

Speak so they hear you

How to say things so they don't get lost



DESIGN INFINITY

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The characters and situations in this book are fictional.

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Before You Begin

Maybe you know the feeling. You spend ten minutes explaining something, you try to be clear and calm, and the other person walks away with something completely different. Or you say one innocent sentence, and thirty seconds later you're arguing about something you never meant to bring up.

It's not that you can't talk. And usually it's not that the other person can't listen either. Words simply change shape on their way from one person to another. They pass through the other person's tiredness, worries, past experiences and the tone you happened to use. What arrives on the other side is often something you never sent.

This book isn't a psychology textbook. It's a practical guide to **saying things so they have a chance of landing**. No rules to memorize, just situations you know from the kitchen, from work and from phone calls with your mom. And above all, sentences you can use tomorrow.

● How to use this book

Every chapter opens with a scene starring **Aileesha and AiDeeran**, two people who love each other and still keep missing each other. Not because one of them is the bad guy. They both make mistakes, just like the rest of us.

Then we look at **what actually happened** in the scene, break down the principle and go through pairs of sentences: **Not like this / Try this**. At the end of each chapter comes the **rewind**: same situation, same people, different words. And suddenly it ends completely differently.

Each chapter closes with a **mini task** for the next few days and a short **In a nutshell** summary. The tasks are optional, but they're where advice you've read turns into a habit.

It's not about speaking perfectly. It's about speaking so the other person has a chance to hear you.

Meet



Aileesha



AiDeeran

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Chapter 1

Speaking Isn't the Same as Being Heard

Why something different arrives from what we sent



Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Aileesha slams the door, drops her bag on a chair and kicks off her shoes. AiDeeran is on the couch with his phone.



Aileesha

Well, I carried the whole day on my own again.

AiDeeran



(doesn't look up) I was working too, in case you missed it.



Aileesha

I didn't say you weren't working.

AiDeeran



So what are you saying?



Aileesha

Nothing. Forget it.

She walks off to the kitchen. AiDeeran keeps staring at his phone, but he isn't reading anymore. Both of them feel the other one started it.

What actually happened?

What she said “I carried the whole day on my own.”

What she meant “I’m exhausted and I need someone to feel for me for a minute.”

What he heard “You don’t do anything.”

Neither of them said anything nasty. And yet, thirty seconds later, they’re in separate rooms. The words didn’t arrive where Aileesha sent them. Along the way, a request became a reproach, and the reproach became an attack he could only defend against.

● Three layers of every sentence

Every sentence we say actually has three versions:

- **What I say:** the literal words I speak.
- **What I mean:** what I want the other person to understand, feel or do.
- **What they hear:** how they translate it through their mood, tiredness and experience.

The gap between the first and second layer is smaller than we think. The gap between the second and third can be huge. We know exactly what we meant. But the other person has no access to our head. All they have is our words, our tone and their own mood.

● Why words change on the way

The other person's brain doesn't process our words calmly and from a distance. First, it quickly answers one question: **“Is this an attack?”** Only once it decides it isn't does it really start listening to the content.

That's why the same sentence can go down smoothly one day and start a fight the next. It depends on the other person's day, on what happened between you yesterday and on whether they caught a note of blame in your words. Aileesha wanted understanding. But after a long day at work, AiDeeran only heard “you didn't do anything again” and went on the defensive.

We're not fully responsible for what the other person hears. But we have a lot of influence over how easy or hard it is for them.

● Say what you really need

The most common reason people don't hear us is simple: **we say what bothers us instead of what we need.** Aileesha didn't need AiDeeran to admit he'd worked less. She needed five minutes of attention and a bit of sympathy. But she didn't say that. She made a complaint and hoped he would translate it correctly.

✗ **Not like this**

“I had to do everything on my own again.”

✓ **Try this**

“I'm completely wiped out today. Would you help me with dinner?”

✗ **Not like this**

"You never notice how much I do."

✓ **Try this**

"It would mean a lot if you told me now and then that you notice."

✗ **Not like this**

"Late again, of course."

✓ **Try this**

"I expected you at six and started to worry. Next time, please text me."

In every case we're telling the truth. We're just sending it in a form that has a chance of landing.

◀◀ **Let's try that again**

Same Tuesday. Same door, same bag on the chair.



Aileesha

I've had a crazy day. I need to vent to you for five minutes. Can you?

AiDeeran



(puts his phone down) Of course. What happened?

And once more, because it can be fixed from the other side too:



Aileesha

Well, I carried the whole day on my own again.

AiDeeran



(looks up) You sound completely drained. What happened?



Aileesha

(exhales) You have no idea.

It doesn't matter who "started it." Either of them can save the conversation.



Mini task

For three days, notice the sentences after which a conversation went wrong. In the evening, take one of them and write down all three layers: what you said, what you meant and what the other person might have heard.

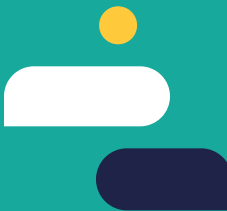
In a nutshell

- 1.** The other person has no access to your head, only your words and their own mood.
- 2.** The brain first checks for an attack. Only then does it listen.
- 3.** Say what you need, not what bothers you.

Chapter 2

The First Sentence Decides

How one sentence switches someone to defense or to listening



Sunday morning. Aileesha is reading on the balcony. AiDeeran steps outside looking serious.

AiDeeran



We need to talk.



Aileesha

(closes her book) About what? What happened?

AiDeeran



Nothing terrible. It's about next weekend.



Aileesha

Then why say it like that? My stomach just dropped.

AiDeeran



For heaven's sake, I just wanted to ask you something. You're impossible to talk to.

They never got to the weekend. They spent the whole morning arguing about who scared whom.

What actually happened?

What he said "We need to talk."

What he meant "I need to plan the weekend with you."

What she heard "Something is wrong. Maybe he's breaking up with me."

The first sentence is the front door of a conversation. If the other person senses danger behind it, they won't come in. They'll stay in the doorway, ready to defend themselves, even if what comes next is completely harmless.

AiDeeran meant no harm. But “We need to talk” carries an alarm inside it. Within two seconds Aileesha ran through every possible disaster in her head, and by the time she found out nothing was wrong, she was already rattled and irritated.

● Sentences that set off the alarm

- **“We need to talk.”** Sounds like the start of a breakup or a firing.
- **“You always...” / “You never...”** Turns one situation into a verdict on the whole person.
- **“I don't want to criticize you, but...”** We all know what comes after “but.”
- **“No offense, but...”** The same thing, just more politely wrapped.
- **“Why did you ... again?”** The word “again” accuses before the question is even asked.
- **“Can I ask you something?”** Without context, it feels like an interrogation.

● Say what it's about right away

The simplest rule for a first sentence: **let the other person know right at the start what you'll talk about and how serious it is.** Their brain relaxes because it doesn't have to guess.