

Communication within the Couple



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Why talk about communication?

- o Communication is one of the most widely cited problems in couples.
- o It is impossible "not" to communicate in a couple. (silence is a form of communication)
- o High conflict couples are more likely to get divorced or separated.
- o Most people never really stop to think about "how" they communicate.

Research on Couples in Psychology

- o Women compared with men, wanted greater increases in their partners' emotional and companionate behaviours, instrumental support, and parenting involvement; men wanted greater increases in sex.
- o Both men and women behaved more positively during their partner's areas of change than their own.

Activity 1

- o Sit back to back with your partner.
- o Describe how to draw the shape to your partner while he or she draws.
- o Switch, draw the shape your partner is describing.



Activity 2

o Having completed Activity 1, describe using 5 adjectives your partner's communication style.





Gender Differences



- o Men are goal-oriented and depend on achievements for self-esteem.
- o Women are relationship oriented and can overcome fears of being unlovable by doing for others. Self-esteem often depends on being involved with someone.



Gender Differences



- o Men need acceptance, admiration, appreciation, encouragement, and faith in their ability.
- o Women need understanding, interest, concern, reassurance, devotion, loyalty, commitment, and respect for their ideas and feeling.



Gender Differences



- o Men want the right to be free and often withdraw after periods of closeness to meet needs for autonomy. They may fear becoming dependent or need time alone to take a break from feeling responsible. Even irresponsible men rebel against an inner pull to take care of everything. Irritability or withdrawal is a sign that a man needs his "space."
- o Women want the right to be upset and need to release emotions to be loving. They get depleted from giving, "hit bottom", and go all the way into the depths of their feelings before they can "come up." A woman may reexperience hopelessness, insecurity, and resentment over and over until she gets the understanding she needs.



Gender Differences



- o Men need to withdraw to think about what is bothering them, or they put their difficulties aside with activity (see above). Feelings are not part of a man's problem-solving style so he is likely to tell a woman, "You shouldn't feel that way."
- o Women seek a sounding board to process feelings that are flooding them. Solutions can interfere with emotional discharge but come automatically after releasing feelings.



Gender Differences



- o Men favor getting help as a last resort and talk about problems to find solutions or to place blame. Their pet peeve is being offered unsolicited advice.
- o Women seek help at the first sign of or before a problem occurs to make sure they are on the right track. Their pet peeve is being given solutions instead of understanding.



Gender Differences



- o Men flee (withdraw) or fight (blame, criticize, yell). They typically start fights by invalidating a woman's feelings—"It's not important . . . Don't worry." When hurt, a man may hold things against a woman, give her "penalty points," punish her, or get even.
- o Women fold (give in) or fake it (pretend they're not upset until they're overwhelmed). They start fights with questions—"How could you . . . ? Why do you always . . . ?" They interrogate with a negative tone of voice although they're actually trying to teach.

Problematic Communication

- 1) Attacking/Defending/Withdrawing
- 2) Trying to Control one's partner
- 3) Condemning or Blaming

Instead of defending or withdrawing:

Apologizing:

"I'm sorry I..."_

Reassuring:

"I really do..."_

Explaining:

"The reason is "

Justifying:

"I was just..."

Tuning out

Use active listening:

Clarify/rephrase:

"What do you mean by ...?"

"Are you saying ...?"

Label feelings:

"You must feel ..."

"You seem ..."_

Validate feelings:

"It makes sense that ..."

"It must be hard when ..."

Instead of controlling:

Use effective expression:

Convincing:

"You have to understand . . ."

Disagreeing:

"You're wrong about . . ."

Advising/lecturing:

"Why don't you . . . ?"

Ordering:

"You have to . . ."

Threatening:

". . . or else"

State your feelings:

"I feel . . . when you . . ."

Make requests:

"Would you . . . ?"

Set limits:

"I'm willing/not willing to
. . ."

Instead of condemning: use deflecting and defusing:

Complaining:

"You don't . . ."

"Nothing ever . . ."

Blaming:

"You never . . ."

Criticizing:

"You should/shouldn't . . ."

Comparing:

"Why can't you be more like . . ."

Turn killer words into kindness:

Agree in fact or theory, take or give compliments; find golden nuggets, dramatize, twist the tone

Understand causes and effects of intimidation:

Label feelings, sympathize, ask questions; express feelings, wants, and limits.

Instead of condemning:

Predicting the worst:

"You'll never . . ."

Accusing:

"I know you're . . ."

Insulting, name-calling,
making slurs

using sarcastic,
mocking, patronizing
tones

use deflecting and defusing:

Use "power words":

try, dare, but; un-related
comments and general
humor.

Rules

- o All relationships have rules
 - o Implicit Rules - Things that govern your relationship but that you are not really aware of.
 - o Explicit Rules - Things you spell out or define between the two of you. (e.g. Neither partner is allowed to speak to ex-girlfriend/boyfriend/spouse etc.)

How do you know it's time to go to counselling?

- o Having the same argument time and time again and not getting anywhere (or things are getting worse).
- o One partner is thinking about leaving.
- o Resentment sets into the relationship.
- o Often earlier is better than later as many couples go to counselling when it is too late.

Question Period



THANK YOU!



Feel free to contact me :

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