

Repair Scripts: What to Say After a Fight

You know roughly what you want to say. You have said versions of it in your head on the way home. What stops you is that the sentence which would have worked at ten past nine sounds absurd by Thursday, and the one that fits three days later would have been far too large an hour after the row. Timing changes the words, not only the tone. So these are sorted by how long ago it happened rather than by what the argument was about.

Who this is for: You have drafted the same message four times, deleted it and gone to bed, and by morning the thing you needed to say has grown too big to start.

The scripts, by how long ago it was

1. Within the hour

Short, small, and not about the argument yet.

"I do not want to keep going like this. Can we stop for now?"

"I am not going anywhere. I need an hour and then I want to talk."

"I need a bit of time. I will come and find you before bed."

My version, in two clauses or fewer:

The word I am tempted to add here, and what it would do:

2. Same evening

One sentence of ownership before either of you sleeps on it.

"I was sharp with you about the car. That was not fair and I know it."

"Sorry if you felt hurt." Rewrite it here without the word if:

"I do not want to sleep on this. Can I say one thing and then leave it?"

My version, naming the exact moment rather than the evening:

3. Next morning

The commonest window, and the easiest one to overload.

"I thought about last night. The thing I got wrong was ____."

"Can we pick up the actual subject this evening? Not now."

Everything I composed at four in the morning that is not going in:

My version, said standing up, in under twenty seconds:

Where the word "but" wants to go, and what follows it:

4. Three days later

Late enough that raising it is its own event.

"Is now a bad time? I want to go back to Sunday for two minutes."

"I have been sitting with it. What I actually did was ____."

"I just wanted to say." What changes if I cut the word just?

My version, with the permission question first:

5. The one from a month ago

Old, unclosed, and still shaping how you speak to each other.

"I have wanted to say something about February for a while."

"I let it go quiet and that was mine. I am sorry it took this long."

What I want them to admit, which is not going in this sentence:

My version, under forty words, with nothing attached:

What I will do if they say they had forgotten it entirely:

6. The repair that is not an apology

About half of them. Nobody was in the wrong.

"Nothing happened. I went somewhere in my head and I am back."

"I do not think either of us did anything wrong. It still felt bad."

"I missed you this week and I did not say so."

My version: what happened in me, then the reaching part:

7. When the repair you were handed was a bad one

What to say without rejecting it outright.

"I can hear you are sorry it went badly. Can you say the bit about the tone?"

"Thank you. I cannot be warm about it yet, and that is not a punishment."

"You do not need to explain why. The first sentence was the one I needed."

What I usually say instead, and what it costs:

My version, taking the real part first:

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