EFFECTIVE PROPOSALS for Mediation & Collaborative Divorce

The research is clear: People reliably resist and/or shut down whenever someone explains, justifies, sells or defends the validity of their own views.

Summary of Proposal Skills Below:

1. Tone is everything – respectful, polite & cordial. Use BIFF. SPEAK SLOWLY to regulate yourself.
2. Communicate understanding *before* making your own point(s).
3. Propose, ask & suggest. Explicitly ask: What do you think?
4. All proposals are win-win & bilateral.
5. Make respectful requests for the specific behavior you want – expect complaints, criticisms, negative judgments, blame etc.to be redirected in the moment.
6. Ask Curious Questions and focus on understanding – don't ask to discredit/argue.
7. Consider how other's proposal might prioritize your kids? you? your spouse?

---

1. Tone is ***everything***. You want to be respectful, polite and cordial – you'd do this with any server in a restaurant.
   a. Imagine this as a conversation between professionals who want to prioritize your kids' wellbeing, and each other's. Remember: the story you tell yourself about your spouse will determine your feelings and behavior.
   b. Use BIFF to help keep the tone respectful. (Brief, Informative, Friendly & Firm – Bill Eddy)
   c. Plan your proposals thoughtfully *ahead of time*.
   d. Get your Divorce Coach's help *as needed*, especially early in any divorce process. The more you learn, the less you'll need them.
   e. Speak slowly and softly – this will help you regulate your own emotions, and ensure your partner isn't dysregulated by your agitation/tone.

2. Communicate understanding *before* making any point of your own.
   a. Do NOT just run over what they've said to insert your own view/desires.
   b. Clearly *communicate a genuine understanding* of the other's view, experience, feelings, desires, concerns, etc. (not just "I understand"), before launching into what YOU want.
   c. Use the research-based Validation Formula religiously.
   d. When you want your proposal/view/concerns heard and understood, you increase the likelihood of this happening by offering the same.

3. Propose, ask and suggest. Explicitly solicit feedback – "What do you think?"
   a. Negotiations require two-way dialogue.
   b. "Demanding" or "telling" anyone what to do/say is inherently disrespectful, and will provoke conflict.
   c. "Propose" how you *both* "might" say/do something at/by a specific time.
   d. Asking for feedback communicates that you know and welcome that this is a shared, two-way street.

4. Proposals are win-win and bilateral.
   a. Proposals need to aim to prioritize the kids' wellbeing, and benefit *both* spouses – not just you.
   b. Proposals require something of *both* of you - not only what you want, or want the other to do.

5. You will be reliably redirected by your coaches *whenever* you: complain, criticize, make negative judgments, blame, start to rehash an unresolved past event.
   a. You'll be asked to instead make a respectful request for the specific, effective behavior you want.
   b. Redirection is an expected part of your learning curve in this process. It especially benefits kids who have to live in the context you skillfully create (or not) with your co-parent.

6. Ask Curious Questions that *clearly aim* to help you understand *the other's* perspective - not questions that discredit/argue against the other's view.

7. Consider how the other's proposal *might work* and/or be tweaked to work for everyone.
   Before saying yes, no, or "I need some time to think about it and I'll let you know by X time," pause to carefully consider:
   a. How might this proposal actually prioritize our kids' wellbeing?
   b. How might this proposal actually serve both me and my spouse?
   c. For your kids to be ok, you both need to be ok.

Ria Severance, LMFT © 2023