

# 10<sup>FOR</sup> Tips

## Effective Communication in Your Relationship

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Effective communication is the key to having and maintaining a healthy and happy relationship.

However, most couples fail to really communicate with each other, which can lead to misunderstandings, heated arguments and escalating conflict. A breakdown in communication can mean a host of negative feelings such as hurt, frustration, anger, resentment, disappointment or sadness.

Poor communication can turn the relationship you once drew strength from into a source of negativity.

In a relationship each of you bring your own past, previous experiences, expectations, needs and ways of relating to others to the table.

Effective communication can take some effort, but once you know how to communicate effectively with your partner you can establish that initial connection.

Here are 10 tips to help you communicate more effectively and positively with your partner. Truly understanding one another and the issues that arise will help you move towards a happier life together. Don't try and incorporate them all at once, instead try adopting only one tip a week and, that way, it will be easier to work it into your daily life.

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#1

## *Start With the Right Attitude*

When you talk to your partner, come from a place of love and with a desire to hear and understand what your partner has to say as well. Have the intention of trying to see and understand things from your partner's perspective as well as stating your own. On occasion, it just may be that your perception of events is not correct and you have jumped to conclusions.

If you are really angry or very distressed, try and wait until you feel calmer before broaching a discussion. Anger tends to breed more anger and, in general, people always remember the nasty remarks and the pain they caused. Since they can never be unsaid, wait till you're calmer.

The tone of voice you use when talking to or responding to your partner can also make all the difference in whether you come across as angry and critical or as loving and concerned. Even though your words may not be angry, your tone of voice and body language may portray anger or some other negative emotion.

In fact, it's a good idea to include some positive feedback when talking with your partner about your concern.

Begin by being willing to compromise if need be and, if you are in the wrong, be willing to apologise.

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#2

## *Don't Blame Your Partner*

When we are feeling hurt, angry, resentful or not valued, it is all too easy to totally blame our partner, telling ourselves that if only they'd listen to you, everything would be fine. Yet, conflict in a relationship almost always involves both partners.

So, ask yourself what you are doing or saying that is impacting the relationship in a negative way. What could you do better or differently that will have a positive impact on your relationship? Analyse your own faults and styles in communicating with your partner rather than just laying all the blame on his/her doorstep and not taking some responsibility yourself.

Even when you genuinely think that your partner is at fault it is wise to try not to sound blaming. Talk simply and clearly, in a non-accusatory way, about your concerns, feelings or needs.

Remember, just because you don't agree does not mean that your partner is wrong. Always insisting on being the one who is right and blaming your partner can quickly erode a good relationship. Think about it: it's not a competition. Are you really willing to sacrifice the happiness of your relationship just to be 'right' all the time?

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#3

### *Let Go of the Anger*

Whilst anger is a normal emotion and one that we all experience at times, it can also be one of the most destructive emotions we experience. It often leads to saying or doing things that you later regret and are not a true reflection of your genuine thoughts and feelings. Yet, once said, those angry words cannot be taken back and can often be replayed in your partner's head, leaving him/her in pain for a long time.

When feeling angry ask yourself what you are actually feeling beneath the anger - hurt, disappointed, unloved, lonely, unvalued etc.

Then you can share that more genuine feeling with your partner instead of expressing anger in a destructive way.

If you are genuinely feeling angry towards your partner, telling them how you feel in a calm way, will often help to dissipate the anger you are feeling and lead to a constructive discussion between the two of you.

However, if you are experiencing intense anger which feels hard to control, try releasing some of the anger through non-destructive physical activity such as going for a run or brisk walk, hitting the bed or sofa with a pillow or writing down what it is that has made you feel so angry, including all your thoughts and feelings, and then tearing it up into small pieces.

