The RESOLVE Framework

GUIDE

A practical, guided framework designed to help you navigate difficult conversations with clarity, intention, and care. When tension rises and words feel heavy, RESOLVE gives you a structured way to pause, reflect, and respond rather than react. Keep it close. Use it often. Let it guide you back to the conversation you actually want to have.

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How to Use This Guide

When tension rises, clarity often narrows. Our thinking gets compressed, our options feel limited, and the urge to react — to defend, to explain, to win — can take over before we've even fully understood what's happening. This is not a personal failing. It is a human response. And it is exactly the moment this card is designed for.

The RESOLVE framework is built around seven intentional steps, each represented by a letter in the word RESOLVE. Together, they form a complete arc — from the moment you notice tension rising, through the conversation itself, and into the reflection that follows. But you don't need to move through all seven steps in sequence every time. The framework is flexible by design. In a heated moment, you might only have the bandwidth to remember one letter. That is enough. Finding your way back to a single step — slowing your breath, asking a curious question, naming what you need — can shift the entire direction of a conversation.

Think of this card as an anchor, not a script. Its purpose is not to give you the perfect words for every situation, but to interrupt the automatic patterns that pull you away from your best self in difficult moments. When you feel the familiar tightness in your chest, the urge to cut someone off, or the impulse to shut down — that is your cue to reach for this card. You don't need to use every step. You just need to find your way back to one.

When to Reach for This Guide

- Before a conversation you're dreading
- In the middle of a rising conflict
- After a conversation that didn't go well
- When you feel yourself getting reactive
- When you want to show up differently

What This Guide Is Not

- A script for perfect responses
- A way to control the other person
- A checklist you must complete
- A replacement for professional support
- A one-time fix for recurring patterns

RESOLVE is a practice, not a performance. The more you return to it, the more naturally it becomes part of how you show up in hard conversations.

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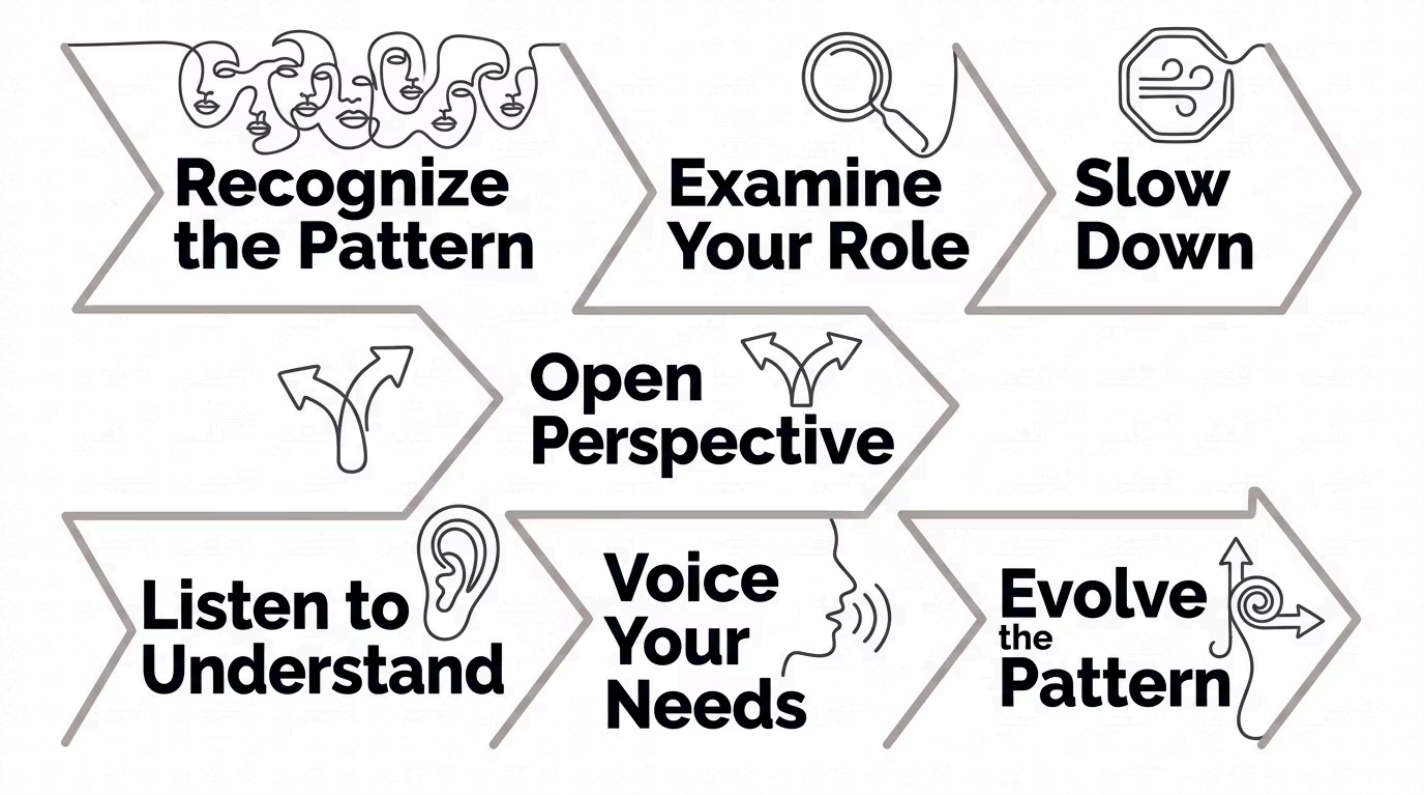
The RESOLVE Framework: A Visual Overview

