

The Repair Process After Conflict

FROM RUPTURE TO STRONGER CONNECTION

Conflict is a normal part of any close relationship. What matters most is what happens afterwards. Repair helps rebuild trust, restore safety, and can lead to deeper understanding.

WHAT IS REPAIR?

Repair involves acknowledging what happened, taking responsibility where appropriate, expressing care and taking steps to move forward. It is not about ignoring the hurt or rushing to "get over it", but working through it in a way that supports both people.

WHY REPAIR MATTERS

Repair helps rebuild trust, strengthen emotional safety and prevent small hurts from turning into long-term distance. When handled well, conflict and repair can deepen understanding, improve communication and make relationships more resilient.

REPAIR IS A PROCESS

Repair usually happens in stages and may take time. Both people need to feel ready and willing to engage. It is not always linear – what matters is the intention to repair and a genuine effort to understand, take responsibility and reconnect.

THE STEPS OF REPAIR

These steps can guide the process. Not every conversation will include all of them, and the order may vary.

1 PAUSE & REGULATE

- Take time to calm down before starting.
- Notice and manage strong emotions.
- Choose a time when both people can talk.

2 ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HAPPENED

- Be open and honest about the situation.
- Describe the behaviour rather than labelling the person.
- Avoid minimising, blaming or making excuses.

3 EXPRESS IMPACT

- Share how it affected you, using "I" statements (e.g. "I felt hurt when...").
- Be willing to listen to the other person's experience too.
- Validate their feelings, even if you see things differently.

4 TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

- Own your part, without defensiveness.
- A sincere apology helps, but is more meaningful when followed by change.
- Avoid over-apologising or making it about you.

5 EXPLORE & UNDERSTAND

- Talk about what led to the conflict (needs, triggers, patterns).
- Be curious rather than critical.
- Look for what can be learned to prevent similar issues.

6 AGREE & MOVE FORWARD

- Discuss what would feel helpful now.
- Consider what might be done differently next time.
- Reaffirm your care and commitment to the relationship.

WHAT CAN GET IN THE WAY?

- High emotions or lack of readiness
- Defensiveness, blame or minimising
- Unresolved past hurts
- Different communication styles
- Lack of willingness to take responsibility
- Expecting an immediate "fix"

HELPFUL MINDSETS

- Repair is a sign of strength, not weakness
- It is possible to be accountable and kind
- Both people's feelings and needs matter
- It's okay if it takes time
- Repair can lead to a stronger, more secure connection

Conflict can create distance.

Repair can create depth.

Reflection

Use the questions below to think about a recent conflict or a relationship you value.

1 · WHERE AM I IN THE REPAIR PROCESS?

What step feels most relevant right now?

2 · WHAT DO I NEED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR?

What is within my control?

3 · WHAT WOULD HELP US MOVE FORWARD?

What could support a healthier conversation and stronger connection?

Repair is not about getting it perfect. It is about showing up, being open and choosing connection.

SOURCES

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