



Hot Tips: Managing Disagreement Without Disconnection

Connection First. Problem-Solving Second

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“Strong opinions and strong relationships do not have to be opposites.”

Disagreement is inevitable in thoughtful professional conversations. What matters most is how we handle it. At a recent professional meeting, I found myself reflecting on the intensity of some disagreements. Participants held strong views about terminology, methods, words, concepts and the “right” approach to solving a problem. Some voices grew louder and more assertive, while others became quieter and seemed to withdraw from the conversation.

Moments like this reflect a broader communication climate we see today. Public conversations often escalate quickly into blame, defensiveness, and polarized thinking. When disagreement feels unsafe, people tend to respond in two ways: pushing harder to defend their position or pulling back and disengaging. Unfortunately, neither response strengthens relationships or leads to thoughtful solutions.

The Importance of the Pause

In these moments, I try to remind myself to pause — to slow down, breathe, and settle my body before responding. The self-regulation “Turtle Power” strategies we often encourage in children apply equally to adults. Neuroscience tells us that when we pause and calm ourselves, we move from reactive survival responses toward more reflective and collaborative thinking.



From Winning to Understanding

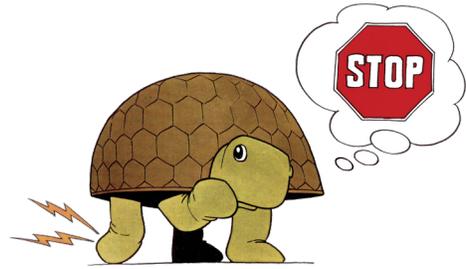
Managing disagreement well is essential to building trust, and trust is the foundation of meaningful dialogue and learning. The goal of disagreement should not be to determine who is right or wrong. Rather, it is to think together — exploring ideas, testing assumptions, and identifying thoughtful solutions while respecting different perspectives. At a time when hostility often dominates public discourse, how we communicate during disagreement matters more than ever. When we approach differences with curiosity, calmness, and respect, conflict can become an opportunity for learning rather than division. Handled with curiosity and dignity, disagreement can deepen understanding, strengthen relationships, and lead to wiser decisions. Here are a few tips to manage disagreement successfully.

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Stay Curious, Calm, and Solution-Focused

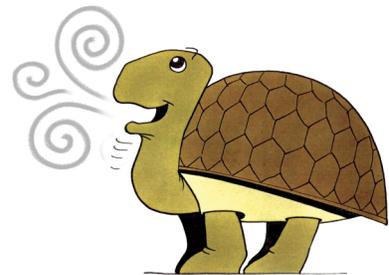
Pause and Regulate First – Use Turtle Power

- Think “Stop”
- Take a breath before responding.
- Notice defensiveness and soften tone.
- Slow your pace.



The Power of the Pause

In moments of disagreement, a brief pause can change the direction of a conversation. When emotions rise, the brain naturally shifts toward quick defensive reactions. A few slow breaths help settle the nervous system and allow the thinking parts of the brain to re-engage.



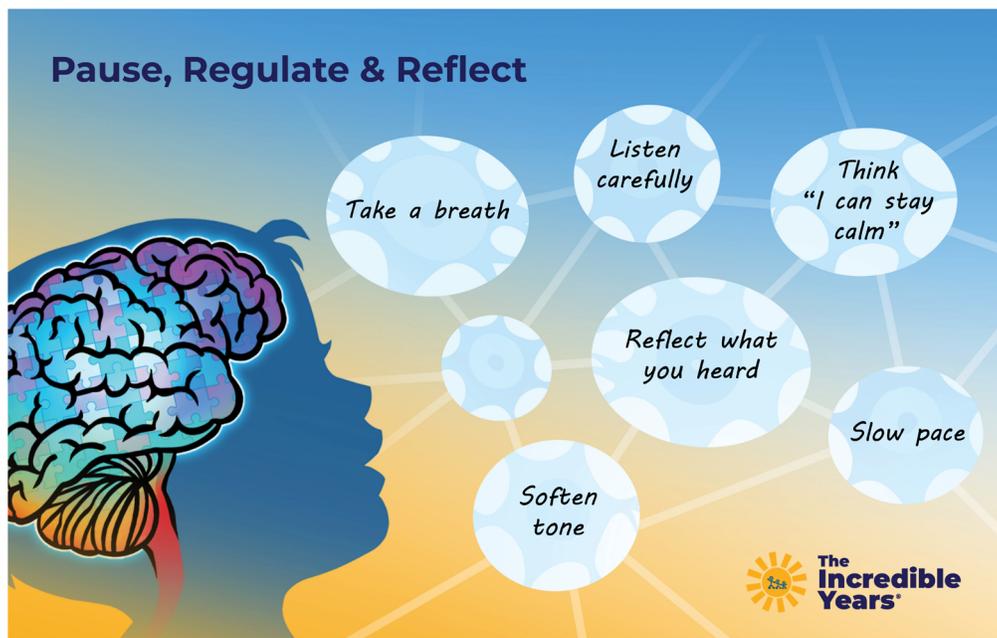
That small pause creates space to:

- Listen more carefully
- Respond thoughtfully
- Preserve the relationship while solving the problem

Often the most productive conversations begin with a moment of calm.

Listen and Reflect — Connection Before Correction

- Summarize what you heard before offering your perspective.
- Help the other person feel understood.



Lead with Curiosity

- Ask open questions: *“Can you say more about that?”*
- Seek understanding before persuasion.



Assume Positive Intent

- Most disagreements arise from people who care deeply about doing good work.

Acknowledge Thoughtful Contributions

- Recognize logic, creativity, or concern — even when you disagree.

Challenge Ideas with Respect

- Address the idea, not the person.
- Offer your perspective calmly and clearly.

Look for Shared Goals

- Identify common values and intentions.
- Shift from *“Who is right?”* to *“What solution best serves our goal and the situation?”*



Encourage Open Dialogue

- Appreciate when someone shares a different perspective.
- Psychological safety strengthens thoughtful problem solving.

When we regulate ourselves, listen carefully, and remain grounded in curiosity rather than ego, disagreement becomes a vehicle for growth rather than division. Strong opinions and strong relationships do not have to be opposites. When handled with respect and openness, conflict can deepen understanding, strengthen collaboration and ability to try again with a new solution.



Reflection Questions

- When disagreement arises, is my first instinct to push harder, withdraw, or pause?
- How do I signal respect and openness when someone challenges my perspective?
- In moments of tension, do I focus more on being right — or on being effective?
- How can I model calm and thoughtful communication during difficult conversations?