

# How To Have Hard Conversations



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Natalie Bacon**

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# How To Have Hard Conversations

Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hey you. Welcome to the podcast. I'm so delighted to be here with you today. We are talking about how to have hard conversations. I have to say that this topic has been so highly requested from you all. I saved it for today because on the day that this comes out, it is ahead of the month of November.

So in a few days, we'll be heading in to November and inside Grow You on November 1<sup>st</sup>, I am releasing a new class called Navigating Challenging Relationships. So if you have a challenging relationship right now, it can be with anyone. Your spouse, your sister-in-law, your child, your colleague, your friend. Anyone in your life who you find to be challenging for any reason, this class is going to give you five tools for how to better navigate that relationship so that it doesn't feel so heavy and stressful and kind of take up more of that mental space than you really want it to.

It's going to help you feel more empowered to approach it confidently and make decisions where you're not kind of worried if that was the right choice or kind of talking with all of your friends or family to get their opinions. You'll really get a better sense of how to navigate that challenging relationship. So if that's you, come on in and join us over at [nataliebacon.com/coaching](https://nataliebacon.com/coaching).

Today, I want to give you a taste of what we're going to talk about inside that class. Part of it will be how to have hard conversations, and that's what this episode is going to be all about. So it's really interesting when we ask the question how do I have this hard conversation? Because it implies that we don't know how to do it.

So typically, when we ask someone how to do something, we want to know the exact steps. If I'm asking you how to cook this new recipe, and you know you are a pro at it, you're gonna give me the recipe. The exact steps. Do X, do Y, do Z. That's how you can make the recipe. But in the question

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how do I have this hard conversation it implies then that we don't know how to do it, but we do know how to do it.

So if I say how do I tell my husband that I need more personal space and alone time, the actual answer to that question literally is just saying husband, I need more personal space and alone time. This is one that I actually coach on a lot. So a client will come to me and say how do I tell my husband I need more personal space and alone time? The answer is in the question.

Anytime that we are asking how do I have this hard conversation? The answer is in the question. How do I tell my kids we're moving? You say kids, we're moving. How do I tell my neighbor that I don't like their loud music at night? You say neighbor, I don't like your loud music at night. How do I tell my friend I don't want to go on this girl's trip? You say friend, I don't want to go on this girl's trip.

So it's interesting because when you see that the answer is in the question, it begets the next question, which is what do we really mean when we say that? We don't really mean what's the recipe? What's the how to? We know how to actually say those words. That's why I think that this is the wrong question. I think understanding why it's the wrong question will help you see what the worry is all about when we say something like how do I tell my friend this thing that I'm nervous about telling her?

Here's what I think that we mean when we say this. What if I say this thing, and then the other person receiving it is upset? What if I cause someone else pain? How can I say this thing in a way that the other person won't be upset? How can I say my truth, what I need to say and what to say, and control how they receive it? Their thoughts, their feelings, and their actions. Really what this comes down to is us wanting to be good and wanting to make sure that the other person still thinks we're good, and they're not upset.

So we're really asking how do I believe that I'm good and say this thing that I need to say that someone might interpret in a way that creates their

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feelings that are negative? How do I believe I'm good, and say this thing knowing that they may interpret it in a way where they feel sad, mad, hurt, disappointed, angry?

When I figured this out that that is what was happening, it changed everything for me. Because a sort of a recovering people pleaser who spends a lot of time thinking about what other people are thinking and tried to control that, it makes so much more sense why it's hard for me to have a hard conversation. Because I am all up in their business. I am all up in their thoughts, their feelings, and their actions. So much so that I'm making it more important than my truth.

I think that as women, we have been socialized to prioritize what other people think more than what we think. It's not just women. In a sense, all humans care about what other people think because for evolutionary purposes, it really mattered that we were accepted or else we would be sort of ousted from the tribe, from the pack, and that meant death.

So we have this very real survival part of our brain that cares what other people think. Kind of on default without doing this work of thinking purposefully, you end up prioritizing what other people think way more than what you think. So much so that you could be in relationships where you're not showing up authentically as yourself. Where other people who you really care about don't know the real you.

