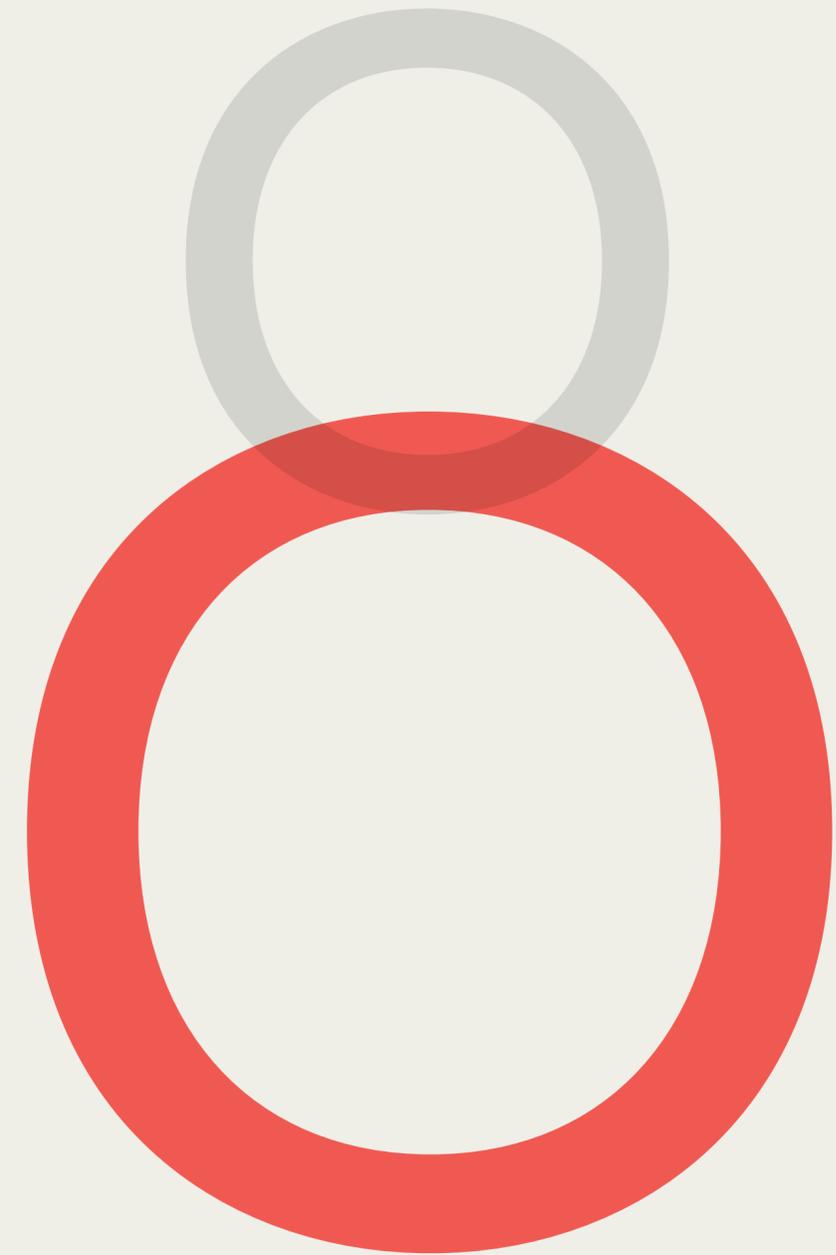




Onward[™] Guides:

Sharing the News of Your Divorce with Your Spouse

Many people struggle greatly at the very thought of sitting down with their spouse and telling them that a decision to divorce has already been made. Setting the stage for a difficult conversation is crucial for ensuring that both partners feel safe, respected, and heard.



Here are some steps to create the right environment for such conversations:

1

Choose the right time and place

The two Ts – Timing and Tone: Look for a moment when both partners are calm and not preoccupied with work or other stressors. Avoid starting the conversation late at night or during times of high stress. Avoid alcohol or other substances being in the mix for the conversation. Choose to use a calm demeanor and a compassionate tone. Think about the outcome you want, not about being “right.”

Location: Find a quiet, private space where you won't be interrupted.

2

Set a calm atmosphere

Minimize distractions: Turn off the TV, silence phones, and eliminate other distractions to ensure both partners can focus on the conversation.

Comfortable setting: Arrange seating so that it feels intimate yet comfortable. You might want to sit on the couch together or at a dining table.

3

Prepare emotionally

Reflect on your feelings: Before the conversation, take some time to reflect on your feelings and thoughts. Consider writing down what you want to say to clarify your points.

Stay calm: Engage in deep breathing or a short meditation beforehand to ensure you approach the conversation with a calm demeanor.

4

Communicate intentions clearly

Express your purpose: To start the conversation, express your intention not to assign blame. This helps to create a collaborative tone. Try to avoid using the word “you” as much as possible. Instead, use “I” statements to frame your thoughts and feelings. This way, you can express your perspective without sounding accusatory. For example, say “I feel overwhelmed when...” rather than “You never...”.