The RESOLVE framework provides a clear, actionable path to transform challenging conversations into opportunities for growth and understanding. Each letter represents a vital step in navigating tension with intention, guiding you from reaction to thoughtful response. Below is a visual journey through these seven interconnected principles.



From identifying ingrained habits to consciously shaping future interactions, RESOLVE equips you with the tools to engage more effectively, build stronger relationships, and foster genuine connection even when stakes are high.

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STEP 1 OF 7

R — Recognize the Pattern

You can't change what you can't see.

Most difficult conversations follow familiar shapes. The same triggers arise. The same defenses activate. The same outcomes repeat. Before you can respond with intention, you first need to notice what is actually happening — both in the situation and within yourself. Recognition is the foundation of everything that follows in the RESOLVE framework. Without it, you are simply reacting from habit, and habits — especially under stress — tend to pull us toward our oldest and least helpful patterns.

Pattern recognition takes practice. In the middle of a tense moment, your nervous system is already activated, and your brain is prioritizing speed over accuracy. This is why the first step is simply to name what you notice, without judgment. You might observe that your jaw is clenched, that you're rehearsing a defense, or that you feel the familiar urge to withdraw. These are signals, not failures. Each one is information — a data point telling you that something important is happening and that you have a choice about what to do next.

Try to notice not just what is happening in this moment, but what tends to happen across similar moments. Do you tend to go quiet when criticized? Do you raise your voice when you feel unheard? Do you shift into problem-solving mode when someone just wants to be understood? These recurring responses are your patterns. Naming them — even silently, even imperfectly — creates a small but meaningful distance between you and your automatic reaction. That distance is where your power lives.

Ask Yourself

What is happening here? What do I usually do when things get tense? Am I reacting from habit, or responding with intention?

Name the Pattern

Complete this sentence: **"When tension rises, I tend to ___."** Say it silently if you need to. The act of naming it loosens its grip.

Why It Matters

Recognition doesn't require you to fix anything in this moment. It simply asks you to see clearly. Clarity is the first act of care — for yourself and for the conversation.

Remember: You are not your patterns. You are the awareness that can see them. That awareness is always available to you, even in the hardest moments.

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STEP 2 OF 7

E — Examine Your Role

Not blame — understanding.

Every difficult conversation involves at least two people, and while we cannot control how others show up, we can take honest stock of our own contribution. This step asks you to look inward — not to assign fault, but to understand your part in what is unfolding. Self-examination in this context is not an exercise in self-criticism. It is an act of responsibility and, ultimately, of empowerment. When you understand what you brought into a moment, you gain the ability to bring something different next time.

It is natural to want to focus on what the other person did wrong. Their tone, their words, their timing — these feel concrete and assignable. But turning your attention inward requires a different kind of courage. It means asking: What did I bring into this moment? Was I already stressed before this conversation began? Did I come in with assumptions that shaped how I heard them? Was I listening, or was I waiting to speak? These questions are not meant to make you feel worse. They are meant to give you agency. Blame keeps you stuck. Understanding sets you free to choose differently.

