

## Evaluating Communication Within Your Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

Most of us tend to believe we're pretty good at communications. We talk to our boss and co-workers, chat with our friends, try to get our kids to listen -- all communicating, right? Communicating is something we all do every day.

But one place where many of us come up short is in communicating effectively with our significant other. Divorce statistics in this country are still extremely high and one of the common causes cited in virtually all fractured relationships is a lack of communication.

One reason for that may be that many of us never really learned the skills necessary to communicate effectively. In a meaningful relationship, communication isn't just talking. It's about sharing our feelings, emotions, experiences and expectations with each other. It's a bridge that connects us to that person we love.

There are various steps that can help build that communication bridge and strengthen a relationship:

- Learn to listen to each other, really listen without interrupting or defending yourself when your partner is speaking.
- Put yourself in your partner's shoes - that doesn't mean agreeing with your partner, but stretching yourself enough to understand the experience that's being shared.
- Listen not just to the words, but also to the emotions, the hurt, sadness, anger, loss, betrayal or other emotions that are being expressed.
- Ask for more information when something isn't clear rather than jumping to conclusions.
- Use "I" rather than "You" messages. Statements starting with "I" open up communication, while "You" statements usually are assigning blame and stifling communication.
- Be aware of nonverbal messages. Voice tone, hand gestures, facial expressions, posture, eye contact, even the distance between you, can all send powerful messages.
- Make time for significant discussions. Set an appointment to have a talk rather than suddenly starting an important conversation as you're walking out the door.
- Stay focused on the issue at hand. Don't bring up old hurts and problems. Your goal in effective communication is to develop intimacy, not to search and destroy.

Communication within a marriage or other close relationship can sometimes be difficult, but it is necessary if the relationship is to succeed. If you find that your relationship is suffering from poor or nonexistent communication, consider meeting with a professional counselor specializing in relationship counseling. He or she can help you in getting your communication bridge building back on track.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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