



PATIENT HEALTH ALLIANCE®
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The Conversation Compass

The Conversation Compass is a tool that helps you navigate challenging discussions by treating conversation like a journey with four cardinal directions. Just as a regular compass helps you find your way in physical space, this tool helps you find your way in conversational space. Each direction serves a specific purpose:

The compass helps you:

- Recognize when conditions are right for discussion
- Express yourself clearly and respectfully
- Listen effectively to others
- Exit conversations that become unproductive
- Maintain your boundaries throughout

How To Use This Tool

1. Start each difficult conversation at the compass's center
2. Check each direction before deciding how to proceed
3. Move between directions as needed during the conversation
4. Return to center whenever you need to regroup
5. Use the provided scripts and checkpoints for guidance

NORTH points toward engagement, showing when to proceed
EAST guides you in expressing your views
perspectives

SOUTH indicates when to step back or exit
WEST helps you receive & reflect on others'

NORTH (Engage & Proceed)

Check these conditions before moving forward:

- ☐ Both parties are calm and receptive
- ☐ Energy levels are sufficient
- ☐ Setting is appropriate
- ☐ Mutual respect is present
- ☐ Time is adequate

Prompt

"I'd like to explore this with you..."
"Let's discuss this together..."
"I'm interested in your perspective..."

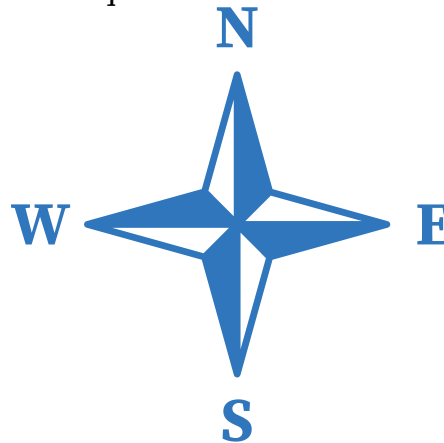
WEST (Listen & Reflect)

Practice active listening through:

- ☐ Clarifying questions
- ☐ Summarizing points
- ☐ Acknowledging feelings
- ☐ Seeking understanding

Listening Phrases:

"Help me understand..."
"Could you explain more about..."
"What I'm hearing is..."



EAST (Express & Share)

- ☐ Express your position
- ☐ Cite clear examples
- ☐ Use "I" Statements

Expressing Phrases

"From my perspective..."
"My experience has shown..."
"When this happens I feel..."

SOUTH (Disengage & Exit)

Watch for these signals to step back:

- ☐ Conversation becoming circular
- ☐ Emotions escalating
- ☐ Personal attacks appearing
- ☐ Energy depleting
- ☐ Boundaries being crossed

Prompt

"Let's pause here for now"
"We should revisit this when we're fresh"
"I need some time to reflect"

This toolkit was co-developed by Patient Health Alliance in collaboration with Give an Hour, a national nonprofit whose trauma-informed mental health frameworks informed the structure and tools included.

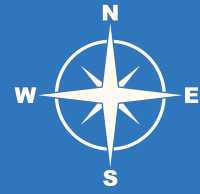
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Practice Scenarios

NORTH Points toward engagement, showing when to proceed

SOUTH Indicates when to step back or exit

EAST Guides you in expressing your views

WEST Helps you receive and reflect on others' perspectives

Practice Scenarios

Use one of these situations to practice using your compass:

- Your spouse interrupts or talks over you in discussion
- A friend pressures you to change your mind about an important decision
- A family member dismisses your career choices
- You get upsetting news and need to talk about it

For each scenario:

- Start at center (ground yourself)
- Choose your first direction
- Practice relevant phrases
- Identify potential challenges
- Plan possible direction changes
- Prepare exit strategies if needed

Remember: The compass is a flexible tool. You may move between directions multiple times in a single conversation. The goal is not to follow a rigid path but to navigate consciously and maintain healthy boundaries throughout the discussion.

CHALLENGING MOMENTS:

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SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES:

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LESSONS LEARNED:

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