

"Diagnosing a communication problem in your marriage"

1. having the same argument again and again
2. feeling constantly misunderstood or misinterpreted in a negative way
3. feeling that your needs aren't being considered in decision-making
4. finding your spouse's behavior baffling
5. feeling frustrated after discussions

"Solving communication problems"

1. what you're doing isn't working, so *any* change will probably help
 - where you discuss things
 - when you discuss things
 - how you discuss things
2. enforce extended turn-taking -- 10 min of listening followed by 10 min of talking,
 - repeat as needed
3. paraphrase what you hear as conversation progresses
4. only deal with one topic in each sitting, no matter how tempting it is to change
5. seek professional help
 - like a golf lesson, some communication problems are easily detected and corrected by a professional [e.g., keep your arm straight (golf) - look at her while she's talking (marriage)]
 - more complex problems also clearly require professional assistance

Rules for Good Communication

1. Be specific.
2. When asking spouse for change, describe what you want spouse to do rather than be. Explain what spouse can start doing rather than stop doing.
3. When discussing a problem, confine the conversation to the present or the future.
4. Stick to one topic at a time rather than introducing several topics.
5. Confine critical comments to observable behavior rather than focusing on your spouse's intentions and motives.
6. Be sure your spouse has completed his/her thought before giving your reaction or comment.
7. Be sure you have understood your spouse's point of view, asking for clarification or examples whenever you are in doubt.
8. Express your feelings openly, but do not use your feelings to induce guilt, threaten or intimidate.
9. Express positive comments (compliments, appreciation) often.
10. Be concise.

Constructive Communication

1. "I like or I don't like" statements:
 - "I like it when you kiss me before you leave for work."
2. "I want" statements:
 - "I want you to go shopping with me this weekend."
3. "I feel" statements:
 - "I felt hurt when you said you didn't like my friends."

4. Reflective statements (checkout meaning or feelings underlying other's statements):
"Did you feel I was criticizing you when I said that?"
5. Questioning statements (encourage conversation and keep discussion open):
"Tell me more about that," or "what would you like me to do?"
6. Asking for specific criticism:
"What is there about my facial expression that makes you think I'm angry?"
7. Asking about spouse:
"What did you do today?" or "Did you enjoy visiting your friend?"
8. Expressing mixed feelings:
"I like it when you ask me about my work, but I get irritated when you constantly ask me about the women I know at work."
9. Clarifying statements:
"I don't want to go to the dance because I feel I don't dance well."
10. Reinforcing statements (express what you like about a specific behavior of another):
"I really like it when you look at me when we are talking."

Communication Advice

1. Use "I feel" statements rather than "you" statements.
- For example, say, "I feel threatened when you tell me how to spend my money." Instead of "You are always telling me what to do!"
2. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying without disagreeing or interrupting. Then "replay" what you have heard. "This is how I understand what you said..."
3. Talk about the details of a disagreement.
4. Never name call and always try to keep statements positive.
Instead of "You made such a mess." Try saying, "I appreciate it when you put your boots by the door when you come in. It makes it easier to keep our home clean."
5. Be honest. Admit when you are wrong and be clear about expressing exactly how you feel.
6. Assume from the start that you both share the same goal of communicating and cooperating. That will help keep the defenses down.
7. Strive to consider the situation from the other person's viewpoint.
8. If things do get heated, take a break. Agree to talk later.
9. Do better than compromise. Seek a win-win situation.
For example, if you each want to go somewhere different for vacation. Evaluate all of your options and then come up with one that is most agreeable for you both.
10. Remember what you like about each other. Appreciate differences. Appreciate each other's gifts.
11. Go on a date. Sometimes life gets in the way of relationships. You rush around trying to fit in work needs, kids' needs, friends' needs, volunteer needs and suddenly the only time you talk to your mate is when you have to discuss bills, carpools and work schedules.
If you make time to enjoy each other, you'll be able to appreciate each other and disagreements will be kept in perspective.

WHEN CONFLICTS CAN'T BE RESOLVED

If you or your loved one can't resolve disagreements or arguments effectively, or if the conflict begins to escalate, you may want to consider seeking outside professional help from a therapist or counselor to your communication skills and relationship.