

# Identifying and Solving Problems in Communication

## Objective

To strengthen your relationship through effective communication.

## You Should Know

Problems with communication have a significant negative effect on relationship satisfaction. Poor communication is one of the most frequent and damaging relationship difficulties and is often why couples seek help from therapists. These behaviors contribute to poor communication:

- Complaining
- Blaming
- Frequently using sarcasm
- Stonewalling (acting detached, cold, distant, or indifferent)
- Criticizing
- Being judgmental
- Mocking or belittling
- Being overly defensive

When you avoid poor communication behaviors, and you express yourself to your partner in constructive and healthy ways, you deepen your connection and strengthen the relationship. Each of you will feel understood, and when problems arise, your connection will remain strong.

Good communication does not have to involve agreement. You and your partner can respectfully agree to disagree, understanding where each of you is coming from. Good communication promotes better understanding, acceptance, and collaboration—instead of constant disagreement and conflict.

It is particularly important during conflict or times of stress that you and your partner slow down and really listen. Quickly responding to assumed (rather than actual) messages leads to ineffective and unhelpful communication, often escalating conflict.

Consider the following tips to have calm and respectful conversations:

### Speaker

Be specific.

Be brief.

Be as positive as possible.

Use “I” statements.

### Listener

Listen attentively; do not interrupt.

Reflect what your partner is saying or feeling.

Summarize what you think was said.

Ask for additional information.

Be clear about what is helpful.

Don't counterattack or be defensive.

Avoid "you" statements.

Clarify without excusing.

Avoid blame, insults, accusations.

Find points of agreement.

Avoid labels or absolute statements.

Apologize or express regret, if appropriate.

## What to Do

Make a copy of this worksheet for each partner. After you have both completed it, share your responses without judging or criticizing.

Rate each communication problem on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = this is not a problem in our relationship, and 10 = this is a major problem in our relationship.

My partner:

\_\_\_\_\_ criticizes me frequently.

\_\_\_\_\_ finds fault with everything I do.

\_\_\_\_\_ offers advice when I don't ask for it (instead of listening to what I have to say).

\_\_\_\_\_ doesn't listen to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ tends to talk too much.

\_\_\_\_\_ frequently yells or screams.

\_\_\_\_\_ avoids conflict.

\_\_\_\_\_ interrupts.

\_\_\_\_\_ apologizes too much.

\_\_\_\_\_ often says "you always" or "you never."

\_\_\_\_\_ constantly nags.

\_\_\_\_\_ has to have the last word.

\_\_\_\_\_ gives me the silent treatment.

\_\_\_\_\_ insists that they are always right.

\_\_\_\_\_ shows very little interest in me.




Did you find the communication tips helpful when practicing this exercise? Why or why not?

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What, if anything surprised you during this exercise?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

What did you learn from this exercise?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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