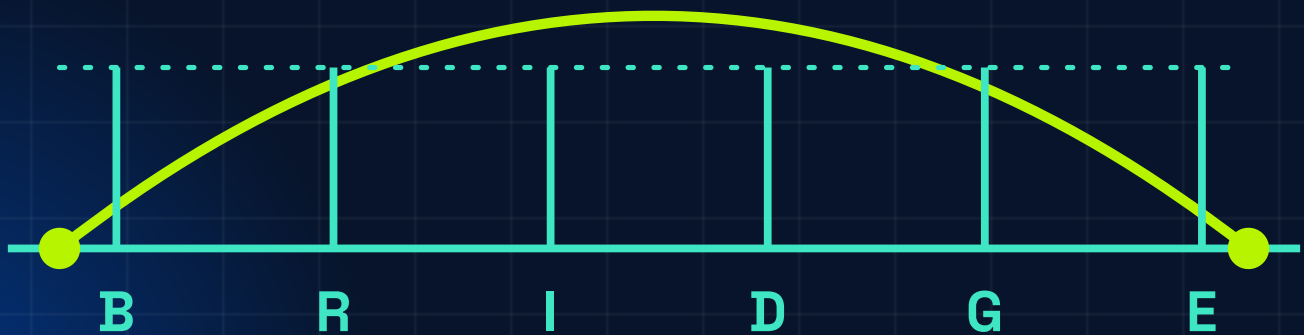


Say the Hard Thing

Kind, clear scripts for the conversations you keep putting off: family, partners, friends, work and neighbors.

**6**

step BRIDGE method

40ready-to-adapt
scripts**18**

pocket pause cards

1

AI rehearsal partner



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Kind, clear scripts for the conversations you keep putting off.

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This is a practical communication guide for everyday disagreements between people who are safe with each other. It is not therapy, counseling, legal or medical advice. If you are afraid of someone, please read the safety note at the start of the book. Research findings are summarized in plain English; references are on the Sources page. Example conversations and scripts were written for this book. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot are trademarks of their owners; SkillNugget is independent and not affiliated with them.

FREE SAMPLE

Inside this free sample

Three chapters and three scripts from Say the Hard Thing.

This sample includes the Welcome, the safety note, Chapter 2 (get clear before you speak), Chapter 3 (the BRIDGE method) and three scripts from the library. The full book has 16 chapters, 40 scripts, what to say when they react, the AI rehearsal partner and a printable toolkit.

GET THE FULL BOOK

skillnugget.com/course/say-the-hard-thing

WELCOME

Say it kindly, clearly and soon

How this book works, in five minutes.

There's a conversation you've been putting off. Maybe for a week. Maybe for ten years. You've rehearsed it in the shower, in the car, at 3 a.m. In your head it goes badly every time, so it stays in your head.

This book is about getting it out of your head and into the room, kindly, clearly and in a way that makes things better rather than worse.

You don't need to be confrontational to have hard conversations. Most people who are good at them aren't. They're simply prepared: they know what they want to say, how to start, what to do when the other person gets upset, and how to end. All of that can be learned, and you can learn it from this book in an afternoon.

What you'll be able to do

- **Decide** whether a conversation is worth having, and whether now is the time.
- **Get clear** on what actually happened, what you feel and what you want, before you say a word.
- **Start well**, with a first sentence that opens the door instead of slamming it.
- **Say it** using the six-step BRIDGE, a structure that works for almost any hard conversation.
- **Handle the reaction**: defensiveness, anger, tears, silence and "Well, you always..."
- **End with a plan**, and repair things if it goes badly.

- **Find your words fast** in the library of 40 scripts for family, partners, friends, work and neighbors.

How the book is built

Part 1, Before you speak, helps you decide and prepare. **Part 2, The BRIDGE method**, is the core skill, with chapters on starting, listening, staying calm and following up. **Part 3, The script library**, has 40 ready-to-adapt scripts for real situations. **Part 4, Writing and rehearsing**, covers messages and email, and how to practice, including a surprisingly powerful rehearsal partner you already have in your pocket.

USE IT WHEN YOU NEED IT

You don't have to read in order. If a conversation is coming up this week, read Chapter 3 (the BRIDGE), find your situation in Part 3, and fill in a Conversation Planner from your toolkit. Come back for the rest later.

One promise before we start

Hard conversations will never feel easy. That's fine. The goal of this book isn't to make them comfortable. It's to make them *shorter, kinder and more likely to work*, so the dread that has been living in your head can finally move out.

BEFORE YOU START

A safety note

Please read this first.

This book is for everyday disagreements between people who are safe with each other: family, partners, friends, colleagues and neighbors who may be frustrating but are not dangerous.

IF YOU ARE AFRAID OF SOMEONE

If someone threatens you, hurts you, controls where you go or who you see, or makes you afraid of what they'll do if you speak up, **don't use these scripts to confront them.** A frank conversation can increase the risk. Your safety comes first.

- In an emergency, call your local emergency number (911 in the US).
- In the US, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is free, confidential and open 24 hours: **1-800-799-7233**, or chat at **thehotline.org**.
- Outside the US, search for your country's domestic abuse helpline, or ask your doctor for local support.

Some conversations are also too big for a book. If you're facing a serious legal dispute, a workplace issue involving harassment or discrimination, or a family conflict that keeps escalating, a lawyer, your HR department, a mediator or a licensed counselor can help in ways a script can't.

This book is not therapy, legal advice or medical advice. It's a practical guide to saying difficult things well.

CHAPTER 2

Get clear before you speak

Facts versus stories, your feelings, and what you actually want.

Most hard conversations go wrong before anyone speaks, because we walk in with a tangle of facts, assumptions, hurt and blame. Ten minutes of untangling on paper changes everything. This chapter shows you how.

Facts versus stories

Your mind turns what happened into a story almost instantly. "She didn't reply to my message" becomes "She doesn't care about me." The first is a fact. The second is a story you're telling yourself, and it might be wrong.

The single most useful thing you can do before a hard conversation is to separate the two.

FACTS (WHAT A CAMERA WOULD RECORD)	STORIES (WHAT I'VE CONCLUDED)
"You arrived at 8:40 for a 7:30 dinner."	"You don't respect my time."
"The report went to the director with only your name on it."	"You're trying to take credit for my work."
"Dad drove onto the curb twice last month."	"Dad is going to kill someone."
"You were on your phone during most of dinner."	"You'd rather be anywhere else."

When you lead with facts, the other person can't really argue with them. When you lead with stories, they'll defend themselves against the story, and you'll never get to the problem.

THE CAMERA TEST

Ask: *Could a video camera have recorded this?* If yes, it's a fact. If you'd need to read someone's mind, it's a story. Keep the story, it matters, but present it as yours: "The story I've been telling myself is..."

Your feelings are information

Feelings aren't something to hide in a hard conversation. They're often the most important part, as long as you own them as yours. "I felt embarrassed" is honest. "You embarrassed me" is an accusation.

Many people struggle to name what they feel beyond "upset" or "annoyed." A more precise word helps the other person understand, and helps you calm down. Try one of these:

hurt

embarrassed

worried

disappointed

overlooked

overwhelmed

lonely

taken for granted

anxious

frustrated

confused

disrespected

scared

sad

tired

left out

resentful

stuck

What do you actually want?

This is where most people get stuck. Ask yourself three questions:

- 1 What do I want for me?** "To feel like my time matters." "To get credit for my work." "To stop worrying every time Dad drives."
- 2 What do I want for them?** "For them to keep their independence." "For us to still be friends."
- 3 What do I want for us?** "To keep working well together." "To enjoy dinners again."

If your honest answer is "to make them feel as bad as I do" or "to prove I'm right," that's normal, and it's worth noticing. A conversation with that goal rarely goes well. Wait until you can find a goal that includes them too.

The request

Most hard conversations need a clear, doable request at the end. Vague requests get vague results.

INSTEAD OF	TRY
✗ "I need you to be more respectful."	✓ "Could you text me if you're going to be more than fifteen minutes late?"
✗ "You need to be a better team player."	✓ "When we present joint work, can we put both our names on it?"
✗ "Be more present."	✓ "Could we keep phones off the table during dinner?"
✗ "Stop driving, Dad."	✓ "Would you be willing to have a driving assessment, so we both know where things stand?"

A good request is **specific** (what exactly), **doable** (they can actually do it) and **about the future** (what happens next, not what happened before).

Imagine their side

Before you speak, spend two minutes imagining the conversation from their side. What might they be dealing with that you can't see? What would they say happened? What might they be afraid of hearing?

You don't have to agree with their side. But if you've imagined it, you won't be ambushed by it, and you'll be able to say something that shows you've thought about them, which lowers their guard.

The Clear Page

Put it all together on one page. (Your toolkit has a printable version, the Conversation Planner.)

The Clear Page

The facts (camera test): _____

The story I've been telling myself: _____

How I feel (one or two precise words): _____

What I want for me / for them / for us: _____

My specific, doable request: _____

What might be going on for them: _____

My first sentence: _____

CHAPTER 3

Build a BRIDGE

Six steps that work for almost any hard conversation.

Here is the structure at the heart of this book. It has six steps, it works for almost any hard conversation, and it fits on a sticky note. When you're nervous, it gives you somewhere to put your feet.

B

Begin with why you care

Say why the relationship matters, before the problem.

R

Report what happened

Specific facts. What a camera would record.

I

Impact on you

How it affected you, owned as yours.

D

Desire: your request

Specific, doable, about the future.

G

Give them the floor

Ask for their side, then really listen.

E

End with a next step

Agree what happens now, and thank them.

A BRIDGE, start to finish

Here's Maya talking to her friend Jess, who is often very late.

- B** Jess, can I talk to you about something? I love our dinners, they're honestly the highlight of my month, so I want to be straight with you.
- R** The last three times we've met, you've arrived about an hour after we said. On Saturday it was 8:40 for 7:30.
- I** I end up sitting alone at the table, and I feel a bit embarrassed and, honestly, a bit unimportant.
- D** Could you text me if you're going to be more than fifteen minutes late? Then I can wait at home instead of in the restaurant.
- G** Is something going on? I'd really like to understand your side.
- JESS** Oh no. I didn't realize. Work's been insane and I keep leaving late, and I think I've just stopped noticing. I'm really sorry.
- E** Thank you for hearing it. So: a text if you're running late, and maybe we book for 8 instead of 7:30? I'm already looking forward to the next one.

It took about two minutes. Notice what's *not* there: no "always," no "never," no lecture about respect, no list of every late arrival since 2019.

Step by step

B: Begin with why you care

The first sentence tells the other person whether this is an attack or a conversation. Starting with why you care lowers their guard before they hear the problem.

SAY IT

I'm bringing this up because I really value working with you.

SAY IT

I love you, and I want our visits to be good for both of us.

SAY IT

Our friendship matters to me, which is why I don't want this to sit between us.

Psychologist John Gottman, who spent decades observing couples in his lab, reported that the way a disagreement *starts* predicts how it ends: in his studies, the outcome of a conflict conversation could be predicted from its first three minutes in the vast majority of cases. A harsh start (criticism, sarcasm, blame) tends to produce a harsh conversation. A soft start gives it a chance.

R: Report what happened

Use the facts from your Clear Page (Chapter 2). Be specific, recent and brief. One or two examples are enough. A long list feels like a prosecution.

INSTEAD OF**TRY**

✗ "You're always late."

✓ "The last three times, you arrived about an hour after we agreed."

✗ "You never help around the house."

✓ "This week I did the dishes every night, and the laundry piled up again."

✗ "You're so negative in meetings."

✓ "In the last two team meetings, you said 'that won't work' to the first three ideas."

I: Impact on you

Say how it affected you, with an "I" sentence. This is the part people can't argue with, because it's about you.

SAY IT

I felt embarrassed, sitting alone at the table.

SAY IT

I end up feeling like the house is my job, and I get resentful, which I don't want.

SAY IT

It makes me hesitant to share ideas, and I think others feel the same.

"I FEEL" WITHOUT BLAME

"I feel that you don't care" isn't an I-statement. It's an accusation wearing a disguise. After "I feel," use a feeling word (*hurt, worried, embarrassed*), not a judgment about them.

D: Desire: your request

Now say what you'd like. One request, specific and doable. If you have several, pick the most important one for this conversation.

SAY IT

Could you text me if you're going to be more than fifteen minutes late?

SAY IT

Could we sit down on Sunday and split the jobs for the week?

SAY IT

Would you be willing to try "yes, and" for a few meetings and see how it goes?

G: Give them the floor

Then stop talking and ask for their side. This is the step people skip, and it's often where the conversation turns.

SAY IT

How does that land with you?

SAY IT

Is there something going on that I don't know about?

SAY IT

What's your side of this? I'd really like to understand.

Then listen, properly. Chapter 6 shows you how. You may learn something that changes the whole picture.

E: End with a next step

Before you finish, agree on something concrete, even if it's small, and thank them for listening.

SAY IT

So we'll try the Sunday planning for a month and see how it feels. Thank you for hearing me out.

SAY IT

Shall we check in about it in two weeks?

SAY IT

I know that wasn't easy to hear. I really appreciate how you took it.

Short version, long version

For small things, a BRIDGE can be two sentences:

SAY IT

I love having you over, so I want to mention this: could you take your shoes off at the door? The carpet's new. Thanks!

For big things, each step might be a few minutes, and the G step might take an hour. The structure is the same.

BUILD YOUR BRIDGE

Take the conversation from Chapter 1 and write one sentence for each step. Don't polish it. Just get it down.

B: why I care: _____

R: what happened (facts): _____

I: the impact on me: _____

D: my request: _____

G: my question: _____

E: the next step I'll suggest: _____

FROM THE LIBRARY

Three of the forty scripts

Family, friends and work.

F1 Asking an aging parent to stop driving, or get checked

You're worried about a parent's driving: near misses, dents, getting lost.

- B** Dad, I love you, and I love that you're so independent. That's exactly why I want to talk about something.
- R** In the last month you've [clipped the curb twice] and [got lost coming back from the store].
- I** I've been really worried, and I'd never forgive myself if something happened to you or someone else.
- D** Would you be willing to have a driving assessment, so we both know where things stand?
- G** How do you feel about your driving lately? Have you noticed anything?
- E** Whatever the result, we'll work out how you keep getting where you want to go. I promise.

If they say "I've been driving for fifty years!" → "You have, and you've been a great driver. That's why an assessment is just a check, not a judgment."

If they say "You just want to take my car." → "I want you to keep your independence. If driving gets harder, we'll find other ways for you to get around."

Tip: Talk about independence, not loss. Come with options ready: rides, a delivery service, a bus pass, a family rota.

R1 The friend who's always late

You're regularly left waiting.

- B** I love our catch-ups, so I want to mention something small before it becomes a big thing.
- R** The last **[three]** times, you've arrived about **[forty minutes]** after we agreed.
- I** I end up waiting on my own and feeling a bit unimportant.
- D** Could you text me if you're running more than fifteen minutes late?
- G** Is something going on? I'd like to understand.
- E** Thanks, I really appreciate it. Same place next week?

If they say "I'm just like that, you know me!" → "I do, and I love you. A quick text would make all the difference."

Tip: If nothing changes, change what you do: tell them you'll wait fifteen minutes and then head off, and do it, kindly.

W2 Telling your manager you're overloaded

You have more work than you can do well.

- B** I want to keep doing good work for the team, and I'm worried I can't at the moment.
- R** Right now I'm working on **[the launch, the budget review and two client accounts]**, and I've been **[working until 8 most nights]**.
- I** I'm worried the quality is starting to slip, and I'm running out of energy.
- D** Could we look at my priorities together, and decide what can wait or move to someone else?
- G** Which of these matters most to you right now?
- E** Thanks. I'll send a short email with what we agreed.

If they say "Everyone's busy right now." → "I know. That's why I want to make sure I'm spending my time on what matters most."

Tip: Bring a list of everything you're doing with rough hours. It turns "I'm stressed" into a planning conversation.