



# POCKET PHRASES

words you keep in your pocket

*"I didn't know what to say."*

I hear this all the time and I totally get it. We don't want to say the wrong thing, so we don't say anything at all. Isn't it better to just keep quiet? No. It's not.

When we don't know what to say, it's often a red flag that a deeper conversation needs to take place. If you decide that keeping quiet is the better choice, I totally trust you. If the stakes are low and it's a simple social situation, being quiet may very well be the best decision. However, keeping quiet because you don't know what to say isn't a decision, it's a defense, and all too often contributes to the behavior we don't know how to address.

Pocket phrases are words you keep in your pocket. By creating pocket phrases, the words are handy, in our pocket, ready to go. The idea is to create habits of diplomacy with words. If we have a few pocket phrases handy, we can transition that awkward moment into a conversation without escalating it into a conflict.

So below I offer you a few pocket phrases and the scenarios in which I use them.

*"I get that."*

*"That's intense."*

Neither mean that I agree, but communicate that I'm listening.

*"I like the intensity of this conversation."*

This phrase communicates, *"Hey, this is healthy. We aren't being chased by lions. Adults have intense conversations."*

*"Will you tell me what you are thinking about...?"*

Instead of "Why do you want to do that?" this is my pocket phrase when someone makes a comment that makes absolutely no sense to me.

*"Thank you for bringing that up."*

*"I hadn't thought of that."*

*"That's a good point."*

These phrases keep my defenses down while getting the information I need.

*"How has this affected you?"*

*"What is the downside?"*

When someone disagrees with my decision, I use either phrase to get clarification.



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*"Here is one option..."*

This phrase saves me overstepping and prevents me from saying, "That won't work."

*"Will you please...?"*

This phrase replaces, "You have to..." "You should have..." "Why didn't you...?" "Your mistake is..." People get so angry about what others didn't do but have rarely asked clearly for what they want or need.

*"What I can do is..."*

This pocket phrase replaces, "I can't, we can't, you can't..." There is always something I can do.

*"What's really important to me is..."*

Instead of this: "I'm worried about..." or "That won't work," share what you want to accomplish.

*"I need to explain this better."*

Say this instead of "You are missing the point," which is insulting.

*"Would it be a good idea to ask a few key people what they think?"*

This one allows me to diplomatically bring in other credible opinions when I think there is tunnel vision in room.

*"What did they say, exactly?"*

*"What did you see?"*

These types of concrete questions help me discern between facts/assumptions.

*"Because I'm defensive of all of you..."*

I use this when I'm worried that an action/message will be misperceived by others with negative consequences.

*"Would you like me to write a draft?"*

With this one, I get to frame the message while inviting in others to edit.

*"Are you feeling \_\_\_\_?"*

I offer a couple of words like frustrated or concerned to fill in this blank, but mainly I want them to know I care and that I'm listening.

*"Hey, will you tell me what happened so I can understand?"*

Keep this one close; it applies to lots and lots of situations and, like all open-ended questions, communicates that you are listening.

*"How do you see things?"*

This one is great for meetings when one or two people haven't said anything at all. Often, people just need a quick invitation.

Take this concept and think about your awkward moments, times when you don't know what to say, but would like to speak up. You are welcome to use the ones here but I'm confident you can come up with your own once you grasp the structure.