RULES FOR GENTLE START–UP

We all use these skills. Softened start-up is basically the way we treat guests- respectfully and courteously. Gentle start-up has five components:

1. **Make statements that start with "I" instead of "You" to avoid blame.**
   Complaining is okay, but criticizing is not. Criticizing is a statement-often generalized, using words such as "always" and "never" -which attacks another person's character. Psychologist Thomas Gordon noted that when statements start with the word "You" instead of the word "I," they are usually more likely to be critical and to make your partner defensive. Instead of saying, "You're so thoughtless ... " it works best to start your complaint with a statement of how you feel, like, "I feel upset.. ." Don't cheat and form an "I" statement that is actually a "You" statement such as "I think you're mean."

2. **Describe what is happening; don't evaluate or judge.**
   Instead of accusing or blaming, just describe what you see happening objectively and non-judgmentally. For example, instead of saying, "You never help clean up," say, "The kitchen is messy."

3. **Talk clearly about WHAT YOU NEED IN POSITIVE TERMS.**
   Say what you wish for or hope for, and/or what you want more of (versus what you don't want). If you could wave a magic wand and get what you want, what would things be like? Instead of asking your partner to guess what you need, or to read your mind, express it explicitly. For example, instead of saying, "This dining room is a total mess," say, "I'd appreciate it if you would clean your stuff off the dining room table."

4. **Be polite.**
   Make requests politely, adding such phrases as "please" and "I would appreciate it if ... "

5. **Give appreciations.**
   Noticing what our partners are doing right is always the best way to go. If your partner has, at some time, been better in this situation, then ask for what you need and couch it within an appreciation of what your partner did right in the past and how much you miss that now. Be Specific! And Don't Store Things Up!
   While being specific is a better idea than global criticism, storing things up is not a good idea.