

# Gottman Conflict Resolution: Softened Startup

Rodney A. Fry, MA, MDIV, MS, LPC, RPT  
[www.naturalstatecounselingcenters.com](http://www.naturalstatecounselingcenters.com)

## Conflict Resolution: Softened Startup

All couples experience conflict from time to time. How you start a difficult conversation can set the tone and increase the chances of a positive resolution. The "Softened Startup" is an effective technique to initiate difficult discussions in a constructive way.

What is a Softened Startup? A Softened Startup is a gentle way to begin a conversation about a sensitive issue or conflict. It helps defuse hostility and defensiveness right from the start.

Instead of criticizing or blaming your partner, you express your own vulnerable feelings and needs using "I" statements. This prevents your partner from feeling attacked and escalating into counter-attack mode.

## Steps for a Softened Startup:

1. Identify the Issue Begin by clearly identifying the non-confrontational issue or situation you want to discuss. Avoid accusations.
2. Share Your Feelings Using "I" statements, share how the issue makes you feel without blaming. For example: "I feel hurt when..." "I felt concerned about..."
3. Express Understanding Acknowledge that the issue is not your partner's entire fault and that there may be reasons for their behavior you don't fully understand.
4. Be Specific Give a specific example or describe a recent situation that led to your feelings, without judgment or criticism.
5. State Your Needs
6. Let your partner know what you need from them using positive language. For example: "I would love if we could..." "It would mean a lot if..."
7. Stay Composed If you become overwhelmed by emotion during the conversation, take a break. Agree to resume when you've both calmed down.

With empathy and care, a Softened Startup can invite your partner into the conversation as an ally, rather than putting them on the defensive. Practice this technique to increase closeness and understanding.

