



Conversation Journal

Sometimes a couple will run into trouble when they are trying to talk about touchy issues.

Touchy issues can be things like money, sex, in-laws, kids, differing values, faith issues, or even how a partner's behavior is affecting the relationship.

A Conversation Journal can help. This is where you carry on a conversation about the touchy issue in writing instead of verbally.

Take a notebook, a legal pad, or even use email to write back and forth to each other about the issue. One spouse shares a page about an issue. Then it's the other spouse's turn to write back a response.

Some advantages to the conversation journal:

- It's a lot easier to get your point across when you can get it written down clearly and concisely.
- You don't have the problem of being interrupted.
- You can choose your words more carefully so that you don't misspeak
- And it's a lot easier to keep emotions from taking over the conversation

Here are a few rules for using a conversation journal - these rules spell out the word OREOS (like the cookie):

1. **Oreo Method:** use the Oreo method in your journal entry. Start with a positive, then the issue, followed by another positive. Say you're wanting to talk about your partner's drinking:
 - a. First, start with something positive – like "Honey, I love you very much and I appreciate your willingness to read this and work on this issue with me. You mean the world to me and I want us to be happy. You are always willing to help around the house and I know you work hard at your job. That means a lot to me."
 - b. After you write those positives things, share the issue with your suggested solution: "Honey, you need to know that the amount you drink really bothers me. it changes how you act around the family, and I really don't like the person you are when you've been drinking. It makes me not want to be around you, because you're not the person I fell in love with. What I would like is for you to go to the rehab center for an evaluation and follow their recommendations. I'm willing to support you in this and work on my shortcomings in the marriage, beginning with better communication."
 - c. Then, follow it up with another positive. "I'm bringing this up because I really do love you and I love who you are when you're sober."
2. **Resolvable:** Include an idea of how this problem can be resolved – give a practical suggestion of what your partner can do ("pursue an evaluation and follow their recommendations"), as well as what you're willing to do to make it better ("support you and work on my shortcomings").
3. **Existing:** It should be a current, existing issue – don't try to deal with last year's or last month's argument or issue – bringing up past mistakes and problems can become just a way of tearing the other person down, rather than actually trying to solve problems.
4. **One topic:** Only discuss one topic – don't try to get all your complaints out in one journal entry – just one topic at a time.
5. **Short:** Keep it Short – no more than one page of writing per turn. Too long, and it becomes a lecture.

Using a Conversation Journal can help you and your partner talk about touchy issues in a rational and loving way if you both use it, and use it appropriately.

Click around on this website for more practical points as well as information about counseling at Practical Christian Counseling.