



# Communicating with Love

## Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Often in the military, people communicate via radio. Ask two National Guard members to volunteer and come to the front of the room. Look for people who are comfortable communicating with hand-held radios and who use them during their time in the military.
2. Give the volunteers a topic to discuss, and ask them to communicate with each other using the rules, key words, and alphabet that they know from the military. The topic could be related to the military or not (for example: What time should the group break for lunch, or what was the most exciting thing they have done while being in the military?). If you have hand-held radios, you might consider having them stand on opposite sides of the room so that they can only hear each other through the radio. Make sure one of them is positioned near the rest of the group so the conversation can be heard by all.

If you do not have hand-held radios, you will need to rely on the acting/roleplaying abilities of your participants.

In that case, be sure and find volunteers

in advance, and give them plenty of time to prepare. For the demonstration, have the volunteers stand near each other in the same room, as they will need to hear each other.

3. After the volunteers have had a few moments to discuss their topic, invite them to return to their seats. Ask the rest of the group if they observed some of the rules or strategies that helped the volunteers communicate effectively. (Answers might include the use of the phonetic alphabet, pauses in between, and the use of key words such as “roger,” “over,” and “say again.”)
4. Tell the couples that one of the most important things they can do for their relationship is to learn how to communicate effectively. In the military, radio communication skills are taught to ensure that the intended message that is spoken is the same one that is understood by the listener. Effective communication is vital to any military mission, and in the same way, effective communication is vital to a healthy couple relationship. This can especially be a challenge for National Guard couples who may have to communicate from a distance (via phone or internet). Tell them that there are many different programs that can teach them in-depth communication modules, but for today we’ll just go over some basic communication rules and skills.

**Group Size:** All

**Time Needed:** 45 minutes

**Goal:** To provide the couples with a new set of communication skills

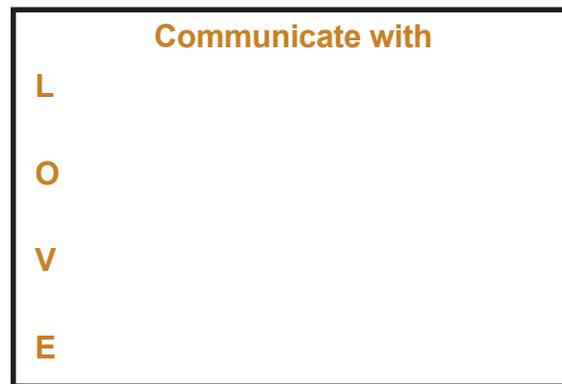
**Audience:** National Guard couples before or after deployment

**Special Considerations:** None

## Resources Needed:

- ✓ Flip Chart or white/chalk board
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ A real set of hand-held radios/walkie-talkies (optional)

5. Write the phrase “Communicate with LOVE” on the flip chart with the letters in the word “LOVE” going downward on the left side of the paper, as in the figure below:



6. Tell the couples that each letter in the word “LOVE” represents an important rule and communication skill. Go over these rules and write down the key words on the flipchart.
- a. The “L” stands for LISTEN. Communication is a two-way street, and to effectively communicate, a person needs to listen to what another person says.
    - i. Point out that most often, even when we think we are listening, we are really thinking about what we are going to say next. Real listening means you can repeat in your own words what the other has just said.
    - ii. Ask everyone to share with their partner an example of when they were speaking and felt understood by the other person. How did that make them feel?
    - iii. Encourage participants to spend time at home practicing what it means to actively listen, whether it’s with their partner, child, or simply when they are watching television.
  - b. The “O” stands for OBSERVE. It means the listener is to look at the others person’s body language and non-verbal communication.
    - i. Tell the couples that between 60 percent to 80 percent of our message is conveyed through non-verbal body language.
    - ii. You may want to give an example of this fact. Tell the couples, “I am so excited you all came to this session,” but have a very angry, sad, or bored facial expression and tone. Ask them what they noticed the most, what you said, or how you said it.
    - iii. Ask the group what some common non-verbal cues in couple communication are and what they might mean. They might include:
      1. Smiles, frowns, or other facial expressions
      2. Rolling eyes
      3. Turing away (the cold shoulder)
      4. Hand gestures
      5. Nodding of head
      6. Voice tone

