

## Couple's Communication Dialog

70% of arguments can be avoided by recognizing that problems do NOT necessarily need to be solved; they just need to be aired out! The Couple's Communication Dialog is a problem discussion, not a problem-solving session. *See the Problem-Solving Technique below for a successful method of problem-solving.*

### Rules for Both:

- 1- Speaker has the floor
- 2- Share the floor
- 3- No problem-solving

### Rules for the Speaker:

- 1- Speak for yourself (don't mind read)
- 2- Don't go on and on
- 3- Pause for listener to paraphrase

### Rules for the Listener:

- 1- Paraphrase what you hear (in your own words)
- 2- Don't rebut (no thoughts or opinions), pay attention

There are three phases to the Couple's Communication Dialog. Depending on the current state of your relationship communication, you can start by practicing Phase 1 only, or you can include Phases 2 and 3. Initially, these dialogs can seem awkward or robotic, but remember that structuring conversation is what will help you gain trust and safety in your communication and avoid negative, destructive arguments. Using these techniques is especially helpful when discussing sensitive issues.

### **Phase 1: Mirroring** – *To mirror your partner makes them feel HEARD*

*Speaker:* State concern

*Listener:* Paraphrase concern (summarize in your own words)

“So, what you're saying is.... Is that correct?”

*Speaker:* If the paraphrasing is accurate say yes, if not elaborate

*Listener:* Ask “Is there more?” – This is important because often the first concern the speaker brings up is not the real issue (remember “Hidden Issues”).

**Phase 2: Validation** – *To validate your partner makes them feel that you **think** they MAKE SENSE.* Validating your partner's thoughts does not mean you have to agree, only that you understand how they could think that way from their perspective.

*Speaker:* You can ask “Does this make sense to you?”

*Listener:* “I see where you’re coming from, what you’re saying makes sense”

**Phase 3: Empathy** – *To empathize with your partner makes them feel UNDERSTOOD – because you truly see why they would **feel** the way they do!*

*Speaker:* You can ask “Can you see why I would feel this way?”

*Listener:* “I can see how you could feel this way. I would probably feel that way too.”

### **Problem-Solving Technique**

Use this when you have a problem that is not solved by “airing it out” using the Couple’s Communication Dialog or when you know that a solution is necessary.

**Step 1- Set the agenda:** You would be surprised how often couples attempt to solve problems when they aren’t even sure what the problem is. Narrow down your conversation to one, specific problem. Tackle each individual issue separately.

**Step 2- Brainstorming:** Once you have the specific problem you will be tackling as a TEAM, conduct a brainstorming session. Brainstorming is an amazing tool for coming up with solutions and ideas that you would not otherwise have discovered! Brainstorming rules are as follows: both people must generate ideas, either or both people may write down notes, write down absolutely every idea that is said, do not discuss any idea while brainstorming, do not make faces or comments about your partner’s ideas, it is encouraged to write down silly ideas, be creative, and have fun!

**Step 3- Agreement/Compromise:** After brainstorming, both of you should select a few of the brainstormed ideas that you feel are the most promising. Discuss them until you can select a solution. