

# YOUR 3-STEP GUIDE TO MASTERING THE ART OF COMPROMISE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

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by ALLIE FLINN, OCTOBER 23, 2019

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There are many desirable traits to look for in a partner—kindness, humor, and intelligence are a few solid examples. Another biggie that comes to mind? Willingness to compromise, because without it, the relationship can quickly veer into my-way-or-the-highway territory. It's often said that in matters of business, if both parties walk away from the table feeling like they got a bad deal, the negotiation is fair. But let's be careful to not conflate romantic relationships and business, because I, for one, think compromise in relationships should look a little different. And, phew, experts back me up on that.

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That said, there are some similarities in terms of negative feelings that can come from compromise of any sort, because by nature, compromise means not getting your way to the full extent—and who enjoys that? This being true, it makes sense that someone might feel less than thrilled after giving in a little bit, but there's certainly a lurking variable to consider with compromise in relationships. "Compromising in a relationship can feel frustrating or disappointing in the moment because you don't get exactly what you want, but it brings a sense of comfort and predictability later, knowing that you're in a partnership in which everyone's voice gets heard and is counted," says clinical psychologist and relationship expert Seth Meyers, PsyD. And it's that last part—about appreciating that any concession on your part will result in a happier partner and more mutual respect—that's unique to compromise in relationships.

"Both parties have to live in the gray and avoid the black and white," says professional matchmaker Destin Pfaff of Love And Matchmaking. "Compromise isn't about getting your way...it includes each person expressing what they want, listening to what the other wants, and agreeing upon a solution." That's the healthy way to go about it, at least. When this happens, both partners should be able to emerge from the discussion feeling able to accept the final decision without feeling angry or resentful.

When this doesn't happen? You likely have a bad compromise on your hands. "A bad compromise often involves passive-aggressive behavior in which a person agrees in the moment but later fights the terms of the compromise," says Dr. Meyers, who serves as eHarmony's resident relationship expert. Ever find yourself compromise-competing? (That is, engaging in fruitless debates that center upon the thesis of "well I gave in last time.") Pfaff says to avoid this tallying behavior at all costs, because it's not in the spirit of healthy compromise.

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Amazing intel all around, but how does one actually implement it? Because it seems tough to avoid the naturally negative inclination to associated with things not going totally your way. And, indeed it is, which is why the Dr. Meyers share his tops tips below for striking a successful compromise.

## The 3-step guide for compromise in relationships.

### 1. DON'T ATTEMPT IT WHILE IN A BAD MOOD

"If you're overly tired, angry, or otherwise upset, you won't have the internal resources to discuss the situation openly and fairly, Dr. Meyers says. "If you're in a bad mood and your partner is pushing you to discuss something, ask if the two of you can pause for an hour and then revisit the issue later."

### 2. CONSIDER YOUR PARTNER'S POINT OF VIEW

"Research shows that successful compromise is associated with perspective-taking, or focusing on the feelings of the other person in a situation," Dr. Meyers says. "If you take the time to think of the other person's feelings, you'll be more likely to find a compromise, and the interaction will generate less conflict."

### 3. LISTEN—NO, *REALLY* LISTEN

Ask yourself what seems to matter most to your partner based on what they're saying and what feelings they seem to be experiencing. That will help walls come down and allow everyone involved to act more reasonably. "Is the root of their feelings sadness, anger, or something else? Once people feel listened to, they'll be more likely to play fairly, compromise, and validate your feelings," Dr. Meyers says. So sometimes, to pinpoint the result someone really wants from a compromise, you need to listen to more than just words.