

Session 3: Communication

An essential building block to every relationship is communication.

Nonverbal Communication

What you say *without words* represents at least 2/3 of what you communicate.

Some of that is intentional, and some is not.

Ray Birdwhistell, pioneer of the original study of nonverbal communication, estimated we can make and recognize around 250,000 facial expressions.

If the verbal message doesn't match the non-verbal message, the nonverbal wins.

Gestures –arm motions, nodding, winking, eye rolling

Body language/ posture- slouching, arms crossed, amount of interest

Physical touch- hand on a shoulder, holding hands, pat on the back

Facial expression- more believable than words!

Eye contact- shows interest or attention

Paralanguage (voice quality, rate, pitch, volume)- shows emotion

Prosodic (rhythm, intonation, stress) – adds message

Clothing- mood, interest, concern

Individual Reflection:

1. Name one of your nonverbals that can distract your significant other or confuse the message you are trying to send.
2. Name a nonverbal cue that you can latch onto and use to communicate more effectively.

Basic Styles of Communication

Passive communication (Avoidance) is characterized by an unwillingness to honestly share thoughts, feelings, or desires. Passive communication is a barrier to true intimacy within relationships.

Aggressive communication (Partner Dominance) is characterized by blaming and accusatory actions and is often accompanied by language like “you always” or “you never.” Aggressive behavior focuses on the negative characteristics of the person rather than the situation.

Passive-Aggressive (Avoidance/Partner Dominance) People with a passive-aggressive communication style will forfeit their rights and desires initially but then will subtly convey anger or seek vengeance later.

Assertive Communication (Assertive) allows people to express themselves in a healthy, non-defensive, and non-insistent way. It means asking clearly and directly for what one wants, and being positive and respectful in one’s communication. Assertive communicators use “I” statements.

Individual Reflection:

1. What style of communication do you default to?
2. In the space below, draw with stick figures what communication styles the two of you use most often.

Couples Reflection:

Share your drawings.

Passive communication is actually a very **dominating** style.

When someone withdraws from the conversation or refuses to engage on a topic, that person is calling the shots.

Four Changes in Your Communication that will Reap Dividends

In his book *A Couples Guide to Communication*, John Gottman writes about different barriers to communicating well. We are going to look at four ways to overcome barriers in communication.

- Acknowledging fear
- Filtering
- Leveling
- Editing

Understanding these barriers and how to get around them will help you become effective communicators.

It will also help you show love to your spouse.

Acknowledging Fears

For people who have a passive style of communication and for those who are higher on the pleasing scale (of S.C.O.P.E.), opening up and sharing can be difficult. In reality, there will be times you will not please your spouse. In fact, you will frustrate, annoy, and disagree. Even so it is important to speak assertively.

As a review, Assertive Communication allows you to share your feelings and thoughts with a focus on you. What are some reasons people might not share what they think? Acknowledge these fears so you can press forward.

- My spouse will not love me anymore.
- I will lose control.
- I will hurt our relationship.
- It is not worth it to put myself out there.
- I will seem weak if I say what bothers me.

The number one predictor
of divorce is the habitual
avoidance of conflict.

smartmarriages.com/divorcepredictor

Learning to Filter Your Day

Everyone has triggers in their lives that impact how they handle conflict. The standard triggers are:

- Hunger
- Health
- Anger
- Fatigue
- Stress
- Depression

One way to be assertive is to be upfront if you are not feeling like yourself. Sharing a "filter" can convey the mood you are in and the ability you have to communicate. This keeps your spouse from misreading your cues, and possibly becoming defensive or feeling hurt.

For example:

- "I didn't have lunch and I am incredibly hungry. So please know if I seem tense, it is that."
- "I don't feel good; I may be coming down with something. I am not going to be very good company tonight."
- "I had a rough day; can you give me a few minutes to unwind before we talk about what is going on?"

Leveling the Communication Ground

When we withdraw part of who we are or speak passively, the communication with our significant other is not level. In contrast sometimes we are too aggressive or intense with our communication and therefore we are not able to have an effective conversation. Leveling means expressing your feelings and speaking assertively, even if it doesn't come naturally to you. Think of a carpenter's level. The goal is to adjust your communication so that the conversation is on level ground.

Character Assassination

You attack your spouse as a person, instead of focusing on the action that elicited the feeling.

Constructive Alternative: Talk about what your spouse did that elicited the negative response.

Insults

Call your spouse names.

Constructive Alternative: State specifically what your spouse did to provoke your negative thoughts.

Kitchen Sinking

Bring up every issue you can and throw it at your spouse.

Constructive Alternative: Choose only one topic to discuss in a healthy way.

Cross Complaining

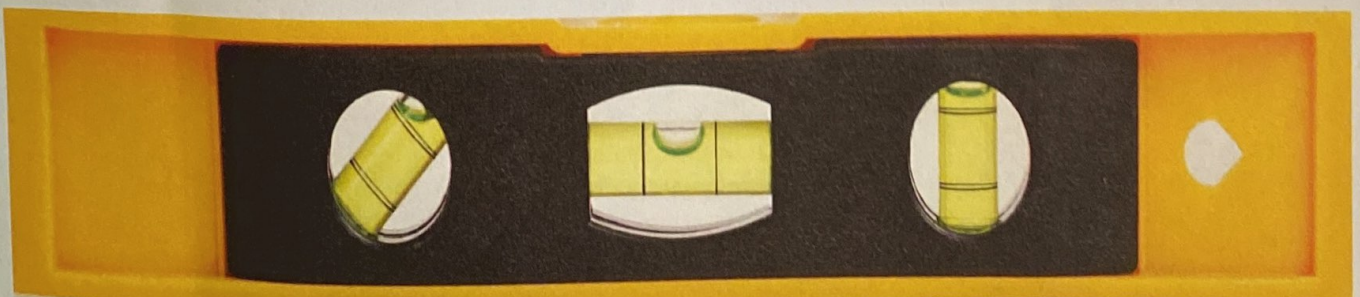
Your spouse brings up an issue involving you, and you react by bringing up something they did.

Constructive Alternative: Stick to the issue they brought up. Share your issue at a separate time.

Complain Constantly

Share every negative thing on your mind, almost in a continual stream of thought.

Constructive Alternative: Write down issues as you think of them, but choose to wait for an appropriate time to share (not all at once).



Editing to Stay Focused on the Issue

It is amazing to see how some couples treat each other. They use sarcasm, yell and scream, and/or tear down the person that they have chosen to make a commitment to.

Editing is when you decide to be polite because you love your significant other and want the best for your relationship.

Rules of Politeness (from Gottman)

1. Say what you can do, not what you can't do.
2. Give sincere and positive appreciation.
3. Express interest in your spouse's activities; be a good listener.
4. Give your significant other a chance to finish talking.
5. Criticize your ideas, not yourself.
6. Focus on the present situation.
7. Think of your spouse's needs and desires.

Goal of Leveling and Editing

The goal of both Leveling and Editing is to help you *communicate in a healthy way*. It will also show love to your significant other that you are *loving them the way you want to be loved*. Yet another benefit is that your marriage can become a model for those around you.

Individual Reflection:

1. Which rule (of politeness) do you most struggle with? Describe the struggle you have with this rule.
2. Which rule of politeness do you think your significant other struggles with? Describe the struggle he/she has with this rule.
3. Have you tried to edit your response? If not, will you try and help each other succeed?