

# **Six practical steps to GET YOUR PARTNER TO SEE YOUR POINT OF VIEW**

**(and one extra step  
for ex-partners)**



# **Six Practical Steps** *quick summary*

## ***Understand her point of view***

You're asking her to understand your point of view. It's fair enough then that she should expect you to make the effort to understand her point of view. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***You take the first step***

Take the first step yourself, even if she isn't meeting you half way. Because if no-one takes the first step, no steps will be taken. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***Acknowledge what you can't understand***

Everyone believes their point of view is logical, practical and for the best. When she has a point of view that makes no sense to you, acknowledge and respect it. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***Understand yourself***

Work out in advance exactly what you want to achieve and why. Prioritise, including points you could concede. If you're not totally clear yourself, she can't possibly understand. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***Identify the real issue***

Full-blown arguments over seemingly minor things can occur when the issue is really about some other, far more serious subject. Separate out the issues and deal with them individually and directly. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***Remember that you don't have to agree***

So far as we know, no two people ever agreed perfectly about everything. Despite this, love prospers and grows. Differences of viewpoint don't have to be negative, they only must be understood and respected.. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

## ***Bonus step for ex-partners***

Ending a romantic relationship doesn't always mean severing all ties. If there are children, maintaining your father role will mean ongoing interaction with your ex-partner. A workable relationship will make life easier for you and better for your children. [Click for more](#), including practical tips.

# 1. Understand her point of view *and your own may change*

You're reading this because you don't think she understands your point of view. But do you understand hers?

Understanding her point of view is not just a reciprocal responsibility; it will actually help you in being better understood.

Why?

Because to understand her side, you will have to ask, to listen and to shift your point of view. You'll have to communicate. And that's the first basic of understanding.

Because when you understand how she sees things, it will probably be clearer to you why you're not being understood.

And finally because, just once in a while, it might turn out that your point of view is, well, not exactly the best way of looking at the issue. It happens.

## **TIPS for understanding her point of view**

- ✓ Ask her what she thinks and feels about the issue. Then sit back and listen without interrupting.
- ✓ Ask her questions about what she says, and try to understand how it looks to her.
- ✓ If it helps, imagine it's just like negotiating something at work. You know each party has some different objectives and views, but you're looking for the common ground on which you can build a win-win situation.
- ✓ If there is a background of hostility and distrust, expect your new approach to be treated with suspicion, as though it might be a trap. Don't give up the first time. Or the second.

- ✓ Stick to seeking information. Don't challenge or argue or demand justification. Put those thoughts on a list for another discussion. Make it clear that for the moment you only want information to help you understand.
- ✓ Take care not to talk in shortcuts when things are difficult, they can be misunderstood. Spell what you want out clearly, for example "I'm not really clear what your point of view is in this. Can you spend some time just explaining it to me? It would help me if we focused just on that."
- ✓ Make sure you've allowed enough time. If you cut her off just as she's starting to open up, it will feel to her like she doesn't matter to you.
- ✓ Remember that not all of the issues that are important to her are to do with you, but you still need to understand them. This is the same for you. For example, you may have issues at work which affect how you feel and how much time you have to spare.
- ✓ Explaining your point of view to your partner is not something we are all trained in and it can be awkward. Take things slowly. It's easier to make a mess of things when you try too hard.
- ✓ Conclude with a summary which reiterates what she has told you, without judgement. Say something like. "So, please tell me if I'm wrong, how you feel about this is..."
- ✓ If there are several factors, ask if any of them are more or less important than the others, and if any of them are critical.
- ✓ Try testing your understanding with a few predictions. For example, "Does that mean that if (such and such happened) you would (do/feel such and such)?"
- ✓ When she confirms that you've got it pretty much right, thank her. You might suggest another time to discuss things further, when you've had time to think about what she's said.

## 2. You take the first step *and it's a faster journey*

Pride is one of the great relationship destroyers. It's easy to feel wronged, neglected or insulted and to demand (silently) that she makes the first move.

Or to believe that you have tried and she hasn't, so now the ball is in her court.