- iv. Point out that sometimes the person giving the non-verbal message doesn't even know he or she is doing it. To illustrate this point, have the couples take a minute and tell each other what non-verbal body language the other does when they've just received good news. Have the women first tell the men, and then switch.
  - v. Point out that while observing non-verbal cues is important, sometimes it can be tricky. It's easy to assume what the other is thinking or feeling based on body language, but you may not always be right. What we want is for both verbal and non-verbal communication to match. This takes us to our next rule.
- c. The "V" stands for VERIFY. This means, as the listener, that you make sure you know exactly what the other person is intending to convey.
- i. Tell the group that after the listener has LISTENED and OBSERVED the first two rules, they should be able to repeat back or paraphrase, in their own words, what the speaker said. If what the listener paraphrases isn't what the speaker intended to convey, then the speaker should try to restate the original message in a different way. Then the listener should again paraphrase until both agree on the message.
  - ii. Explain that if the speaker says something and the listener is able to correctly restate what was said, 1) the speaker knows he/she was listening, 2) the speaker likely feels validated, and 3) the listener knows he/she understood the right message. That means that your communication was a success!
  - iii. Tell them that this skill also gives the listener a chance to match up the verbal and non-verbal communication. If the speaker said something that wasn't in sync with his or her body language, the listener can verify the intended message.
- d. The last letter "E" stands for EXPLAIN. This means that, as the speaker, you should say exactly what you want to say. Don't expect the other person to interpret or "mind read."
- i. Tell the group that sometimes in relationships there is the belief that: "If she really loves me, she would know what I am trying to say or what I want her to do" or "I shouldn't have to tell him what I want; if he cares for me, he should already know."
  - ii. Tell the couples that the best way to make sure their message is getting across correctly is by simply using accurate and descriptive words to describe thoughts or feelings about a certain subject.
  - iii. Describe how using "I" statements can help them more accurately express themselves. This means that everyone speaks only for themselves and not for the other person. Out of frustration, it's easy to talk about what the other person did or didn't do or our perception of what they did or didn't do. Here is a scenario followed by some examples of how to more effectively communicate about hot-button issues:

A wife comes home to find that her husband has once again left everything out in the kitchen after making a sandwich. The packages of meat and cheese are still on the counter along with the knife used to spread mayonnaise. Extra bags must have spilled onto the floor, and there are enough crumbs around to feed a small family of mice. Here are some of the wife's possible responses:

"You left everything out again. You're such a slob and you always leave a mess wherever you go! You do this just to irritate me."

What is wrong with this statement? How do you think the husband will respond?  
Contrast it with this “I statement.”

“After working so hard to clean the kitchen last night, when I came home and saw the kitchen the way it was, I felt very angry and feel like you don’t respect my efforts to keep our home clean.”

What is the difference in this statement? How might the husband respond to this?  
How would the scenario play out differently if the husband mentioned he received an emergency call from work and had rushed out unexpectedly before he could clean up the sandwich?

When “Communicating with LOVE,” couples can hear the other’s perspective and better understand what impacted that person’s decision. There’s room for respect, appreciation, and compassion.

7. After you have explained the “Communicating with LOVE” model, ask them if they noticed that the first three (LISTEN, OBSERVE, and VERIFY) focused on the role of the listener and listening. Only the last one (EXPLAIN) focused on the role of the speaker. This insight addresses the power of listening in healthy communication.
8. Tell the couples to take a few moments to practice by picking a topic to discuss and take turns as the speaker and the listener. Encourage them that when picking a topic, they should select a low conflict issue to discuss (so likely not finances, sex, or another hot button or very personal topic.) It could be something that happened recently at work or in the relationship or even something as simple as where or what they want to eat for dinner later.
  - a. The man will start first by EXPLAINING his point of view in two to four sentences.
  - b. The woman will LISTEN to his words, OBSERVE his body language, and then VERIFY what he said by stating it back to him. The man then gets the opportunity to say whether or not the woman was right in her paraphrase.
  - c. After this exchange has taken place, let the woman mention any non-verbal cues she noticed as he was talking.
  - d. Reverse the roles and let the woman EXPLAIN, and the man LISTEN, OBSERVE, and VERIFY.
  - e. Allow this exchange to go on until 10 minutes before your allotted time is up.

### Process:

Ask the couples if it was difficult to incorporate new rules into their communication. (Many will say it was hard or unnatural.) It can also be powerful to talk about examples of what we might do “naturally” during hard conversations: walk away, tune out, scream, call each other names, etc. Remind them that with any new skill it takes time and practice, and encourage them to practice on small issues until they get the hang of it. Addressing hot button topics immediately, before mastering the skill, is not advised — it could just lead to frustration or a fight. Ask the National Guard members who volunteered earlier if it was hard at first to learn the military way of communicating over a radio. (Most will say it was very difficult at first but over time it became natural and easy.)

### Conclude:

Invite the couples to practice this model in their communication on their drive home or shortly after,

reminding them that this model can be used to convey positive things when encouraging your spouse or showing appreciation as well as when addressing a concern. Also invite them to discuss with each other how they will effectively communicate with each other in the event of separation for deployment or other reason. Hopefully this activity has offered a starting point for their conversation, but the important part will be using the tool as well as developing a strong communication plan for times when they are apart. Tell them that with practice their communication experience can be very successful, even from a distance.