Examine your role with the same compassion you would offer a friend. You are not looking for evidence of your failure. You are looking for information about your patterns, your triggers, and your opportunities to show up more fully. Sometimes your role is obvious — perhaps you interrupted, or you made an assumption, or you let frustration color your tone. Sometimes it is more subtle — perhaps you were physically present but emotionally absent, or perhaps you held back something important that needed to be said. Both are worth noticing.

Questions to Ask

- What did I bring into this moment emotionally?
- How might I be contributing to this dynamic?
- What assumptions am I making about their intentions?
- Am I reacting to what is happening, or to something from the past?
- What would I see if I looked at this from their perspective?

Your Ownership Statement

Complete this sentence honestly:

"In this situation, my role has been ___."

This is not an admission of guilt. It is an act of clarity. When you own your part, you reclaim your power to change it.

> "The quality of our conversations is a reflection of the quality of our self-awareness. When we understand our own patterns, we stop being controlled by them."

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STEP 3 OF 7

S — Slow Down

Pause before you respond.

Speed is the enemy of intention. When a conversation gets difficult, our nervous system responds as though we are under threat — heart rate rises, breath shortens, and the impulse to react becomes urgent. This is not weakness. It is biology. But biology is not destiny. The simple act of slowing down — even for five seconds — can interrupt the automatic cascade of reactivity and create space for a more considered response. That space is where your choices live.

Slowing down does not mean avoiding the conversation or suppressing your feelings. It means giving yourself a brief moment to come back to center before you speak. In that moment, you are not ignoring what is happening — you are choosing to meet it from a more grounded place. Think of it as hitting a pause button on a recording. The conversation doesn't disappear. The tension doesn't vanish. But you give yourself the chance to respond from your values rather than from your impulses.

There are many ways to slow down in the moment. You can take a sip of water. You can say, "Let me think about that for a second." You can simply breathe. The specific technique matters less than the intention behind it. What you are doing is signaling to your nervous system — and to the other person — that this conversation matters enough to be approached with care. That signal, however small, can change everything.

Notice Rising Tension

Recognize bodily signs of stress quickly.

Choose Your Response

Act with intention rather than impulse.



Pause and Breathe

Inhale 4 counts, exhale 6 counts mindfully.

This three-step reset — notice, breathe, choose — can be completed in under thirty seconds and is one of the most powerful tools in the RESOLVE™ framework. Practice it before you need it, so that it becomes available when you do.

🌬️ The Breath Reset

Inhale for 4 counts. Exhale for 6 counts. Repeat twice. The longer exhale activates your parasympathetic nervous system, helping you feel calmer almost immediately.

⏸️ The Verbal Pause

It is always okay to say: "I want to give this the attention it deserves. Can I take a moment?" This is not avoidance — it is respect.

🧠 The Mental Check-In

Ask yourself: "What do I actually want here?" The answer — connection, understanding, resolution — will almost always point you toward a gentler response.

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STEP 4 OF 7

O — Open Perspective

Get curious, not certain.

One of the most reliable traps in difficult conversations is the feeling of certainty — the sense that we already know what the other person means, what their intentions are, and where this conversation is headed. Certainty feels safe, but it is often an illusion built on assumptions, past experiences, and the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of ambiguity. Opening your perspective means consciously setting down that certainty and replacing it with curiosity. It means asking: What might I be missing?

Curiosity is not the same as agreement. You can be deeply curious about someone's experience without sharing their view or accepting their behavior. Curiosity simply means you are willing to consider that there is more to the story than what is immediately visible. The other person is not a character in your narrative — they are a full human being with their own fears, history, and reasons for showing up the way they do. When you approach them with genuine curiosity, you create the possibility for understanding that certainty would never allow.

Opening your perspective also means being honest about the limits of your own view. You are seeing this situation through your own history, your own triggers, and your own needs. That does not make your perspective wrong — it makes it partial. Acknowledging that partiality is not a weakness. It is an invitation for the other person to help you see more clearly, and for you to do the same for them.



Look for What's Hidden

What might they be experiencing that I can't see? What fears, pressures, or histories might be shaping their behavior right now?



Ask Better Questions

Instead of assuming you know, ask: "Can you help me understand?" or "What's this like for you?" These questions open doors that certainty keeps closed.



Challenge Your Story

What narrative am I telling myself about this situation? Is it the only possible interpretation? What would I see if I told a different story?