The pride of not wanting to be the first to "give in" has to be weighed against the value of the relationship. Because if both of you maintain your stand-off for long enough, the relationship will be over.

If you value the relationship, swallow hard and make the first move. And the second, if necessary. This is what all that stuff about "commitment" actually means.

*You taking the first step is the fastest path to getting her to understand your point of view.*

### **TIPS for taking the first step**

- ✓ If there is a background of hostility and distrust, you can expect your first step to be treated with suspicion. Don't give up.
- ✓ Remember that a good relationship is bigger and more important than one issue. You want to resolve the issue but the first priority is the relationship.
- ✓ Acknowledge that you might be at fault, at least a little bit.
- ✓ Realise that, from her point of view, you may be totally to blame. An opening ambit claim or broad statement that you think generously acknowledges mutual fault may be perceived as an attempt to share blame. Focus on solutions.
- ✓ Be up front about your concerns and especially your desire to preserve the relationship. *Tell her.*

✓ Some possible opening lines:

“I’m really worried about this issue. Can we talk about it?”

“You know, you’re far more important to me than this issue.”

“I’m feeling a bit silly about this issue. Can we sort it out?”

✓ God made chocolate, flowers and perfume to help men through situations like this. He even made them available to people who don’t believe in Him. You could write on the card, “I love you, can we make up?”

### 3. Acknowledge what you can't understand

Everyone believes their point of view is logical, practical and for the best. But everyone has different points of view.

Arguing about the difference itself may get you nowhere. Argument is about logic, but differences are often about emotions, values, temperament and experience.

If she's passionate about Mozart, there is no argument you can use which will make her experience Led Zeppelin the way you do.

If you like fish and chips out of paper because it reminds you of family holidays, but she hates it because it reminds her of poverty; no argument will change those perceptions.

In fact, very few of the important decisions we make in our lives – whether in love or at work or in a car yard – are without a big component of emotion. No wonder then that what one person claims is a 'logical' viewpoint can be incomprehensible to someone else, if they are drawing on different emotions.

It's popular to make sweeping statements about the emotional differences between men and women. There *are* gender related differences in broad averages on some factors, but the variations between individuals are much greater. However you are heading for failure if you try to predict how someone will respond based on their gender. Far safer than making assumptions based on broad generalisations is to get to know your partner.

When your partner has a point of view that makes no sense to you, acknowledge and respect it; in turn she is more likely to feel acknowledged and respected. What is important, what you **have** to deal with, is how they view the situation - not whether or not you understand the emotional mechanics behind that view.

The skill is in appreciating and respecting the differences, and being able to find common ground where you can both happily co-exist in this relationship. It is not about *who* makes the decisions, or who does the jobs; it is about **how** the decisions are made.

If you think you are showing your love for her by working hard, building a house, and repairing things to save money, when what she wants is someone to hold close and talk, or walk along the beach with; then neither of you are really satisfying the others needs. You may not yet understand why she doesn't seem to appreciate you, but the following tips may help you get started. All through this eBook, remember what's at stake here for you.

## **TIPS for acknowledging what you can't understand**

- ✓ Tell your partner exactly what it is that you can't understand, but make it clear that you nevertheless respect her attitude/viewpoint.
- ✓ Talk with your partner, asking about the ways in which these things you don't understand influence her attitudes and behaviour.
- ✓ Ask your partner to describe for you the ways in which your attitudes and behaviours interact with the things about her you don't understand. You may have been unwittingly causing problems – and she may have been interpreting your behaviour as intentional, when in fact you hadn't anticipated the outcome.
- ✓ Try to work out how you would feel and act as if you believed or felt the same way.
- ✓ Sometimes the attitude may relate to an activity; something your partner does, which makes no sense to you or seems unimportant, but which she values. Can you try the activity yourself? There is probably something you can read about the activity in the library, on the net or in a magazine. Perhaps there are values you have missed, which could help you appreciate what she gets out of it. Are you just being stubborn about something you really know nothing about and have no interest in trying? Is that fair?
- ✓ Understanding how another person thinks and feels is one of the hardest relationship challenges, because we tend to project our own mental make up onto others and dismiss reactions that are outside our experience.