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#4

## *Don't Ignore Your Concerns or Feelings*

As each of you come from different backgrounds and experiences, it is normal to have some hiccups in relationships from time to time hiccups that cause some degree of hurt or other negative feeling and can be a source of worry or concern. Hiccups both big and small are a normal part of having a relationship, but if just ignored they grow bigger and fester, leaving you to harbour negative feelings and negative thoughts about your partner.

There are many different reasons why someone hesitates in letting their partner know how they are really feeling and what they are really thinking; usually it is fear of something like fear of conflict, fear of rejection, fear of being dismissed or ignored, fear of hurting your partner or fear of evoking anger in your partner.

However, by talking about your fears with your partner you can use them as a way to get to know more about them and yourself. Try to state what you are thinking or feeling at the time in order to prevent a build-up of negative thoughts and feelings. Open and honest communication about your concerns helps to resolve the issue at hand and, more importantly, any negative feelings.

Being assertive by expressing our real feelings and thoughts to our partner in a direct and appropriate manner will, in the long run, only benefit the relationship, even though it may be difficult to do so in the moment.

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#5

## *Take the Time To Talk and To Listen*

Set aside some time on either a daily or weekly basis when you can both talk about your relationship and air any concerns that either of you may have, remembering to share how you feel as well. This will minimise conflict and promote intimacy between you.

Effective communication takes practice and you have to be deliberate about it, so turn off your mobiles and TV and create the opportunity to talk together. Remember to each have a turn to talk and to listen, try not to have one person dominating the conversation.

Maintain eye contact and face each other when conversing because really listening incorporates noting the facial expressions and body posture of your partner, not just hearing your partner's voice.

Focus on what message you want your partner to receive and understand and try to keep to the topic. Resist the urge to dig up past issues and conflict that have nothing to do with the issue you are talking about.

Decide to really listen when your partner is speaking. So often couples don't really listen to each other; one partner is thinking about what he/she is going to say when the other finishes, rather than really listening. Watch for the cues that tell you that you are not really listening - feeling impatient, waiting for the chance to have your say, waiting to leave, thinking of the 'solution' whilst your partner is still speaking, losing interest in what is being said, formulating your response in your head whilst your partner is still speaking, judging what is being said etc. Be aware of your own internal reactions.

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To listen effectively you need to use your eyes and your heart as well as your ears. Really listening and hearing and genuinely trying to understand what your partner is saying will help you to set aside, or to hold, your own thoughts and any negative reactions you have, such as defending, blaming or shutting down. Try reflecting back what your partner has said in order to ensure you have heard what they have actually said which assures them you're paying attention.

Effective communication between you and your partner promotes mutual understanding and empathy which, in turn, fosters and enhances emotional intimacy.



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#6

## *Use Time Out When Needed*

Sometimes when you are feeling very emotional, you or your partner may need distance from the situation/discussion. Having an emotionally charged argument is not the way to resolve issues and will only add hurt or anger to the issue.

Giving yourself some time out prevents the risk of saying things you may regret later and adding to the emotional pain of you both. So, it is important that once your emotions are running wild and you feel like you're no longer in control, or that your feelings are dictating your thoughts and actions, to step back and take some time out to calm down and think about what it is you really want to say and what you are really feeling.

The really important thing is not to just walk off but rather to let your partner know that you need some time out and how much time, be it 5 minutes to catch your breath or longer, maybe even a day or two. Emphasise that you are willing to then take up the discussion once more. That way, your partner is not left hanging, feeling alone and unsupported, and instead knows that you do care enough to continue with the issue at hand until it feels resolved for both of you.

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#7

## *Don't Make Assumptions or Interrupt*

Many people do not even realise they're interrupting before the other person is finished what he/she is saying.

You hear something that you either don't like or disagree with and feel like you just have to have your say. Not only is this disrespectful to your partner but it sends the message that you are not interested in him/her and their thoughts and feelings.

So, wait until your partner has finished and only interrupt to ask a relevant question or reflect back what he/she has said in order to clarify what is being said.

