



Communication Guide

Seven Vital Steps to Improve Communication in Your Relationships



Holistic Coaching, Counseling & EMDR

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Love Therapy Center

Relationship Counseling for Couples & Individuals

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Conflict in relationship is inevitable. Conflicts occur when one or the other of you is trying to be heard, understood or accomplish something. Conflicts and disagreements in and of themselves are not necessarily bad, it is actually healthy to communicate your truth. It is in the communicating, or lack thereof, that things can go awry. Miscommunication can lead to frustration, anger and resentment that leads to emotional reactions that leads to more miscommunication, until the whole thing gets out of hand.

Instead of making amends, understanding each other and becoming closer, resentment, being tuned out, distance and coldness grow. Issues become harder and harder to talk about and no one feels satisfied. How do you break out of this cycle and create a healthy, happy, harmonious relationship? These 7 steps are vital to take BEFORE you communicate so that when you do, it goes well and creates connections instead of conflict.

1. Understand what you are feeling and what it means.

This step starts with something our society has gotten far away from: noticing what you are feeling and sensing in your heart & body. Your heart & body contain

more information than it has been previously given credit for. There is emerging evidence that the heart has an intelligence all of its own:

“Heart intelligence is the flow of awareness, understanding and intuition we experience when the mind and emotions are brought into coherent alignment with the heart. It can be activated through self-initiated practice, and the more we pay attention when we sense the heart is speaking to us or guiding us, the greater our ability to access this intelligence and guidance more frequently. Heart intelligence underlies cellular organization and guides and evolves organisms toward increased order, awareness and coherence of their bodies’ systems.”

The intelligence of the heart can be understood by looking to the body and can be felt in the form of rapid or pounding heartbeat, shaking, sweating, etc. Before communicating, look within - notice what your body is telling you. Some of the things to start noticing are:

- Stomach sensations - nausea, tightness, butterflies
- Tightness or tension
- Clenching - jaws, fists, shoulders
- Breathing - rapid or holding breath

- Sweating
- Heart - palpitations, rate increase, sensation of beating throughout the body
- Sensation of “electric shock” running through the body.

There are just a few things to look out for. Once you start paying attention you will notice more and more ways that your body is speaking to you. This will help you gain clarity of your feelings which will make it easier to express yourself and be understood accurately.

2. Walk away, BREATHE, and agree on a time to come back.

It's **never** a good idea to communicate when you're upset! You're likely to say or do something you'll regret – then wish you could take it back once you're calm. When we hurt, we want to lash out and hurt back. This is a common yet counterproductive reaction and is the basis of many sabotaged relationships. When you find yourself unable to talk or listen calmly- BREATHE or take a time-out. Agree beforehand that if you get into a heated moment you will both respectfully and gently (as much as possible) walk away from the situation and agree upon a time to come back to it. Walking away when feeling upset is one of the hardest things to do because you may feel an intense desire to be understood, get your point across or resolve the issue right away.

When people are angry their ability to listen reduces drastically, this is scientifically proven.

Here are some ground rules you should both agree to before a potentially intense conversation is started.

- **Agree beforehand that if you get angry or upset, you will both agree to pause the conversation.**
- **Come up with a keyword or phrase that you can say in the heat of the moment that will get the attention of both of you and that means it's time to walk away and take a deep breath. Using a funny or outrageous word is often helpful too, to break the energy of the moment... i.e. hey you know what?!?!??. chicken butt!**
- **MAKE SURE to include a time frame that you will come back to the topic, and honor that time. This is very important, as one or both of you could wind up feeling abandoned if this is not respected. The amount of time isn't as important as setting it, 5 minutes, later in the day, tomorrow. It will be easier to walk away if you know that it will be revisited in the nearfuture.**
- **Agree that if either of you says your key word or phrase, you will respect that, drop the conversation immediately, and walk away.**
- **Once you come back to the topic, if you get heated again, walk awayagain.**



3. Do some journaling - let it all out!

You may be thinking or feeling that it is important to be truthful and honest in your relationship by letting your partner know exactly what you are thinking and feeling. This is a big misconception in our society and a problem in relationships. Getting your feelings out is important, but dumping everything you're feeling and thinking on your partner is not productive. We are not mind readers for a very good reason, can you imagine what the world would be like if we could read each other's thoughts! Not pretty! That's where journaling comes in...

By keeping a journal, you can write out all of those negative, twisted, confused, angry emotions in a safe and productive way. You can then go back when you are feeling more grounded and read through what you wrote to gain constructive insight and knowledge about the deeper truth that you WILL want to communicate later.



Here are some pointers for productive and effective journaling:

- Keep your journal handy and easy to get to. This will make it much more likely that you will actually do it when you need to. There are

some great applications for note taking on smart phones. You can also use your computer, laptop, or a good old fashioned notebook. If you have a smart phone or tablet, I highly recommend these. They can be password protected too.

