

Communication Tips

Support Your Partner's Efforts to Communicate

Many people feel vulnerable when communicating important messages to our partners. Support for your efforts can help alleviate fears and anxieties and can encourage us to continue building the communication skills so important for a viable relationship. Think how good it can feel, after struggling to voice an important concern, to have a partner say, "I'm glad you told me how you really feel," or "Thanks for caring enough to tell me what was on your mind." Such supportive comments can help foster mutual empathy while ensuring that we will continue to communicate our thoughts and feelings candidly.

Express Unconditional Positive Regard

Carl Rogers introduced the concept of Unconditional Positive Regard in the 1950's. In personal relationships unconditional positive regard means conveying to our partners the sense that we will continue to value and care for them regardless of what they do or say. It encourages them to talk about even the most embarrassing or painful concerns.

Use "I" Language

Use "I" language when stating your needs to others. This forthright approach brings the desired response more often than does a general statement. For example, saying "I would like to eat dinner with you Friday evening" is considerably more likely to produce that result than "What would you think about hanging out this weekend?"

Avoid "Why" Questions

People commonly use "why" questions as thinly veiled efforts to criticize or attack their partners while avoiding full responsibility for what is said.

"Why don't we have sex more frequently?"

"Why don't you show more interest in me?"

Such questions have no place in a loving relationship; they are hurtful and destructive. Rather than conveying simple requests for information, they typically convey hidden messages of anger that the speaker is unwilling to communicate honestly. These are hit-and-run tactics that cause defensiveness and seldom induce positive changes.

Limit Complaints to One per Discussion

Many of us tend to avoid confrontations with our partners. This understandable reluctance to deal with negative issues can result in an accumulation of unspoken complaints. Consequently, when we finally reach the point where we need to say something, it may be difficult to avoid unleashing a barrage of complaints that includes everything on our current list of grievances. Such a response, although understandable, only serves to magnify rather than resolve conflicts between lovers.

Saying No

Many of us have difficulty saying no to others. Perhaps you have not learned that it is okay to say no or you may not have learned strategies for saying this. Having such a strategy for saying no can help you prevent being caught off guard, not knowing how to handle a potentially unpleasant interaction with tact. One approach involves three distinct steps:

1. Express appreciation for the invitation (e.g. “Thanks for thinking of me” or “It’s nice to know that you like me enough to invite me”). You might even wish to validate the other person (“You’re a good person”).
2. Say no in a clear, unequivocal fashion and avoid mixed messages (e.g. “I would prefer not to get involved in a dating relationship/go dancing/make love.”)
3. Offer an alternative, if applicable (“However, I would like to have lunch some time/give you a back rub”)

Source:

Crooks, R. & Baur, C. (2010). *Our Sexuality* (Eds.) Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing