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25 YEARS OF PROVIDING SERVICE

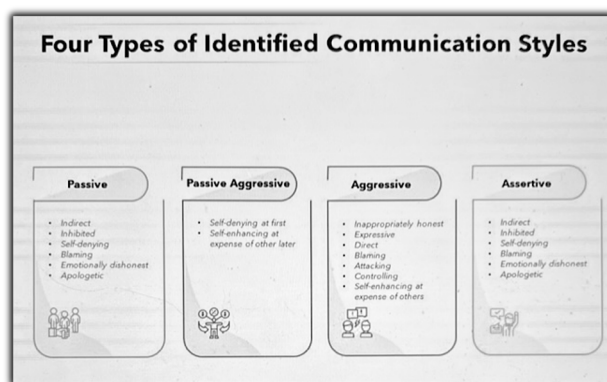


## COMMUNICATION for COUPLES

If you're in a relationship, chances are you've had your share of conflicts and tension. It's fine to have arguments — disagreeing with a partner is a part of being a couple. The key to a healthy & respectful relationship is **COMMUNICATION**. Whether you're a new couple or one that has been lengthy, the strategies below can help you and your loved one improve your communication skills and deepen your relationship.

### RECOGNIZING COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

In a previous newsletter I discussed in detail the 4 different communication patterns: **Passive**, **Passive-Aggressive**, **Aggressive** & **Assertive**. Knowing your style of communication can help you to avoid falling into a possibly unhealthy automatic communicate style and help you in your effort to build a trusting & positive relationship.



### PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS FIRST

Before talking with your significant about an issue that's concerning to you, be sure to process your own feelings on the subject and calm yourself first. Take a moment. Breathe and process your feelings. By taking a moment you will be less emotionally reactive which usually only winds up covering up the true message.

### AVOID YOU STATEMENTS AND TRY USING "I" STATEMENTS

When feelings are hurt, we can become defensive and it's common to fall into unhealthy communication habits such as using "you" statements. You statements, (e.g. "you always do this!" or "you don't even care") are verbal jabs that and often received as blaming and critical which can lead to you or your partner having feelings of resentment and hurt. On the other hand, healthy communication is based on "I" statements. These expressions of our feelings help to directly communicate your underlying emotion & provide your partner with specific actions they can take to improve the situation.

➔ The formula is easy: I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (insert emotion/feeling word such as *frightened*, *overwhelmed*, *disrespected*, *ignored*, etc.) when you do \_\_\_\_\_ (specific action, statement, or event) and what I need is \_\_\_\_\_ (specific behavior change, alternative response, or call to action)



## COMMUNICATION EXERCISES FOR COUPLES



### **EXERCISE Active & Reflecting Listening**

The practice of Active Listening exercise is an effective tool for couples. **Active and Reflective Listening** exercise involves one partner sharing a thought or concern, while the other partner listens mindfully with the intent to fully understand what the other person is saying. After the first-person shares, the reflective listener repeats back what was said to ensure they understood. An easy way to begin is by **Making a Wish List**. Each partner creates a wish list of 3 things they want more of in their relationship such as more date nights, more cuddle time, less phone time, etc. Then each couple communicates their wish and how it will make them feel about the relationship. Each partner gets a turn to practice active and reflective listening.



### **EXERCISE: Listen without Responding**

The goal of healthy conversations is NOT to get your partner to always agree with you. Your goal needs to be to hear and completely understand each other and doing this with kindness and respect.

#### **Try this the next time a conflict arises:**

1. Decide who will have the floor first. This partner starts by stating their side of an issue for a set amount of time (e.g. 10 minutes),
2. Second partner (the listener) only has one task – ask questions in order to clarify and get a better understanding. Eg. *Why is this so important to you? What is the worst-case scenario? What are you afraid will happen? What does this mean to you? What are you feeling? What is it you want me to know that you don't think I've grasped yet?*
3. After the 10 minutes, the partners change roles, giving the other person a chance to share.

\*While this exercise may not lead to an agreement or compromise, the key is that it enables couples to have a conversation about a serious topic without relying on defensiveness and anger. It helps the couple feel more as a team and less like adversaries.



### **EXERCISE: Feel Loved By You**

Partner A says, I feel loved by you when... (Complete the sentence.)

Partner B says, Thank you.

Partner B says, I feel loved by you when... (Complete the sentence.)

Partner A says, Thank you.

**\*\*Repeat these exchanges alternating for a total 10-15 minutes. The thank you responses are to prevent you from praising, criticizing, blaming, making excuses, or otherwise commenting, positively or negatively, on your partner's statement.**

**\*\*Speak your sentence and complete it as quickly as possible and back and forth. After a few minutes you'll find that your ideas flow smoothly. If you get stuck, just say pass, and go on to the next round.**

**\*\*When done, discuss what you've learned: Any surprises? Did you get any good ideas from your partner's statements? How did you feel, hearing how your partner felt loved? How did you feel, sharing how you felt loved?"**





### **READING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION & COUPLES:**

HOW TO BE AN ADULT IN RELATIONSHIPS: THE FIVE KEYS TO MINDFUL LOVING by David Richo

THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES HARDCOVER SPECIAL EDITION: THE SECRET TO LOVE THAT LASTS by Gary Chapman

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING MARRIAGE WORK: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FROM THE COUNTRY'S FOREMOST RELATIONSHIP EXPERT by John Gottman

I HEAR YOU: THE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE SKILL BEHIND EXTRAORDINARY RELATIONSHIPS by Michael Sorensen

COMMUNICATION MIRACLES FOR COUPLES: EASY & EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO CREATE MORE LOVE AND LESS CONFLICT By Jonathan Robinson

GETTING THE LOVE YOU WANT: A GUIDE FOR COUPLES by Harville Hendrix, PhD

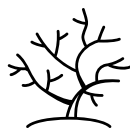
THE ART OF LOVING by Erich Fromm

ATTACHED: ARE YOU ANXIOUS, AVOIDANT OR SECURE. HOW THE SCIENCE OF ADULT ATTACHMENT CAN HELP YOU FIND – AND KEEP – LOVE By Dr. Amir Levine & Rachel S.F. Heller, MA

THE NEW RULES OF MARRIAGE: What You Need to Make Love Work by Terrence Real

SEVEN CONVERSATIONS FOR A LIFETIME OF LOVE by Dr. Sue Johnson

MARRIAGE MEETINGS FOR LASTING LOVE: 30 Minutes a Week to the Relationship You've Always Wanted by Marcia Naomi Berger



Heather Cohen Meiselman, MSW LCSW is owner of her Private Practice & has been providing therapy services for over 25 years. Areas of focus include depression, anxiety, grief & loss, marital issues, family concerns, infertility & infancy loss, women's issues, aging concerns, caregiving & disability & employment stressors.

If you need support services do not hesitate. You do not have to go through this alone.

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