

# How to Communicate When Emotions Are High

When emotions are high, our brains naturally move into protection mode. We may snap, shut down, talk over each other, or say things we don't mean. You are not "bad at communicating" — you are having a nervous system response.

This page offers simple steps and language you can use to stay clearer, kinder, and more grounded when things feel intense.

## 1. Pause Your Reaction, Not the Relationship

You are allowed to slow down. A pause is often the most caring choice you can make when you feel yourself getting flooded.

- Notice your signals: racing heart, heat in your face, tight chest, urge to defend or shut down.
- Name it to yourself: "I'm getting activated / overwhelmed right now."
- Ask for a brief pause instead of disappearing.

### Example language:

*"I care about this and I'm starting to feel overwhelmed. Can we take a 5–10 minute pause so I can come back clearer?"*

## 2. Speak From Your Experience (Not Their Motives)

When emotions are high, blaming or mind-reading ("You're trying to...", "You don't care...") makes things explode. Focus on what you feel, need, or noticed instead.

- Use "I" statements: "I felt...", "I noticed...", "I need...", "I interpreted...".
- Describe the behavior, not their character: "When this happened..." instead of "You always...".
- Stay specific and present-focused instead of bringing in every past hurt.

**Instead of:** "You never listen to me."

**Try:** *"When I was sharing earlier and the phone came out, I felt dismissed and unimportant. I need to feel like I have your attention when we talk about things that matter."*

## 3. Make Room for Their Perspective Too

High emotions often come from feeling unseen or misunderstood. Inviting the other person's perspective can lower defensiveness.

- Ask open, curious questions instead of cross-examining.
- Reflect back what you heard to check if you understood.
- Let them clarify before you respond again.

### Example language:

*"I've shared how this felt for me. I also want to understand your side. What was this like from where you were standing?"*

*"What feels most important for me to hear about your experience?"*

## 4. Use Grounding Phrases to Keep Things Contained

Grounding phrases help signal safety and keep the conversation from turning into "all or nothing."

- "This conversation matters to me, even though it's hard."

- “We’re on the same team, trying to figure this out.”
- “Let’s tackle one piece at a time.”
- “Can we come back to this specific issue, not everything at once?”

**Remember:** communicating when emotions are high is a skill, not a personality trait. You are allowed to pause, ask for clarity, and come back to the conversation when you feel more regulated. Every time you practice, you are teaching your nervous system that hard conversations can be handled with care.