

THREE TYPES OF AGREEMENTS HANDOUT

Main, Supporting, and Restoring

In a conversation, after solution requests have been made, you can move to agreements.

Main Agreements

These are what both people agree to do coming out of the conversation. It helps greatly if the main agreements are specific enough — clear, doable, action language of what *is* wanted not only what is not wanted. It can be helpful to hold this as something to try out, a learning process to discover what works. For example, a couple agrees to have family dinners together 3 times a week, starting at a certain time in the evening.

Supporting Agreements

These are agreements one or both people make to support the main agreement(s) happening. Even with the best of intentions and desire to do something, if it involves future behavior change, it is easy to unconsciously fall into current automatic habits and not do what we said we'd do. So, agreeing to do things ourselves and also for each other another to help keep the main agreement(s) can be very helpful to being able to follow through on doing them. For example, with the couple agreeing to have weekly family dinners together, to support this happening, one person might agree for the first week to call or text the other on those days to remind them to leave from work in time to arrive home by the agreed upon dinner time. The other person could agree to putting the dinner times in their calendar and setting alerts on their phone.

Restoring Agreements

Even with clear main and supporting agreements, because we are human and imperfect, it can still easily happen that the main agreements are not kept right away. This could be because it takes time and repetition to develop the new habit(s) for the new behavior(s), or it could be that what was agreed to in actual practice just doesn't work for one or both people, for whatever various reasons. When agreements are not kept it can be very upsetting. People can sometimes feel worse off than before making the agreement, feeling more anger or disappointment, or even hurt, resentment, and disillusionment. For these reasons it can be enormously valuable to have an agreement for how it will be handled if the main agreement(s) are not kept. Instead of it leading to more conflict and disconnection, there could be the agreement to come back to conversation and communication and talk about what happened, reconnect with the needs that were hoping to be met by the new actions, empathize with any disappointment of it not happening, and also try to compassionately understand what led to the agreement(s) not happening. With the new learning and information, the same agreement(s) can be better supported, or there could be coming up with new main agreement(s) to try out. It then becomes an iterative, experimental process of planning, doing, and learning, moving more and more towards greater fulfillment of needs.

JOHN KINYON
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