- Use your journal to get out all those twisted emotions that keep you from wanting to walk away. Know that you can get them out in writing so you won't forget or lose the important points you want to make.
- Pretend you are writing an email or a letter to them that you are never going to send.
- Imagine they are standing in front of you and tell them how you are feeling. Then write down the important pieces.
- Start with I feel... (sad, angry, frustrated, embarrassed, confused, jealous, etc.) because... and fill in the rest of the sentence.
- Remember there are no consequences to what you write or say - because you are not actually going to give them the letter or email. This is JUST FOR YOU! To let out steam and to uncover your truth.
- Make sure they will never be able to see or read this (it could be hurtful). These are your personal inner thoughts that are from an emotional, angry state that is hurting and wants to lash out and hurt. It feels good to get them out unfiltered but it wouldn't feel good for your partner to hear them. There is a better way to create understanding and change.

In the next step, you will use what you've written after you've rephrased and reframed.

4. Get to the heart of the matter- the piece that really bothers you and needs to be communicated.

This is tricky because the truth of the matter often gets buried under years of self-protection and fear. The ego

is very adept at keeping it this way. It takes practice, but don't worry - if you are persistent it will come. Think of the psyche as a muscle, the more you practice, the easier it gets. Your "muscles" will get stronger and lifting the "weight" (in this instance, getting to your deeper truth) will get easier.

First – take out that journal. What did you write? What pieces are important to be communicated? You'll be interested to find what comes out when you can actually speak your mind – thoughts like:

"I really don't want you to go to that party, vacation, etc., but I don't want to control you" "It really hurt me the other night when you spoke about your future without me in it."

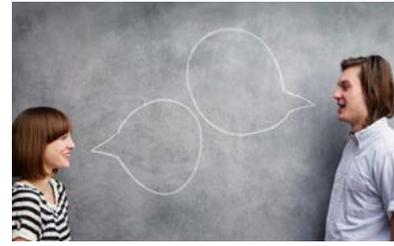
"It really gets on my nerves when you don't respect my quiet time." "I feel disrespected when you don't [clean] [call] [are not on time]"

Keep in mind – boiling these thoughts down to the essential piece that is bothering you is tricky. In fact, this is the trickiest piece of the puzzle and what couples-therapy can really help facilitate. We aren't trained to boil our thoughts down to the essentials, but rather we are trained to blame, become indignant, run away, do things to get back at them- anything rather than looking at ourselves. This, we think (as we have been unfortunately taught by society) saves our dignity.

Fear often blocks us from seeing our own truth as well as the truth of our partner. It may seem that our partner is being rude and inconsiderate, that they are just selfish jerks, or whatever else you might feel about them. Keep in mind there is often more to their underlying truth as well. Keep trying to understand the essence of what it is that's bothering you, instead of what they're

doing to you. To see through your ego and fear, practice finishing these sentences:

- I am scaredthat....
- I am concerned that...
- I am sadthat...
- I feel rejectedwhen...



Remember that if you are feeling hurt, angry, disgusted, etc. there is always a deeper fear, worry or concern that can be found. Keep persisting – this is how you find your truth.



5. Reframing & Rephrasing Using the Bookends®.

This step is crucial - not only for positive communication, but also for feeling better and more empowered in all of your relationships. This is what most people think of when talking about communications training, counseling etc. Now that you've come to a deeper understanding of the emotions in your body, fears from journaling (steps 1 & 3), walked away when the time wasn't right, done your journaling and you've been able to look through your journal notes with a calm and grounded attitude, you are now ready to find the right words and communicate your truth in a pro-active way.

The bookends® start with taking responsibility for your feeling, i.e. *"It would feel good to me..."* and ends with a

statement that lets the other person know you are not trying to dictate to them but rather have a conversation about what would feel good to you, such as “*what do you think / feel about that?*” Most importantly is what comes between the bookends, which is your POSITIVE statement. This communication framework incorporates respect and collaboration, two important elements in partnerships.

In summary, the basic structure of the bookends® is: “*It would feel good to me if [insert your positive statement]... what do you think / feel about that?*”

There are three very important and somewhat simple rules here:

