

Seven Communication Rules for Marriage

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1. Always remember that your spouse is still your boyfriend or girlfriend—so treat him or her as you did before marriage with boatloads of respect and kindness. Remember how you used to listen to your beloved, asking him or her all kinds of questions? You not only asked how he or she was doing every day—you really wanted to know. You listened with both your ears and your eyes. After the wedding, some spouses can become deaf and blind, using one ear and no eyes when they talk.

2. Do you treat strangers better than your own spouse? Do you say things to your spouse that you would never say to strangers? Many spouses routinely use profanities at each other that they would never say to strangers. Words can kill or heal. Decide if you want to be a murderer or a doctor with your words.

3. Be careful with generalizations. You may be careful about using profanities, but do you routinely use words like "you never, ever, or you always do _____!"? Such words are also profane because the generalizations distort the truth. Does he really NEVER talk with you? Is she ALWAYS too tired for sex? Do you say these things anyway? You discredit the other person when you generalize their actions. That builds resentments, which can cause him to quit talking to you, for her to be too tired for him, and for this cycle to continue FOREVER and ALWAYS.

4. Speak for yourself. It's easy to say "You don't care. You are so selfish, etc. You, You, You" It's better and just as easy to start with an "I". "I was waiting for you to meet me at the restaurant at 7PM. What happened?" "I feel tuned out when you watch TV in bed. I'd like to get rid of it." Let your spouse know where you are coming from, and he or she can then speak for himself or herself.

5. You always control your anger. It's impossible to not get angry with your spouse about something. But it is possible to control your anger and use it responsibly. It is a cop-out to "lose your temper." You choose to lose it. You choose to control it. You always decide. Your temper does not control you. You control your anger. Practice points 2, 3 and 4 above when you are angry. And if you need time to cool off, then take your time. Better to take a ten minute break for a walk around the block than to say something that breaks your spouse's heart. You can use the time to think about how to say what you need to say, and then say it more effectively. There is nothing wrong with anger. What matters is how you express it.

6. Memorize this: one of the shortest verses from the Bible (whether you are religious or an atheist). "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger." (James 1:19) All these talking points are summed up in this one gem of wisdom. Live by this advice, and you will have a master's degree in communication with your spouse.

7. Repeat point number one. Once upon a time when you dated your spouse, you routinely spoke words of affection, appreciation, desire and support. Keep dating your spouse with words such as these. Do it daily. (A word of wisdom: if you don't, someone else will) Call or text your longtime boyfriend or girlfriend (aka your spouse) just as you did with each other before you were married. Make your dating life last a lifetime. Have multiple affairs with your spouse. Routinely ask, "How are you doing?" and listen with two ears and two eyes.

Anything else? A Bonus Talking Point: For an advanced degree in communication—try this. After you have listened to your spouse say whatever she or he has to say, extend the conversation (and show your interest) by saying these five words; "And is there anything else?" Whether he or she is excited about something or angry about something, asking these words invites them to say anything else on their mind, and shows them that you seriously want to know all that they are thinking or feeling. It also shows that you want to hear them out before you say what you have to say. "Anything else?" Give it a try it and see the difference it makes.