

What to Know

When you're able to talk with the mother of your children and solve problems together, it helps you both to raise healthy children. But even when you and she do a good job of talking and solving problems, it can sometimes take a lot of work for you to know where she's coming from, and for her to do the same with you. That's because the ways in which men and women are wired to think differ.



A great way to think about how men and women think is:

- Men are like waffles, and
- Women are like spaghetti.

(This way of thinking is described in detail in the book and study guide [*Men are Like Waffles, Women are Like Spaghetti* by Bill and Pam Farrel.](#))

Think about the shape of a waffle and how spaghetti, after its cooked, lays out in a bowl or on a plate. A waffle has “boxes” divided into neat rows. Syrup flows into the boxes and separates. Spaghetti noodles lay all over each other, twisting and turning over and under one another.

Like waffles, men tend to put the parts of their life into separate boxes that create space between those parts. They tend to spend time in one box at a time. A dad might, for example, focus on being a dad when with his children and not think about work. But when he's at work, he thinks only about work and not about his role as a dad.

Like spaghetti, women tend to have every part of their life touching every other part. They tend to “flow” easily from one part of their life to another because they see them as connected. A mom might, for example, focus on being a worker and mom while at work, and a mom and worker when with her children.

This way to think is a bit simple. It can also not describe the way some men and women are wired. Some men can be wired more like spaghetti, and some women like a waffle.

Still, it's useful because it can help explain why you and the mother of your children can sometimes have trouble talking and knowing where the other person is coming from. It helps explain why, for example, you might want to get right to the heart of the matter and solve a problem, while she wants to explore it in detail and talk it out.

The bottom line is conflict will arise when you and she don't understand your differences. When you understand and respect your differences, you can talk and solve problems. You also need the right mindset and good skills to talk with her and solve problems.

What Else

An open mindset will help you to talk with the mother of your children and give you the best chance to solve a problem between the two of you.

Here's how to adopt an open mindset to take into any talk with her, complete with some "Don'ts" and "Do's."

- Know that you have a role in creating any problem between you and her.
- Let her talk first. Only share your view after she shares hers.
- Value that she might be right or, at least, have good points.
- Focus on her mood and how that might affect what she says and how you might react to what she says.
- Accept and be open to the fact that you might need to change.
- Don'ts:
 - Have a tense posture, such as keeping your arms folded across your chest.
 - Get in her space or face.
 - Pick a fight with her.
 - Blame her or get angry. If you get angry, walk away until you calm down.
 - Dismiss what she says.
 - Walk out when she says something you don't like.
 - Withdraw or give her the silent treatment.
 - Deny something she says that's true.
 - Be stubborn.
 - Come up with an excuse for why you did or said something wrong.
- Do's:
 - Have a calm posture, such as keeping your arms relaxed and by your side when standing, If seated, keep your hands relaxed, open, face down, and on your thighs.
 - Make eye contact with her.
 - Smile, but not a fake one.

- Ask her questions nicely.
- When you don't understand something she says, ask questions to help you understand where she's coming from.
- When you understand where she's coming from but she says something that's too broad or vague, ask her to be more specific.

What to Ask

Reflect on each of the questions below. Take your time. Write your answers if you like.

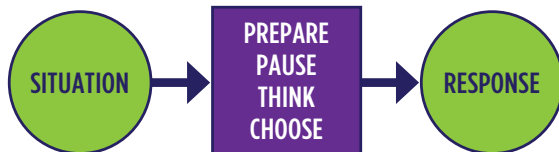
1. How aware am I of the typical ways in which I talk or use body language when I talk with the mother of my children? How aware am I of the typical ways in which she talks or uses body language with me?
2. What problems do we cause because of the typical ways in which we talk or use body language with each other?
3. Do I have an open mindset when I talk with her about problems between the two of us? Do I have an open mindset when we talk about any issue, whether it's between us or not?
4. If I don't have an open mindset, why don't I have one?
5. What do I need to change to do a better job talking with her?

Learn More

One of the best skills you can learn to have better talks with mom is called

“Prepare → Pause → Think → Choose.”

Use it to create the space and time you need—from the moment a problem arises—to respond in a calm, caring, and thoughtful way.



The first step is to **Prepare** for times when you have to talk with her about a problem. There are problems that just come up that you can't prepare for, but there are many times when you know ahead of time that you must talk with her about a problem.

There are two parts to preparing. The first part is to remember what to do when talking about any problem. The second is to practice how you will respond.

The first part is:

- Prepare to be calm.
- Prepare to be open to her point of view first before sharing yours.
- Prepare to listen and share with compassion.

The second part is to practice your response using the following statements.

When she _____ (says or does this),

I will _____ (say or do this).

I will not _____ (say or do this).

You might have to practice one or more responses because she might say or do several things. If this is a problem that you've talked about before, think about what she usually says or does. Practice your response(s) as many times as you need to feel good about it. Write it down if it will help you stick to it.

The second step to this skill is Pause → Think → Choose. Even though there are three parts, it's one step because you have to do the parts quickly. **This will be the only step in this skill you can use when you don't have time to prepare for a talk.**

When she says something, you need to:

- **Pause**, even if only for a few seconds. Take a deep breath and relax.
- **Think** about how to respond with compassion.
- **Choose** your response.