

## Communication - the Key to a Good Marriage

**Effective communication means verbalizing needs and listening carefully.**

It can't be stated often enough. If you don't have a healthy way of expressing your thoughts and emotions to each other, of speaking and being heard, then everything else will ultimately crumble.

In order to have a successful marriage you have to make yourself an expert in communication. You have to try to understand what your partner is saying on a simple level as well as try to analyze the underlying message or desire.

For example, the last thing a woman wants to hear when she complains about her weight is a suggestion for a new diet plan. Actually the last thing she probably wants to hear is, "Yes dear, you do need to slim down a little!"

Nor does she want just a sympathetic ear (just when a man thinks he's mastered the art of good listening). What she really wants is for her husband to say, "You look terrific!" "You look thin!" "You look so young!"

Having said that it is important to look at what Virginia Satir calls the "metacommunication." This is the underlying message, the motivation behind the communication. We all need to be amateur psychologists and try to figure out what our partner really wants. For example, when Susan tells her husband that she isn't feeling well, that may be her way of saying "could you drive the children to ice skating lessons today dear?" or it may be her way of expressing a need for more attention from her spouse. As I'm about to illustrate we can't all be mind readers, but it is important to try to focus not just on the words being said, but what may possibly be implied as well.

It is important to hear what your spouse is really saying, but it is also important for the other side to give clues.

We shouldn't expect our mates to intuit our needs nor rely on some level of divine inspiration. If there's a special necklace you want for your birthday, point it out to your husband. It will save him the agony of choosing and spare you both needless pain. It works both ways -- maybe he doesn't want socks this year.

## **TELL YOUR PARTNER WHAT YOU WANT**

Joe is the romantic type. Every week after he got engaged he brought his fiancée flowers. He even sent her flowers every day of the week before their wedding.

He continued this practice a number of years into their marriage.

Finally Emily, his wife, ever the unsentimental and practical one, spoke up. "You know Joe, I really love you and I like that you want to bring me flowers. But I actually don't like flowers that much. And besides, they die so soon after that I feel like we've wasted our money. I'd rather you saved up for a more lasting gift."

Luckily this is a very trivial example. But being able to express yourself in the small areas will lead to open discussion in the big areas as well. If we want something, we need to say it.

It sounds so obvious, but how many hurt and angry couples come in for counseling saying "he should have known..." or "she should have realized..."? How should he have known? How should she have realized? Did you tell him/her?

## **DON'T RELY ON INTUITION**

I have a friend who never makes grocery lists. She goes to the supermarket and relies on her intuition. This led to, at one point, 12 jars of mustard in her refrigerator.

This approach to life has relatively little impact on her, other than maybe leading to excessive consumption of hot dogs, but in marriage it could be disastrous.

Don't rely on your intuition. Ask. Don't rely on his/her intuition. Tell.

"You knew I wasn't feeling well. Why didn't you offer to make dinner?" "This and many similar dialogues often lead to tension around the home. Yet the solution is so simple. "I'm really not feeling well dear. Would you mind making dinner?"

It is a common assumption that prophetic power is proof of your spouse's undying love and devotion. Let's destroy that myth right now. Tell your spouse what you want. His or her thoughtful response to your explicitly expressed needs is a sign of commitment.

While we're on the topic, don't ask for signs or proofs. It will get you in trouble. Everyone expresses their caring and develops their love in differing ways and at varying rates. A confrontation over "do you love me?" will be just that -- a confrontation. Express yourself in a way that shows understanding of your spouse's personality and he will respond in kind.

Perhaps the most essential quality for good communication in any relationship, and particularly in a marriage, is to be a good listener.

Take a minute to ask yourself if you listen attentively when your partner speaks. Or is your mind on tonight's dinner, tomorrow's business meeting, Bloomingdale's sale ... Do you comprehend clearly what you mate is saying?

## **LISTEN TO YOUR PARTNER**

Sometimes when my husband and I are quarreling, he'll stop me in the middle to say: "What am I saying, and what are you saying, and what's the difference?" It's infuriating but effective.

Frequently I find that I've been so caught up in hearing myself talk or the passion of the moment that I haven't really been listening. I'm amazed to discover that our positions aren't that far apart, in fact they're not apart at all.

If this is a difficult issue for you it sometimes helps to establish structure. You could set aside a time where you are required to listen to your mate without interrupting for 10 minutes. Don't plan your defense or rebuttal. Just listen. You'll be surprised at how much you'll learn and when it's your turn you'll realize a unique pleasure in being able to express yourself freely.

Another technique psychologists favor is called active listening. There are many variations on this theme but the basic style is mirroring back what your partner says. "I hear you saying..."

Keep doing it until you get it right. Maybe many of your misunderstandings are because you heard your partner wrong the first time, or you didn't hear your partner at all.

We have numerous distractions in our lives today -- telephones, televisions, and now the Internet. If we want to be listened to with concentration, we must provide the same. Hang up the phone when your spouse walks in the door. Turn off the TV. Escape from the Web. Otherwise your mate feels like second best, and when you have something to say it will also fall on deaf ears.

We have to remember that marriage creates a unity, a oneness. We can use our powers of communication to solidify that unity or, God forbid, to tear it asunder.

As the Chazon Ish, a great Jewish scholar, wrote "Treat your wife as a left hand protecting the right one ... and not an independent limb." If we accept this attitude we will recognize that spending time and energy to improve communication is the way to achieve a true marital bond.

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**Courtesy:** [http://www.aish.com/family/marriage/Communication\\_-\\_the\\_Key\\_to\\_a\\_Good\\_Marriage.asp](http://www.aish.com/family/marriage/Communication_-_the_Key_to_a_Good_Marriage.asp)