Don't fall victim to the 'crystal ball syndrome' where you assume you know what your partner is going to say, what your partner is thinking or, especially, what your partner is feeling. Likewise, don't assume that your partner knows why you are feeling angry, hurt or upset.

Sometimes how you interpret your partner's behaviour is quite different from what they are actually feeling. For example you may perceive their anger but not realise that they are in fact deeply hurt.

You need to share your thoughts and feelings with your partner in order to avoid assumptions being made. If you are not ready to share when your partner asks what is wrong, let him/her know that and that you need some time to feel comfortable opening up.

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#8

## *Praise and Look for Positives*

Tell your partner about the things/behaviour that you appreciate and like and how they make you feel happier and more positive towards him/her.

In general, we have a natural tendency to notice the negatives in life and in others, so look for and emphasise the positives, making sure to verbalise these to others as well as your partner.

Focusing on the positives and giving genuine praise and compliments helps you both to feel good and nourishes your relationship.

Some people find it very difficult to either give or receive praise or a compliment. If you notice that your partner brushes off the positive things you say about him/her, gently point this out and encourage your partner to hear the praise/compliments and take them to heart. If, on the other hand, you know that you find it very hard to give praise/compliments then let your partner know this and that you will keep trying to do this until you feel comfortable. Ask for his/her help if you need it.

Practice giving your partner praise and compliments until it feels natural to do so. On the other hand, if you tend to dismiss praise or compliments, then practice simply saying 'thank you' until you feel comfortable and are able to hold on to the positive feedback. These strategies will promote both physical and emotional intimacy between you.

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#9

## *Don't Resort To Name Calling or Stonewalling*

Try not to be overly judgemental or critical of your partner.

Don't attack his/her personality or character. Verbal abuse only tears down relationships.

Whilst an apology may help later, name-calling is hurtful and, often, not easily forgotten. Don't put your partner down, fling insults, or mock him/her.

Remember, this is someone you love and whose love you cherish, so don't let minor or momentary words damage the love you have for each other.

Don't 'stonewall' your partner by absolutely refusing to consider his/her perspective or refusing to communicate at all, shutting them out so that they feel that they just can't reach you. This behaviour is not only infuriating but can lead to you evoking feelings of resentment in your partner. Also, don't allow a disagreement to cause you to withdraw your own love and affection. When couples stop communicating altogether it erodes their love and is a threat to the relationship itself. (Note: this is different to taking 'time out').

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#10

*Stay On The Topic*

If you are talking about a particular issue, stick to that one and don't bring in any other issues until the first issue is resolved. Remember that if you have raised the issue then it is up to you to try and keep the topic on track.

Dredging up things from the past won't help and neither will telling your partner what your friends or family members have said about the issue at hand.

Try and begin your sentences with "I" instead of "You" which sounds accusatory. For instance, "I feel unhappy when" instead of "you make me unhappy when". This helps you to take ownership of your experience and reduces the risk of your partner feeling blamed.

Also, remember that it will be easier to have your partner keep on the same track if you are respectful and use a non-accusatory tone of voice.

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### *About the Author*

Colleen HurlI has been married for 37 years so is personally qualified to talk about effective ways to communicate with your partner. Having experienced and struggled with some of the pitfalls and communication spoilers when communicating with her own partner in the early years of her marriage, Colleen is keen to share with you tips which lead to being able to communicate with your partner effectively and curtail or stop the pain that ineffective communication between a couple can bring.



Professionally, Colleen has extensive training in relationships and is passionate about the importance of couples learning to communicate effectively and avoid the pain that ineffective communication brings.

Over the past 16 years, Colleen has helped hundreds of couples and individuals to master the skills of Effective Communication in their relationship, thereby resolving past emotional wounds in their relationship. The learnt skills of effective communication have enabled these couples and individuals to enrich and nurture their own relationship by resolving issues as they arise and hence, promoting and maintaining positive feelings within their relationships.

**Colleen is in private practice in Castle Hill and can be contacted on 0413181320.**

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