Assume Good Intent

Where possible, assume the other person is doing their best with the tools they have. This assumption — even when tentative — softens your stance and opens space for connection.

Your curiosity prompt: "What might I be missing?" Say it silently. Let it soften your certainty. Let it open the conversation.

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STEP 5 OF 7

L — Listen to Understand

Listen to learn, not to reply.

Most of us do not listen to understand — we listen to respond. While the other person is speaking, we are already composing our reply, identifying the flaw in their argument, or preparing our defense. This is not listening. This is waiting. True listening — the kind that transforms conversations — requires setting down your own agenda long enough to fully receive what the other person is offering. It requires presence, patience, and a willingness to be changed by what you hear.

Listening to understand does not mean you agree with everything being said. It means you are giving the other person the experience of being heard, which is often what they are actually seeking. When people feel genuinely listened to, they soften. Their defenses lower. The conversation becomes less adversarial and more collaborative. This shift does not happen because you conceded anything — it happens because you created safety through your attention.

Practicing this kind of listening takes deliberate effort, especially when the conversation is emotionally charged. You may notice your mind wandering, your body tensing, or your opinions rising to the surface. These are normal responses. The practice is to notice them without judgment and gently return your attention to the speaker. You are not trying to be a perfect listener. You are trying to be a present one.

Signs You Are Listening to Reply

- You are thinking about what you'll say next
- You feel impatient when they pause
- You interrupt to correct or clarify
- You feel relieved when they stop talking
- You can summarize their logic but not their feeling

Signs You Are Listening to Understand

- You notice their emotions, not just their words
- You feel curious about what they haven't said yet
- You can reflect back what you heard accurately
- You feel present, not just polite
- You are open to being surprised

The Reflection Practice

After they speak, try reflecting back before you respond:

"What I'm hearing is..."

"It sounds like you're feeling..."

"Let me make sure I understand..."

This simple practice signals that you are listening — and it gives you a moment to process before you speak.

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STEP 6 OF 7

V — Voice Your Needs

Say what you need — clearly.

After recognizing patterns, examining your role, slowing down, opening your perspective, and truly listening — you arrive at one of the most important and most difficult steps: saying what you actually need. Many difficult conversations stay difficult because needs go unspoken. We hint. We imply. We hope the other person will figure it out. But hope is not a communication strategy. Clear, honest expression of your needs — without blame, without demand — is one of the greatest gifts you can offer a relationship.

Voicing your needs is not the same as making demands. A demand says: "You must do this." A need says: "This is what would help me." The difference is significant. When you express a need, you are sharing information about your experience — you are not requiring the other person to fix it. This distinction matters because it keeps the conversation collaborative rather than adversarial. You are not asking them to surrender. You are inviting them to understand.

The challenge, of course, is knowing what you need in the first place. Needs often hide beneath emotions. Frustration might be masking a need for respect. Anxiety might be masking a need for clarity. Withdrawal might be masking a need for safety. Part of this step is doing the internal work of identifying what is actually underneath your reaction. Once you know, you can say it — simply, directly, and without apology.

Step 1: Identify

Ask yourself: What do I actually need right now? Not what do I want them to do — what do I need? Safety? Clarity? Respect? Time? Acknowledgment?

Step 2: Structure

Use this frame: **"I need ___ so that ___."** For example: "I need us to slow down so that I can actually hear you." Simple. Direct. Blame-free.

Step 3: Deliver

Say it calmly and clearly. You do not need to justify your needs. You do not need to apologize for having them. Your needs are valid simply because you have them.

Step 4: Receive

After you voice your need, give the other person space to respond. They may not be able to meet it immediately — and that is okay. The act of naming it has already shifted something.

> "The courage to voice your needs — clearly and without blame — is one of the most transformative acts in any relationship."

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STEP 7 OF 7

E — Evolve the Pattern

Choose differently next time.

The final step of RESOLVE takes you beyond the conversation itself and into the space of growth. Every difficult conversation — even the ones that don't go well — contains information. It tells you something about your patterns, your triggers, your needs, and your opportunities to show up differently. Evolution is not about perfection. It is about progression. It is about looking at what happened and asking: What will I do differently next time? And then, when next time comes, making a genuine attempt to do so.

