

Improving Your Communication Skills In Relationships Plus Worksheets.

(This is from my blog originally released back on the 12th March 2018)

Honesty is they say the best policy and having honest communications leads to a healthy relationship. We all want what is best for our relationships no matter if it's with colleagues, friends or family members. Today's blog is all about improving communications with a partner, but the tips can be used in any relationship to improve it.

A couple of words of warning: firstly if you feel any of these tips would put you in danger don't use them. Secondly these tips will take time to become a natural way of communicating with your partner. You will have to work at them and practice them for a while before they become second nature to you.

This might put you off but it's worth it in the end. I would also advise you not to try to implement them at times of high stress, use them when you're not under pressure first, take small steps and gain small wins to build up your confidence in making these changes.

It would be helpful if you both read the blog and took on board the tips together in order for them to work. But you can do this by yourself and helpfully your partner will ask you about why you have to change your way of communicating and how they can do it too.

Having a weekly meeting where you catch up with each other is a great way to keep communication lines open between you. Make sure you both take responsibility to work on finances together and make decisions about your lives and the children together.

There is nothing worse than a partner feeling like they are raising the kids or managing the finances alone either. Both of these issues will lead to endless arguments in your relationship if not tackled in a healthy manner.

Remember you are both grow-ups here and neither is solely responsible for the other's health, wealth or happiness, this is a joint venture.

So how can you improve communications in your relationship?

1. Agree to be honest even when the truth hurts, this is the key to a healthy relationship.
2. Admit that you aren't always perfect or right.
3. Apologize when you make a mistake.
4. Find the right time to talk when both you and your partner are calm and not distracted, stressed or in a rush. – as I said, weekly check-in meetings are a good way to do this, but if this is something that needs to be discussed now, then don't wait – (If you're angry check below for some tips)

5. Get comfortable or if it's finances then use the dining room table. Try to use someplace neutral i.e. never use the bedroom to talk finances.
6. Talk face to face and avoid talking about serious matters or issues by text messages or email, as these can be misinterpreted. Talking in person limits any unnecessary miscommunications.
7. Look at your partner and make eye contact, but remember it's not a staring competition either with your partner.
8. If you're having trouble collecting your thoughts, consider writing them down ahead of time and reading them out loud to your partner.
9. Use Active Listening – now this can be hard to learn as it involves really listening to the other person plus: Show your attention (nonverbal as above); Pay attention to your partner and don't interrupt, Do not focus on thinking about your own thoughts regarding what you will say or respond; Do not judge what they say; Tolerate silence – as it allows you both to think before you speak; Most importantly Do Not Attack and Use "I" or "we" statements not "you" statements – make sure you say things like "I feel... when you do or say...". Even when we mean well, we can sometimes come across as harsh because of our word choice.
10. Ask your partner to share their perceptions by using open questions i.e. questions that don't require a yes or no answer.
11. Reflect back to your partner what you think your partner is saying. Check in with what you thought you heard them say by repeating what they said to you in your own words and asking them if this was correct: "What I hear you saying is..." or "If I understand you correctly, then I think you feel..." This lets your partner know that you really care about what they have to say and that you empathize with your partner's perspective — it's amazing how different a relationship can look to two different people!
12. If there's a problem that you are trying to solve, communicate your ideas for solutions. Never be afraid to admit you're stuck and don't have a solution. Try to use words that get your partner working with you to try to solve the problem like: "Well, perhaps we could try..." Or "What if I did . . . and you did . . ." "I'm stuck. What do you think we need to do next?"
13. Keep the communication flowing, be willing to listen, make sure you are really hearing the message your partner is sending, and don't be afraid to say you don't know.
14. Always remember, although there is only two of you in the room there is a third entity in the room – your relationship is there too and this needs constant work in order to remain healthy.

How to Communicate If You Are Angry

1. Remember, it's okay to get angry, everyone does it and rows happen in relationships, that doesn't mean your relationship is over. What's important is that you resolve conflicts in a healthy way.
2. If you get really angry about something, stop, take a step back and breathe. Tell your partner you'd like to take a short break before continuing the conversation.
3. Use that time to calm down by watching TV, talking to a friend, playing a video game, taking a walk, listening to some music or whatever helps you relax. Taking a break can keep the situation from getting worse.
4. Use the 48 Hour Rule if you need to. If you're still hurt 48 hours later, say something, remember your partner can't read your mind. If you don't speak up when you're upset, there is no way for them to apologize or change. Once you do mention your hurt feelings and your partner sincerely apologize, let it go. Don't bring up past issues if they're not relevant.
5. Use the time away and while calming down to think. After you're no longer upset, think about the situation and why you got so angry. Was it how your partner spoke or something they did? Figure out the real problem, then think about how to explain your feelings. Again if you need to write it down do so and read it to your partner.
6. Now it's time to talk again and use the tips above.
7. Remember to listen to what they have to say – after you tell your partner how you feel using your “I” statements – remember to stop talking and listen to what they have to say. You both deserve the opportunity to express how you feel in a safe and healthy environment.