If you don't understand an attitude in your partner, maybe you need to simply accept it at the moment to compensate for this tendency to ignore what we don't understand.

- ✓ Values are possibly the most difficult difference of viewpoint to come to grips with. Perhaps you think that the disciplines of team competition are essential to developing character in boys, but she thinks they are just a slightly dangerous way of blowing off excess aggression. Or you can't understand how she can attach so much importance to sticking to a family budget. Respecting her opinion means accepting her viewpoint and working in with it. After all, that's what you are trying to get her to do, in relation to your viewpoint.
- ✓ Appreciate the differences. You wouldn't want a partner who was just a reverse sex copy of yourself. Growth and continued interest in life depend on being open to new things: if you get some of them from your partner, it can strengthen your relationship.

## 4. Understand yourself

### *then you can communicate effectively*

To be honest, we don't always know exactly what we want. Or we know parts of it at different times, but the pieces don't all fit together.

It's when we try to explain exactly what we want that these flaws are exposed.

*If you can't explain precisely what you want, in words, it's impossible for your partner to understand what you want.*

There's a common romantic myth that people who are really in love will automatically understand what each other means and wants. This myth is as real as unicorns and Santa Claus.

If you want your partner to understand your point of view, you must tell her what it is. Clearly, precisely, realistically.

### **TIPS for understanding yourself**

- ✓ Think through in advance exactly what it is you want her to do. Is it just to “understand”, or do you also want some change in attitude or behaviour?
- ✓ Condense what you want to perhaps three to five key points. Write them down.
- ✓ Are your points reasonable? Are they attainable? Are they consistent with each other and with other aspects of your relationship?
- ✓ Just how important is each point, in the context of your relationship? Are some aspects negotiable, or perhaps non-critical?
- ✓ Are you sure this is what you really want (it's not some kind of debating position, or an assertion of your rights, or an attempt to make yourself look better)?
- ✓ If you have a friend you can comfortably discuss this with, explain your points to them and question them to see if they easily – and correctly – understood you. Do they think you are being reasonable and realistic?

- ✓ For most people, serious talks work out better if they are flagged in advance. If they aren't, your partner may feel ambushed or trapped. Sometimes too they can bring more to the discussion if they've had time to think.
- ✓ Flagging a talk is especially important if there is a hostile atmosphere, as it suggests the subject can be talked about in a controlled way, rather than arising out of raised emotions.

- ✓ Possible lines:

“I want to talk with you about this issue. Could we do that tonight please?”

“I want to explain myself to you about this. Can you set aside some time when we can talk about it please?”

## 5. Identify the real issue

You think you're arguing about some specific issue – something practical, say it's renovations – and you've just about won your point, based on the logic of it. Then suddenly it's, "You never listen to what I say," and "You always treat me like an idiot."

Sometimes the apparent issue acts as a proxy, usually for a much deeper, more emotional issue which perhaps is being mutually suppressed. The real issue adds emotional weight to the proxy argument, but it's hard to get a resolution because you're not even talking about the real causes of the emotion.

Nothing can be resolved this way. She is never going to see your point of view about the location of the bathroom if the real issue is that she thinks you're taking her for granted.

### ***TIPS for identifying the real issue***

- ✓ If an argument seems to be more intense than the subject warrants, or all your arguments seem to go the same desperate way, this is a warning sign that you're missing some much more important issue.
- ✓ When an argument is finished, do you both feel relaxed? Is this a time when you can be more intimate with each other? Or is there something else still lurking?
- ✓ Remember, if there is a hidden issue driving all your arguments, it will block your efforts to get your point of view understood. Her responses are not related to the point of view you're trying to present. You have to deal with the real issues first.
- ✓ Once a pattern of avoiding the real issue is established, it can be hard to break. If you try to approach the issue, you may find yourself slipping into another proxy argument. Counter this by staying focused on the underlying issues that have been common to several arguments.