This step is where the framework becomes a practice rather than a one-time tool. The first six steps help you navigate a specific moment. The seventh step helps you change the pattern that keeps creating those moments. This is the long game of difficult conversations — not just surviving this one, but becoming someone who handles them with increasing skill, grace, and intention over time. That transformation does not happen overnight. It happens through repeated, honest reflection and small, consistent commitments to do better.

Evolution requires honesty. It means acknowledging where you fell short without spiraling into shame. It means recognizing what went well without inflating it into a false sense of mastery. It means holding both — the imperfection and the progress — with equal honesty. When you can do that, you create a sustainable practice of growth that will serve you in every relationship and every difficult conversation you have going forward.

1 Reflect

After the conversation, take time to look back. What happened? What did you notice about yourself? What patterns showed up?

2 Identify

Name one specific thing you want to do differently. Not everything — one thing. Specificity is what makes change possible.

3 Commit

Complete this sentence: "Next time, I will ___." Say it out loud. Write it down. Make it real.

4 Practice

When the next difficult moment arises, reach for your commitment. You may not get it perfect. That is not the point. The point is the attempt.

Your evolution statement: "Next time, I will ___." Fill in the blank with one specific, achievable shift. That is enough. That is everything.

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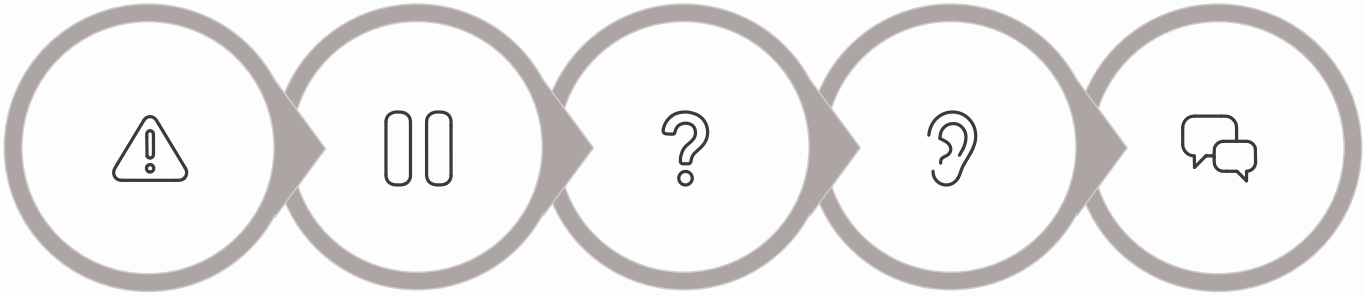
In the Moment: A Simple Flow

The RESOLVE framework is comprehensive, but in the heat of a difficult conversation, you may not have the bandwidth to recall all seven steps. That is why it helps to have a simplified flow — a shorter version you can reach for when complexity feels impossible. This six-step sequence captures the essential arc of the framework in its most distilled form. Practice it until it becomes second nature, so that when tension rises, it is already there, waiting for you.



Notice Pause Get Curious Listen Speak Clearly

Each step in this flow builds on the one before it. You cannot truly listen if you have not paused. You cannot speak clearly if you have not gotten curious. And you cannot evolve a pattern you have not noticed. The sequence matters — not as a rigid rule, but as a reminder that difficult conversations require a certain order of operations. Inner work before outer action. Understanding before expression. Presence before response.

Putting It All Together

RESOLVE™ is not about eliminating conflict.
It is about changing your relationship to it.

Instead of being pulled into automatic reactions, you begin to notice the pattern, pause within it, and choose differently. Over time, those small shifts compound. Conversations soften. Trust rebuilds. Systems begin to function with more clarity and less friction.

Conflict does not disappear.

But it becomes something you can navigate—with intention, with awareness, and with choice.

A Note on Practice

This guide is not a reminder to get it right. It is a tool to help you return to intention when it matters most. You will not use it perfectly. You will forget it in the moments you need it most. You will remember it afterward and wish you had used it sooner. All of this is part of the practice.

The goal is not a flawless conversation. The goal is a slightly more intentional one than last time. That is how patterns evolve — not in leaps, but in small, repeated choices to show up with care.

The most important thing: Return to the card. Return to the breath. Return to curiosity. You can always begin again.

7	1	5s
Steps in RESOLVE	Step Is Enough	All It Takes
A complete framework for navigating any difficult conversation with intention and care.	You don't need all seven. Finding your way back to just one step can shift everything.	A five-second pause is enough to interrupt reactivity and create space for a better response.

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