

Sequence 12 Step Summary

The “Openness and Flexibility” Steps

1. Focus on Your Own Reactions

Remember to shift your focus from how irritating or upsetting your partner’s behavior or attitude is to your own reactions to it. Remind yourself that you don’t want to react in ways that never work for anybody, in any relationship. If you can respond effectively in situations like these, your partner will become more understanding and cooperative.

2. Avoid a Judgmental Attitude

Don’t jump to conclusions; give the benefit of the doubt; and with an open mind, ask your partner why she acted as she did, or is thinking the way she is. Consider that this situation might not be about right/wrong, but rather about legitimately different wants, needs, priorities or standards.

3. Find the Understandable Part

Become determined to find any at-least-partly-understandable reasons for her thinking or actions, and acknowledge them.

4. Identify and Explain What is at Stake

Tell her why you’re upset, or why you’re having trouble acting or thinking the way she wants. Explain the bigger thing that’s at stake for you. Look for the bigger thing at stake for her too.

5. Offer Assurance

Assure her that you’re trying to be flexible and keep an open mind, and that you realize that you may have legitimately different wants, needs, priorities or expectations that come to play in situations like these. Let her know that there’s no reason why your feelings should count more than hers.

6. Give and Require Equal Regard

Let your partner know that you’re willing to make some changes and to work with her to find a mutually acceptable solution. Ask her to do the same.

The “Standing Up” Steps

7. Lighten Up

Don’t hit the panic button or get “trigger happy.” Give her the benefit of the doubt. She may not realize how inflexible or closed-minded she’s being, or she might not be thinking about how it makes you feel. Her inflexible stance may change quickly if you’re able to avoid overreacting and simply “ask and offer” (step 8).

8. Ask and Offer

Let her know that you’re feeling upset. **Ask** her to adjust her attitude, while **offering** assurance that you don’t expect her to agree with you or to just blindly comply with your wishes—you’re just asking her to respect your feelings and be willing to give and take.

9. Call the Question; Temporarily Distance Yourself

If she continues to criticize or disregard you, *call the question* (“I feel like I’ve been trying here, but you’re not giving me anything back. Are you really going to sit there and dismiss every single thing that I say?”). If her critical or dismissive attitude persists, let her know that you don’t want to be around her right now.

10. Don’t Make a Big Deal of It

When you’re by yourself, lighten up, and let go of anger and resentment. You don’t have to make a big deal of her inflexible behavior or closed minded attitude. It’s not a crime that she acted this way. It’s natural enough for her to want to have her own way or to be biased toward her own point of view.

11. Try Again Later

Begin a new conversation without a chip on your shoulder. Don’t try to get your partner to see how “wrong” her inflexible or closed-minded attitude was. Don’t demand an apology. Simply return to the issue that didn’t get resolved and try to resolve it again, beginning with the “openness and flexibility” steps.

12. Refuse to Continue “Business as Usual” (only if needed)

After several conversations in which you show open-mindedness, flexibility and willingness to give and take, and your partner refuses to do the same, make it clear that it doesn’t feel right to you to pretend everything is OK and to continue business as usual. Inform her of your intention to put some distance between the two of you.