

Couple Communication Tip Sheet

T TIME

Just making *time* to talk and share your lives without interruption from the TV, phone, computer, work or kids is the first step toward better communication. Much like a garden needs a fence around it to keep it from being trampled, creating “protected time” for our marriage forms a healthy boundary that helps it grow and thrive. Especially when we become parents, it is tempting to focus all our time and energy on meeting our children’s needs. However, with God’s help, at whatever life-stage you’re in, you can still find a way to have “dates” regularly, times together that don’t necessarily have to be elaborate or expensive. Researchers recommend a date night *at least* once every two weeks to sustain a healthy marriage. It is during these times that we all get our “relationship batteries” re-charged and remember again the reasons we got married in the first place.

A APPRECIATION

We all want to know that our significant other *appreciates* us. Letting people know specific things that we appreciate about who they are or what they do is like putting a crisp, dry log on a fire. The more we give each other sincere appreciation (not flattery), the larger the fire burns, and our relationships grow. How many logs have you been putting on the fire recently? One couple we worked with was having trouble expressing appreciation to each other because they were too angry. Since it was difficult to verbally appreciate each other, they decided to put up two clipboards with each other’s names at the top. During the course of a week, each would write down little things that they appreciated about their spouse. This created a “snowball” effect; soon they could verbalize things they were thankful for, and now they are building each other up daily!

L LISTENING

Listening is an art that few people master because it involves more than just *hearing*. Recently Perry wanted me (Dianne) to listen to him the other night as he talked about some concerns he had at work. I “heard” every word he said while I was flipping through my magazine. But I did not do him the honor of truly *listening*. Listening is not just done with our ears. It takes our eyes, time, and attention. One way to let our partner know you are listening is to repeat back what he or she has just said in a non-judgmental way. For example, think of ordering a meal at a drive-thru. After we order, the attendant repeats back to us what we just said and asks, “Is that correct?” What they don’t say is, “You ordered what!? I can’t believe it. What kind of a choice is that?” When we get the facts straight and can clarify what our partner tells us, we communicate a tremendous amount of respect and regard.

K KINDNESS

Talking about disagreements in a *kind*, calm tone of voice will enhance communication greatly. Research has shown that both men and women will emotionally “shut down” and instantly become defensive when they see a facial expression or anticipate a tone voice that will convey blame, disdain, or intense anger, *even before the conversation begins*. In such situations, we all start thinking more about defending ourselves than listening to our spouses. So here’s the question: Would you rather have your spouse go on the defensive and withdraw, or listen to what you have to say? If you prefer the latter, here’s a suggestion: As much as possible, don’t EVER begin a conversation when you are really angry. Instead, wait, go to God *first*, share your anger with *Him*, and then ask His help in sharing your frustrations with your spouse in a way that is respectful and loving, while still being honest. God tells us to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Even if you have a fiery personality and aren’t used to doing this, God can and will help you if you ask Him. Remember, *God will never ask you to do something He’s not ready to help you do*. Using a more relaxed, even tone not only increases your chances of being listened to, it also shows a great deal of kindness.

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