- ✓ Set aside a mutually agreed time for discussion and agree not to talk about specific current issues.
- ✓ Possible lines:
  - “I’m feeling like I’ve missed something important. Can you tell me what it is?”
  - “I think I’ve done something to make you angry with me and I’d like to make it up to you. Can you help me understand?”

## 6. Remember that you don't have to agree

Differences of viewpoint don't have to be negative, they only must be understood and respected.

Ask yourself why it is important to you to win this argument. Does the outcome genuinely affect you in a significant way, or are you simply trying to exert control? Trying to control another person is a sure-fire way to ensure that your point of view is not heard. More likely, it will be rejected without consideration or understanding – exactly the behaviour embodied in the original attempt to control.

It is well known that relationships based on control, from either party, are never places where, in the end, either partner really ends up getting what they want. And it can be a pretty miserable experience along the way too.

### **TIPS *managing disagreement***

- ✓ Respect is the key word. Tell your partner that you see it differently, but you acknowledge and respect her point of view. After all, isn't that why you're reading this booklet: because you want her to acknowledge and respect your point of view?
- ✓ Let your partner be an individual, with differences.
- ✓ Remember to call a time out if the disagreement starts to get out of hand and old habits come back.

## 7. The extra step for ex-partners

Why is it you want to maintain a relationship with your ex-partner? Most probably because you have children and you aim to continue your role as their father. For the sake of your children, then, you have to negotiate a new kind of relationship that meets their needs.

Most importantly, your responsibility as a parent is to leave your children out of your dispute with your ex-partner. They need to love both their father and their mother.

### **TIPS for ex-partners**

- ✓ Your old relationship with your ex-partner is over. Maybe it's time to let go of the arguments and recriminations that belonged to it. You don't have to admit blame or feel guilt, just recognise that there is no longer any mileage in the dispute: it's over.
- ✓ Don't respond to old arguments and recriminations. Pause, then take the conversation back to current issues concerning the children. You'll do better at being understood if the current issues are not clouded by the past.
- ✓ To get your point of view across, express it in terms of benefit to the children.
- ✓ Don't involve your children in any residual disputes with their mother. If you use them as pawns or spies in an ongoing battle, then you should expect her to do the same. That kind of warfare is bad for your kids, and it reduces to about zero the chances of your ex-partner hearing your point of view.
- ✓ Don't denigrate your ex-partner to your children. Unavoidably she will realise you are doing this, so there will be a barrier between you which will make it impossible to have your point of view heard. It's also extremely damaging to children to be used this way.

- ✓ You may hate her, but they love her. They need a strong relationship with her, it's an important part of their lives. This is a tough call, but the best thing you can do for them is to value and support their relationship with their mother. And, if you can do this for your kids, you'll have an easier time getting her to hear your point of view.

## About MensTime

A lot of men feel they can't talk with others about their problems, and they don't trust counsellors. That's why we wrote this series of booklets, and made it available anonymously over the internet.

But we know that talking with other men in groups *does* help. It makes men stronger, not weaker. Of course it can be hard to make that first move, and maybe some people would laugh at you if they knew – but it's not their life.

You won't be laughed at in a **MensTime** group. You will be heard and maybe even understood. Chances are, you'll end up getting a better handle on your life, as do most men who attend.

- **MensTime** provides group meetings and resources for men to deal with issues such as parenting, relationships and personal development.
- **MensTime** Group Programs allow men to take stock, affirm who we are and reclaim our unique contribution to relationships, families, the workplace and society.
- **MensTime** is time out, for men to reflect on the important issues of life.
- **MensTime** is for men, because we believe it's time to recognise the needs and contributions of men.
- **MensTime** is an opportunity for men to enhance our relationships and our parenting.

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Anglicare offers a wide variety of groups and courses that help people change their lives.

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## Gender specific pronouns

This publication looks at communication within male/female partnership relationships from a male perspective. The authors acknowledge that other types of relationships exist. Many of the principles used here are probably applicable across all forms of relationships, however the authors however do not profess expertise in other types of relationships.

