



Activity

Relationship Communication Tips and Role Play

Relationships can bring much joy and companionship. They can also bring challenges. In fact, conflict in a relationship is almost unavoidable. However, in and of itself, conflict is not the problem. How we chose to handle conflict is the cause of bigger problems. Though there are many things that can bring you closer together or pull you apart, communication skills will play a large role in whether your relationship will become stronger or lead to dissatisfaction or unhealthy relationship patterns. Learning and practicing communication skills is critical in establishing a healthier, loving and lasting relationship. Study, practice and keep these tips on effective communication skills to help you find the life of love and happiness that you seek in your relationship.

Partner 1

- Pick the right time and place to have the conversation.
- Don't have the conversation when you're too angry or too emotional to communicate or to listen.
- The goal should be to find a solution that pleases both parties not "winning" the argument or "being right".
- Avoid starting sentences with, "You always..." and "You never..." Stay away from bringing up past conflicts to throw the discussion off-topic and stir up negativity.
- Identify your feelings so that you can more accurately share them with your partner.
- Express feelings to your partner as clearly as possible. For example, "I feel like I don't really matter to you".
- Express your needs to your partner. For example, "I need you to do things that help me feel like I matter to you". This should be followed with examples of what that could look like so your partner knows how to be successful.
- Don't blame your partner for your feelings. For example, "You made me mad when you left without me, even though I asked you to wait". Rather, state, "I felt mad when you left without me because I

had to try to find a ride at the last minute and couldn't find one".

- Give your partner a chance to be heard as well. Don't dominate the conversation.

Partner 2

- Try really listening to what your partner is saying instead of thinking about what you are going to say next when he or she is done talking.
- Reflect on what your partner is saying so he or she knows you have heard the intent of what was communicated.
- Don't interrupt. Respectfully listen.
- Don't get defensive. Your job is to listen and understand.
- Be aware of your body language and you are communicating. For example, rolling your eyes when your partner is speaking may be seen as a sign of contempt. When it is your turn to speak, make sure the tone of your voice reflects genuine caring rather than sarcasm.
- Admit to and own what is your responsibility.

Partner 1 and Partner 2

- Look for compromise instead of trying to "win" the argument.
- Sometimes being a good communicator means knowing when to take a break. So, take a break from the discussion when needed, particularly if things get too difficult, emotional, or argumentative.
- Always come back to the discussion at a later time, when you both have had time to calm down.

Now that you have these tips freshly implanted in your mind and you are interested in putting them to use, take a practice run together and see how you do.

Instructions:

Step 1: Each partner will take turns being Partner 1 in the two situations listed below while the other plays the role of Partner 2. Try to contain the conversation to five minutes. Use the tip sheet above to guide your conversation.

Step 2: After each situation is practiced, Partner 1 should share what they experienced while using these techniques and how they believe their partner did in practicing them. Partner 2 should do the same.

Situation 1:

Your partner consistently drives your child around town without putting the child in a car seat. You would like for your partner to realize the danger and start using the car seat you have.

Situation 2:

When around friends and family, your partner constantly embarrasses you (and themselves) when they drink too much alcohol. You would like your partner to feel free to drink but not drink as much.

Activity Take Away:

Learning to identify, express, and take responsibility for how you communicate with your partner takes practice. Be patient with yourself as you learn how to be an effective communicator. Observe what you experience as you practice and how your partner responds to your new approaches.