

## The Repair Kit

The **repair kit is a communication and conflict resolution tool** for adults and kids alike. Couples can use it to practice better skills at both talking and listening, promoting better understanding while minimizing defensiveness. It's also one of our favorite prescriptions for siblings who fight a lot.

Person #1 starts as the speaker, and person #2 as the listener. It's helpful to sit in chairs face-to-face so that knees are almost but not quite touching. Person #1 shares with person #2 in the following steps:

**First, express a genuine appreciation toward the other person.**

**Second, describe what you are upset about.**

Example: "It made me mad when you teased me about my shirt today."

**Third, share a wish or a want that would help fix the thing you are upset about.**

Example: "I want you to be nice to me and not tease me."

After sharing one way, person #1 becomes the listener and person #2 becomes the speaker. This exchange can go back and forth a number of times.

### Other guidelines:

- The speaker should avoid using words like you "always," "never," "every time" etc. because these absolute terms increase defensiveness.
- Learning new things happens best when we're not upset, so it's helpful to first practice with lighter topics rather than pulling out the big guns right away.
- It helps for the listener to take deep breaths while listening to the speaker, and for both parties to take deep breaths while switching roles.
- At the conclusion of the entire process, share some sincere apologies and a big hug.

### Guidelines for use with kids:

- First practice with kids as part of a family meeting, when things are going well. Explain to them that, "just like when you get a flat tire and it's in need of repair, something's just not right when people aren't acting in caring ways toward each other." Build their skills by initially having them "pretend" to be upset with the other about something.
- Elements of this lesson can be adapted according to age.
- An adult coach or mediator is often needed to guide kids even after the repair kit is learned. This tool can be used as frequently as needed to help things run more smoothly as conflict occurs.

Adapted from *How's Your Family Really Doing?* ([www.howsyourfamily.com](http://www.howsyourfamily.com))  
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