



Tips for changing the course of a conversation

I have mentioned 'scripts' in a previous tips sheet. These are the things we say when we are triggered into having the same conversation about the same topic. It is a natural human response to our concerns or point of view not being given the attention we think they deserve. When you reflect on these kinds of conversations there is nearly always something you can identify as 'the trigger'.

Every one of us has sensitivities about certain subjects. There are topics that are guaranteed to start an argument especially if they are raised by the same person.

1. Take a little time out to think about what these triggers are and name them. They may be phrases (you always...), a certain look, a topic and even tiredness.
2. Notice any physiological signs that accompany those triggers. It may be a change in body temperature, a mannerism, itchy palms - there are many signs that can herald the feeling of being stressed. It is helpful to identify your personal cues.

3. Thinking about the other person: Try and recall any verbal or physical cues that you remember when they get into an emotional state of mind.
4. Next, plan an approach for dealing with your own triggers. If it is the time of day, plan a response to postpone the discussion to a time when you know you will be in better shape. If it is tiredness, plan to acknowledge that this is an important conversation and propose a time to sit down and talk. If it is a private conversation and the other person tends to bring it up in front of others, plan to agree a time to revisit the topic. The formula is generally 1. acknowledge, 2. propose an alternative, 3. ask for their agreement.
5. Each time you address this in real time make sure you maintain steady eye contact with the other person. Not a stare or glare. Steady eye contact is a form of boundary setting and equally a sign of confidence. It is also an effective way to deal with passive aggressive behaviour.
6. Always follow-up at the agreed time, be ready and have the kettle on and the mince pies out!