Of course, there are some relationships, you know, if you're walking around your neighborhood, having small talk that aren't deep, and you don't want them to be deep. That's the nature of them. But I'm talking about those relationships that are deeper. Are you comfortable kind of owning who you are, and using courage and vulnerability to show who you really are to other people?

So when you are thinking about having a hard conversation, notice how often you are thinking about the other person's thoughts, feelings, and actions versus your own. So there's two ways that you can do this. One is very helpful and useful, and the other is not.

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In the first way that is helpful, when you're thinking about someone else's thoughts, feelings, and actions, if you do it, to understand them, if you do it to have more compassion for them, that can be very useful. I recommend that. It doesn't take a long time to do this.

So let's say for example, that your son is having a really hard time. Thinking about what's going on in his mind, what kind of thoughts he's having, and how those thoughts are creating his feelings, and how the thoughts and feelings together explain his actions can be very useful for you to try to see where he's coming from so that you can be more compassionate and loving.

Then you show up and you have a challenging conversation with him with so much more connection because you're more grounded. You're not trying to shame him or blame yourself. It can be very connecting in this way. So that's how you can think about other people's thoughts, feelings and actions in a way that's so helpful.

But what we do most of the time is not that what we do most of the time is we spend so much of our attention in other people's thoughts, feelings, and actions in an effort to control them, in an effort to judge them, not in an effort to be more understanding and compassionate.

So let's say that your son wants to go on a trip. You've decided that the answer is no. As you think about having that conversation with him, if you spend a lot of your mental energy thinking about his reaction and trying to control his reaction and trying to make sure that he doesn't feel upset, this isn't useful. It's something that typically when I'm coaching a client sounds very lovely. Oh, I just don't want my child to be upset. But really, that's just a lovely way of saying I'm trying to control my child's thoughts and feelings.

So instead, what we want to do is only spend time thinking about other people's thoughts, feelings, and actions in a way that's really helpful and helps us have compassion and understanding for them. We don't want to spend time thinking about what other people are thinking in order to try to control how they feel. So instead of asking how do I tell my son this? How

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do I tell my kids this? How do I tell my sister-in-law I don't like her swearing around my kids? It's the wrong question.

So I have some questions that you can ask instead of that. Ask yourself what feels like my truth? Okay, my truth is I would prefer my sister-in-law not swear in front of my kids. Okay, how can I tell that truth in a loving way? How can I love myself, love my kids, and love my sister-in-law?

Love does not mean yes. So people get that confused. Love is a feeling. So you can feel love for yourself, you can feel love for your kids, and you can feel love for your sister-in-law and tell your truth. It's going to sound very different than if you tell sister-in-law hey, stop swearing in front of my kids in a way that's fueled by righteousness, and I'm better than you, and that negative judgment, and you shouldn't do that. If it was me, I would not do that.

It's gonna be a very different conversation than if you tell your truth in a very loving way. Hey, I know you like to swear. I actually love that part about you. You're raw. You're authentic. Just for me, as I'm trying to navigate what's best for my kids? Do you think it'd be okay if you toned it down a bit in front of my kids?

She may or may not say yes or no. But can you love her? Can you love your kids? Can you love yourself? Can you tell your truth through all of it? Can you stay connected? It only takes one person to be grounded and connected and calm. The other person can act crazy. The other person can be fueled by judgment. It's okay. The other person probably isn't doing this inner work. It's totally fine. Can you love them as they are?

Then the last question, one of the most important, is how can I make sure I let the other person feel their feelings? If sister-in-law feels offended, let her feel offended. Now, this doesn't mean that you don't care. It doesn't mean that you don't say oh my goodness, I am not trying to offend you at all. This is just my truth. I know it's messy. It's taking a lot for me to even say is. It's you telling her the whole truth. She might feel offense, but that's not your intention. You could hear her side of it as well.

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Or if you're having a conversation with your family, and you're telling your kids that you're going to be moving and your kids are angry. Can you let them feel angry and have compassion for their thoughts and their feelings knowing that they have a different brain than you. They have a different mindset than you. In their world, they want to be angry about this. Can you let them be angry without trying to control them?

That is the work. Feeling feelings, allowing for feelings, being authentic and genuine, staying connected, telling your truth in a loving way, caring about other people's thoughts, feelings, and actions, but not trying to control them.