- 1- **ALWAYS** keep things in the positive. This is much harder than it sounds. It comes naturally to know what we DON'T want, but figuring out what we DO WANT is another thing entirely. It is actually pretty hard to figure out what you do want. Now for a minute, imagine what the other person in your life is telling you that they DON'T like about you... For example, “It's rude and inconsiderate when you [negative statement]” or “I hate it when you [negative statement]” or “You always [negative statement]” or “you never [negative statement]”. It doesn't feel very good does it? And if they aren't offering any suggestions for how to change... well, that feels downright hopeless. That is how your partner is feeling when you offer them what you don't want or don't like about them. Not to mention that most of us will immediately shut down, get defensive and not hear another word when we hear negative messages about ourselves.
- 2- Change your frame of reference from their actions to how you feel about things. You can start with what you don't like (in your journaling). In a basic sense, what you don't like, makes you feel bad. To put the shoe on the other foot and for you to get a sense of how powerful

this one small change can be in your communications. Imagine how you would feel if your partner said: “You are rude and inconsiderate”! Would it make you feel good? Would it make you want to be gentle and kind? No! It makes you want to withdraw. It makes you want to ignore them (which is rude and inconsiderate). See the irony here? Now imagine the opposite: Take what doesn't feel good and turn it around to make it feel good. For example, what is the opposite of rude and inconsiderate? Gentle and kind maybe? Considerate and loving? Using “feeling” statements from above you can now construct your positive communication: “It feels really good to me when you are considerate and loving, gentle and kind.” Quite a difference, isn't it? Trust that your partner will hear your request and has your best interest at heart.

- 3- Ending your statement with “What do you think”, or something along those lines, can begin a conversation that goes back and forth, not just one way. The open ended “what do you think” is important on many different levels. It can avoid the other person feeling trapped or dictated to and conveys the sense that it is an open conversation with two people that have two differing opinions and that is ok. It also:
 - Stimulates a response to what you've just shared (so you're not left wondering).
 - Leads to openness and willingness to what you have to say.
 - Will leave both of you feeling empowered to have your own opinions.
 - Creates a sense that it is ok to have different ideas about things.

Memorize the basic structure of the bookends® to begin with and then use it often. With practice it will become more organic.

WARNING: Attempting to use the bookends® in the heat of an argument may backfire. Remember to walk away or take a break until emotions are stabilized.

6. Find the right time.

Finding the right time is really important. Communicating at the wrong time can create unnecessary drama in your relationship.

Imagine the following scenario:

You're trying to have a conversation with your partner when they're just getting home from work. They've had a really stressful day, but you've had a stressful day, too! You've been ruminating all day about how you're going to talk about this important issue and what you're going to say. They walk in the door and you say *"I need to talk to you."* They reply *"not now."* And you get really upset. Well guess what? It's not the right time! You have to be willing to say *"OK, if it's not going to work for you right now, when is it going to work? What's going to be a good time because this is an important thing."* And if they can't think about it, it's important to be able to let go and come back to it at a time when you see that they're calm. Do you know that they're calm in the evening / morning? Perhaps during break-fast, try communicating or asking for a specific time. The point is - don't just jump on them - especially when you don't know where they're at.

OK - quick check-in. So you're not feeling upset, you did your journaling, took a deep breath, drank a glass of water, worked out, listened to good music, called a friend, or other healthy self-soothing activity, you have your positive communication with constructively structured words, and you've found the right time. Now you're ready to communicate. Now that you're sitting down together this next step will create an atmosphere that is loving, feels really good for both people, and is mutually honoring.

7. Seek first to understand, then be understood.

Steven Covey said it best in the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Before you can communicate, you need to create a foundation. It may seem counterintuitive, *"If I want them to understand me, I have to understand them first?"* Yes! When you are both in a state of trying to understand each other rather than trying to make the other person understand, it makes for beautiful communication and a harmonious atmosphere, thereby setting the stage for a truly successful communication.

What's the best way to create this foundation? Start by saying: *"I understand that you feel..."* *"This is what I understand about how you feel..."* and then repeat to them what you understand about their feelings on the topic. In addition to this being good communication, it's also a good test, do you really understand how they feel? Do you need clarification? This may be difficult to do when you are feeling misunderstood, but it is truly magical what happens and how someone will open up once they are feeling understood. A few good questions to keep in mind when approaching this step are *"What's is my ultimate goal?"* *"What do I want to achieve by talking to them?"* Most of the time, the ultimate goal is to create more closeness, to create a better relationship, and to make things feel great! Keep that as your foundation. Before you say anything, think - what am I trying to achieve? Is this communication going to help me or hurt me? Remember the journaling you did earlier and keep statements in the positive.

Think: If I tell my partner *"I think it's disgusting when you don't brush your teeth"* - is that really going to help the relationship or is it going to hurt? If I say *"it really*

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turns me on when your breath smells good" - is that going to help or is that going to hurt? Imagine how your comment will feel to your partner.

Now stop fighting and start communicating!

Now that you've learned the 7 essential tips - start using them in your daily communications. Keep in mind to follow the "flow" or sequence as described above.

It takes 2 people to communicate - but implementing these steps will empower you to open up the conversation in a way that addresses your feelings, strengthens your relationship, and gets you closer to that happy,

healthy relationship you want. If it doesn't work in this relationship then you will be able to take these tools into the next relationship and will have a better foundation off of which to build.



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