Simple is better: Keep your message simple and be open to having multiple shorter conversations about the same topic, reiterating your position.

Be patient: Keep in mind that the brain can struggle to effectively listen and process difficult news due to emotional reactions and feeling overwhelmed.

5

Invite participation

Encourage openness: Let your spouse know that you value their thoughts and feelings. This can foster a mutually respectful dialogue.

Listen actively: Show that you are listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding, and summarizing what they say to ensure understanding.

Take some time: Give your spouse time and space to take in what’s being said and sufficient time to formulate responses.

6

Be prepared for mixed reactions

Understand that your spouse may react in a number of ways: sadness, anger, relief, or even resignation. Be prepared for this range and try to remain supportive throughout.

Allow for silence: Sometimes, silence can be powerful. Allow your spouse some quiet moments to process their emotions without feeling pressured to fill the space with words.

Stay calm and engaged: Often this will be mirrored in your spouse’s behavior.



7

Establish ground rules

Create safe boundaries: Discuss the importance of respecting each other's feelings and ideas. Agree to speak kindly and to avoid yelling or interrupting each other.

Consider your children: If the relationship includes children, agree to not argue or disparage one another in front of the children. Instead, hold adult conversations in private or with a co-parenting therapist present. It's very important to establish how you will agree to talk about one another with the children.

Be willing to pause: Recognize that emotions can run high during difficult conversations. Agree to take breaks if needed to cool down.

8

Listen for solutions and places of collaboration

Focus on collaboration: Approach the conversation with a mindset of finding solutions together. Explore options, common ground, and compromises.

Venue plays an important role in having that critical conversation.

In-Person Conversation

Deliver the news to your spouse privately and in-person. You can share your thoughts in conversation or read out loud what you want to say.

Involve a Therapist or Mediator

Tell your spouse in the presence of a therapist or mediator and either tell them in words or read your prepared notes.

Written Communication

If in-person feels too intense, a letter or email can provide the message you wish to convey.

Supported Conversation with Friends or Family (if appropriate)

If helpful and appropriate, you can talk to your spouse while having close friends or family members nearby.

Virtual Call

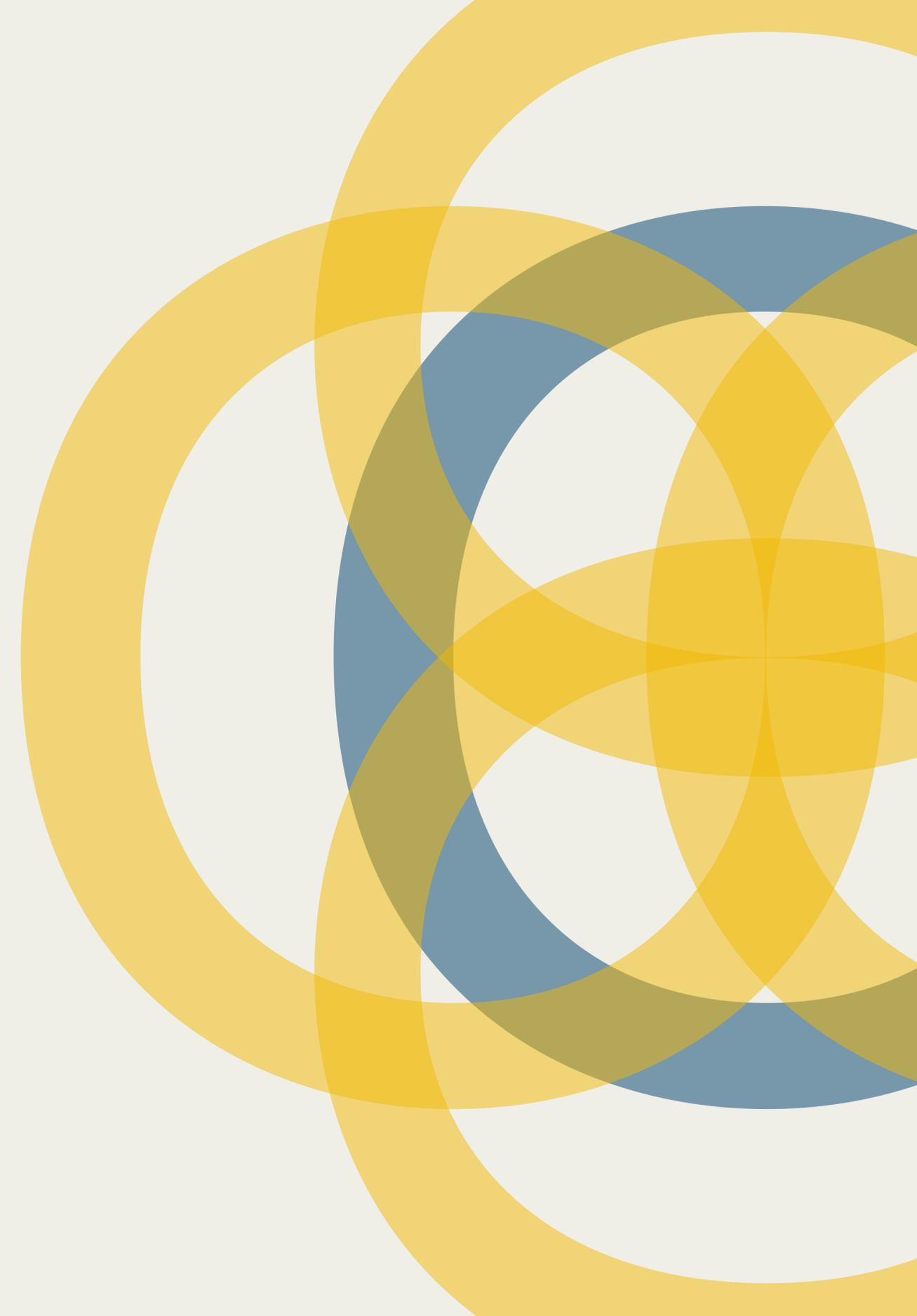
In cases of emotional or physical safety concerns, a video or phone call might be a safer choice.

Sharing the News in a Public Place

If for one reason or another you do not feel safe to tell your spouse in person alone, having the conversation in a public place with people around can be helpful.

Serving papers

If for one reason or another you do not feel safe to tell your spouse, you can have your spouse served divorce papers by a sheriff or a professional process server.



Finding the words to begin...

It is essential to understand that there are many variables at play, each unique to you and your spouse.

It's critical to tailor how news is broken to those circumstances.

While the conversation may look any number of ways depending on the relationship, here are examples of opening statements to begin the conversation:

"I want to start by saying that I care about you deeply. You've been my partner for so long, and I cherish the moments we've shared."

"Hey, can we talk? I've been thinking about some things."

"I think it's important to be honest with ourselves."

"But I feel like we're both growing in different directions, and it's made me realize that living apart might allow us to find our own happiness again."

"I believe it might be best for both of us if we consider getting a divorce."

"I've been doing a lot of soul-searching lately, and things have not been easy for us for a long time."

Statements for de-escalation

A person's reaction to difficult news can vary a great deal. Some people shut down and go into a state of avoidance and denial. This is why it is important to practice some kind and helpful statements ahead of time.

"I know this is hard to hear and not what you expected. I'm very sorry to have hurt you by breaking this news."

"This is a lot for both of us. Maybe we should pause and talk more when we're both feeling calmer."

"I can see you're upset and I can understand why. Let's talk more about this tomorrow."

"I know this is hard to hear and I want us both to come out of this feeling respected and that we've been fair to each other."

"I know this hurts, and I'm sorry for the pain this causes. I want us to work through this in a way that minimizes hurt as much as possible."

"I understand you're upset, but we can only have this conversation if we keep it respectful. Let's take a break if needed and return to it when we're both ready."

"I want to help make this transition easier on both of us. Let's discuss how we can go through this process in a way that feels manageable."

"I understand you're upset, but I think we'll get through this better if we stay calm."

"I hear that this is incredibly painful, and I'm so sorry for the hurt this causes. But I believe this is the right path."

Statements for providing comfort

A person's reaction to difficult news can vary a great deal. Some people shut down and go into a state of avoidance and denial. This is why it is important to practice some kind and helpful statements ahead of time.

"I want you to know how grateful I am for the years we've spent together and the memories we've made. I'll always appreciate and value them."

"This isn't easy for either of us, and it's not something I'm doing lightly. I believe that, in the long term, this will allow us both to find happiness."

"I want to make this as smooth as possible for both of us. I'm here to support you too through this process."

"You're a wonderful person, and I know you'll have happiness in your future. I truly want what's best for you, for both of us."

"This isn't happening because of anything you've done wrong. It's about where I am personally, and I think this is the best path moving forward."

"I want us to go through this in a way that is kind and respectful to both of us. I hope we can support each other during this transition."

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Statements for someone dealing with denial/avoidance

It is important to provide comfort to your spouse as they are receiving and digesting the news you are sharing.

"I know this may feel overwhelming, and I understand it's a lot to take in, but this is a serious decision for me. I hope we can talk about it openly."

"I know this is hard, but I think it's important we talk about what this means for us moving forward. This way, we can make the transition easier on both of us."

"I can see this is difficult to talk about. What are you thinking or feeling about what I've shared?"

"I know this is a lot to take in. Maybe we can take a little time and then come back to this, but it's something I feel strongly we need to address."





Open communication is essential, and preparing yourself to face the challenges with resilience and self-awareness is critical. [Join our Onward community](#), where you will have a safe place to organize your thoughts and everything else to get you through your divorce.

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