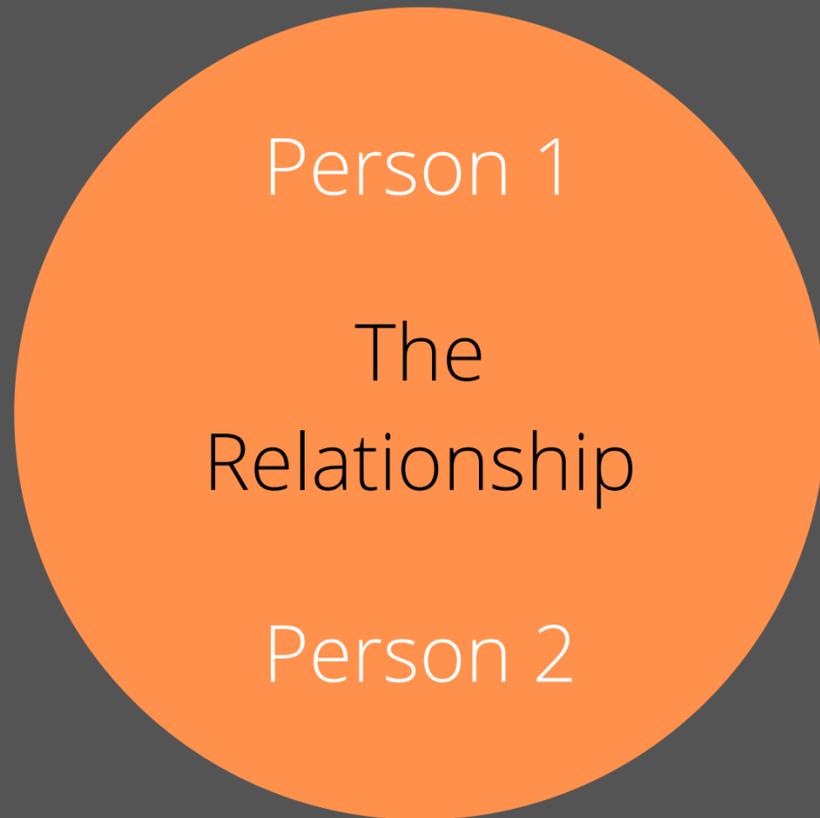


# The Solving Circle

Draw or create a circle.  
Inside the circle are 3 things:



Both parties 'step' into the circle to discuss a matter.

When you're inside the circle, the following conditions apply:

- **The relationship takes priority.**

Both parties will have their own wishes, and if you are having a difficult time in your relationship, then some of those wishes will probably conflict. So when you enter the solving circle, you are acknowledging that the relationship takes priority over the wishes of either party. The focus becomes, "Will this decision help the relationship?" rather than, "Is this the decision that I want?"

- **You agree to not hurt the relationship.**

No matter how strongly you might disagree, as long as you are in the solving circle, you must negotiate your differences, rather than arguing, blaming, criticizing, or doing any of the other behaviours that we know hurt relationships. Thus, don't try to change each other. Make your choices based on how they will affect the relationship.

- **Each partner says what they are prepared to do to help the relationship.**

- **If you can't reach a compromise right away, then step out and try again later.**

- The key to this is that you are both creating a space where the relationship takes priority over the individual. This doesn't tell you how to have a conversation, rather it creates the space for it to be held.
- This can be used in conjunction with other tools.

# The Art of Compromise

**Step 1:** Consider an area of conflict where you and someone else are stuck in perpetual gridlock. Draw two ovals, one within the other. The one on the inside is your Inflexible Area and the one on the outside is your Flexible Area.

**Step 2:** Think of the inside oval containing the ideas, needs, and values you absolutely cannot compromise on, and the outside oval containing the ideas, needs, and values that you feel more flexible with in this area. Make two lists.

**Step 3:** Discuss the following questions with each other that feels most comfortable and natural for the two of you:

- *Can you help me to understand why your “inflexible” needs or values are so important to you?*
- *What are your guiding feelings here?*
- *What feelings and goals do we have in common? How might these goals be accomplished?*
- *Help me to understand your flexible areas. Let’s see which ones we have in common.*
- *How can I help you to meet your core needs?*
- *What temporary compromise can we reach on this problem?*

Designed as an activity for the two of you, this exercise should not be approached in the midst of conflict. It will be most helpful if undertaken in peacetime. It should take approximately thirty minutes. Remember, this activity is not a magical pill. Hopefully, it is the beginning of a series of long, honest, and fruitful discussions.