I think it can also be helpful to understand why this is so challenging for us. The default primitive lower brain wants to be liked and loved and accepted and respected and included. It wants to think that you're good, and you're doing a good job because that was really important for your survival. Evolutionarily, if you weren't good, if you weren't liked, if you weren't loved, if you weren't accepted, it meant exclusion and death.

So that part of your brain that is still with us today thinks it's very important to think about what other people think of you. If someone else is upset, it thinks that's a huge problem. But that part of your brain, on default, creates so many problems in your life because we live in a modern world where disagreeing and having these hard conversations doesn't mean death. If someone doesn't like you, or they disagree with you, or they feel angry, that doesn't mean anything for you.

So what we can do is use our prefrontal cortex, that evolved, slower thinking, more thoughtful, intentional, human part of our brains to override this lower brain. We can and teach ourselves and be the boss of our brain to stay out of what other people are thinking and feeling and doing, and to create love and connection by what we think, and to say our truth. We can approach hard conversations from a place of clean thinking.

So clean thinking just means that you are taking responsibility for your thoughts and your feelings. Dirty thinking is going to someone and saying

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you made me feel this way. What are you going to do to fix it? That is dirty thinking because it creates resistance. It creates emotional blame. You're blaming someone outside of you for how you feel. No one else outside of you can ever create your feelings.

The reason that doing this work is so important and why this way is the best way to do it is because when you blame someone for how you feel, and you make it so that they have to fix and change themselves in order for you to feel better, you have no control over how you feel. If you could control other people, I would say go ahead, go for it, do it that way. But of course you can't.

So what we want to do is hold people accountable for their actions, yes. But we always are accountable for how we feel. That doesn't mean we want to be happy all the time. Sometimes we want to be upset. But we know it's because of what we are thinking. So clean thinking means that you're taking responsibility for how you feel. That when you have a hard conversation, you're sharing your thoughts and maybe your feelings and maybe your decisions, and you are allowing space for that other person to have their experience of it.

You can validate yourself and know that you still are good, even though your truth might not be what they want to hear. You're a good mom, and your kids can feel sad, mad, hurt, etc. Going back to the example of you're telling your kids that you're moving, allowing them to feel those feelings.

Now if you're having a hard conversation about a mistake that you made and you want to repair, maybe you yelled or something like that. It's still I'm a good mom, and I am so sorry, kids, for those actions. That's something that I'm working on. It came from me and my brain and my messy humaneness. I'm working on feeling my feelings of anger. What you want to make sure that you're not doing is blaming your circumstances or anything outside of you for how you feel. Also not trying to control anyone's reactions. It's like trying to manipulate the situation a little bit.



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Because this is something that we are not taught and we are not in the habit of doing, it will take practice for it to become natural and a habit. But it will be a skill that you can really cultivate and get so good at. It's one that you can use for the rest of your life.

If you get really good at having hard conversations from a place of clean thinking where you are owning your truth, being grounded and connected and calm, not blaming anyone for your feelings, not trying to control their reaction and letting them feel their feelings, not trying to get them to change from your blame. You're in full responsibility. You will deepen your relationships, and you will really grow and evolve because you will use this skill anytime something comes up.

So if you are struggling with how do I tell my friend I don't want to go on this girl's trip, remember, that's the wrong question. You want to ask yourself those questions that I mentioned earlier. What feels like my truth? The truth is I genuinely just don't want to go on this girl's trip. How can I tell my truth in a loving way? How can I stay connected? It might sound like friend, for me right now in this season, the girls trip is a no. I love you so much. I know I'm going to have those fear of missing out moments when you guys are on the trip. But for me, it's best right now that I pass on this one.

Let them or her, whoever it is that you're telling, your friend feel their feelings. It's totally fine. If they're upset, it's totally fine. If they're mad, it's totally fine. If they don't understand, you can be the grounded calm one.

So just remember, whenever your brain goes was to that thought of how do I have this hard conversation, just quickly remind yourself that's the wrong question. Practice these other questions so that you can really have a more effective, cleaner way and helpful way of approaching challenging conversations that actually maintain the connection and deepen your relationships.

All right, my friends. For those of you who want to do this work with me inside Grow You, I invite you to join me. We are going to have so much fun working on challenging relationships next month. Take care.

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