Everything I've spoken about takes time to learn, particularly, if you didn't have healthy role models as a child. But these are healthy habits and like all habits, they can be learnt with patience and practice. Don't get mad and abandon them after a few tries. Remember too what I said at the beginning, start small, don't try to use these for the first time either if you're angry or having a big row with your partner. Small steps in time lead to more self-confidence and bigger rewards.

Note these worksheets are no substitute for professional therapy if you need it.

Worksheets

1. Try to spend at least one day just listening to your partner. (This can be used with other people too.) This will be harder than you think. Most of the time, we are too focused on what we need to say, or how to defend ourselves, in reply to the other person, rather than on what is being said.

How did this go? What did you find out about yourself and the other person?

Check out their non-verbal cues also. What are their facial expressions or body language telling you? Does it contradict what they are saying or doing?

What are they really saying?

Do you fully understand it? Ask for clarification to be sure.

Are you misinterpretating it?

Are they baiting some traps for you? What are these? You need to start recognising them for what they are. Close family members and friends can do this as they know us so well, especially when they wish to manipulate or control us.

2. Make an agreement with yourself to stop arguing. Now that's not to say you have to take abuse from the other person. But you will remain calm, kind, but firm when responding. You are simply not getting into the argument dance with this person.

Using the above information what can you do to stop falling into any traps/baiting set by others? Remember how you react to others is always your choice. Do you need to change the subject, ask for time out because you are angry, hang up the phone, or leave the room?

What methods can I use to calm myself on a daily basis? This will help you remain calm while others are not. Preparation in advance is one key to remaining calm in a difficult situation and managing your stress.

[Meditation](#) (I have a number of podcasts on this topic you can find one through the link.)

[Journal](#) – brain dumps, reviewing my priorities, gratitude.

[Self-Care](#) – exercise, eating healthy, getting enough sleep, shower, dressing the best I can today, etc.

Setting healthy boundaries with yourself and others.

Learning to recognise my thought patterns. You can get a free resource [here](#) plus more below on this.

3. Let's examine what's going on next. It's a good idea to stop, take some time, and examine our own thoughts here.

Do you go over the same old issues continuously? What are they? Is the issue really about these?

Are you feeling victimised/criticised/abused? Is that what is really going on? Please be careful here as [abusive partners](#) can use gaslighting tactics to make you think you are imagining it all. You may feel you are going crazy but you are not in this case.

Are you blaming each other but not looking to find a solution?

Do you want the relationship to work? Is it worth the effort? It's okay to be honest with yourself (at the very least) here. If it is then you have to work together and ask for professional counselling to help if your relationship needs it.

What do you want/need from your relationship? We need to know what that is in order to ask for it.

4. Review the steps from “**So how can you improve communications in your relationship?**”

Show your attention (nonverbal)

Pay attention to your partner and don't interrupt,

Do not focus on thinking about your own thoughts regarding what you will say or respond;

Do not judge what they say;

Tolerate the silence – as it allows you both to think before you speak;

Most importantly Do Not Attack

Use “I” or “we” statements not “you” statements – make sure you say things like “I feel... when you do or say...”

.Ask your partner to share their perceptions by using open questions i.e. questions that don't require a yes or no answer.

Reflect back to your partner what you think your partner is saying. Check in with what you thought you heard them say by repeating what they said to you in your own words and asking them if this was correct: “What I hear you saying is...” or “If I understand you correctly, then I think you feel...”

If there's a problem that you are trying to solve, communicate your ideas for solutions. Never be afraid to admit your stuck and don't have a solution. Try to use words that get your partner working with you to try to solve the problem like: “Well, perhaps we could try...” Or “What if I did . . . and you did . . .” “I'm stuck. What do you think we need to do next?”

Any notes you need to make here?

5. Remember to remain calm, have patience with yourself while practicing active listening and asking for what you need/want. This will take practice and time to learn if you are not use to doing it.

It is better to start with positive friends and family members.

Where will I practice using active listening skills? With whom? Write out a list of people you can practice with and examples of situations you can try your new skills with. Make sure these people don't cause you to feel stressed and they are generally positive, supportive people.

Person	Situation

Now review these interactions. Remember this is a new skill you are learning so have patience, time and give yourself every chance to succeed.

How did it go?

If you fell into a trap add it to your list above.

What did you learn about your interactions?

6. When you feel ready make a list of the more difficult people or situations you need to use your new skills in.

Person

What do I need to remember about this person? Any traps/baits they use? What can I prepare in advance to counter these?

Situation

What do I need to be mindful of in this situation? Will it trigger any thoughts/feelings/emotions I find difficult? How will I handle that?

7. Remember to keep reviewing your progress with each interaction. You can learn a lot about yourself and others by doing this.
Write your notes/observations here.