

Soften Your Start-Up - A gentle, respectful way to begin a conversation about a difficult topic

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Soften Your Start-Up FORMULA

“I feel [your feeling]”

- left out
- hurt
- jealous
- lonely
- etc.

“When [the specific behavior, not a pattern of behavior]”

- I'm not invited to virtual happy hours with your friends
- you don't read the articles I send you
- we don't have dinner together

“And I need [state the positive need].”

- to know what your preferred evening schedule looks like and how I can be a part of it
- to feel like you're interested in the things I care about
- to spend some quality time together this week

The Gottman Institute

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www.coachmyrna.org/

Soften Your Start-Up

A "soft startup" in the Gottman method refers to a gentle and respectful way to begin a conversation about a difficult topic, particularly when addressing a problem or conflict in a relationship. It emphasizes using a calm tone, positive body language, and "I" statements to express feelings and needs without placing blame on the partner. This approach aims to create a safe and open space for

discussion, increasing the likelihood of a positive resolution.

In their recent book, "Fight Right", John and Julie Gottman state that couples who use softened start-ups have a much greater chance of success in their relationships which means not just staying together but finding high levels of happiness and satisfaction.

The basic steps include:

- Describe yourself and your feelings
- Describe the problem without criticizing or blaming your partner. You talk about the situation, not your partner.
- State your positive need--identify what your partner can do to help this situation get better. You're not fixating on the negative or listing the ways they've failed. You're describing how specifically they can shine for you.

Here are some examples of hard vs soft startups.

Harsh startup: "You've overspent again! When are you going to stop being so irresponsible with our money?"

Softened startup: "I feel stressed (the feeling) about our budget this month---it looks like we're going to be short again (the situation). Can we sit down together and plan how to cut some of our expenses (the need)?"

Harsh startup: "I can't believe you agreed to spend Christmas at your mom's again. You just cave in to whatever she wants. I guess we're never going to spend a holiday at my parents because the only family that matters is yours."

Softened startup: "I'm sorry, but I'm still so frustrated (the feeling). Your mom pressured us into spending Christmas with her again (the situation). I miss spending holidays with my family (more feelings). Can we please go back to her and bow out for this year so that we can go to my parents' instead? That would make me feel like you really have my back (the need)."

I highly recommend this book for any couple who wants to discover more about turning their conflicts into connection. www.amazon.com/dp/B0C3ZJRBNL

They also have a free phone app **Gottman Card Decks**, an amazing resource that gives tons of tips on topics such as I Feel..., Open-Ended

Questions, Appreciations, Expressing Needs and more.

Check out this video of the Gottmans talking about learning to identify and talk about feelings:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt6affPLYpo

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If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: www.coachmyrna.org/

Find out more about creating better connections with Safe Conversations www.coachmyrna.org/create-connection.html

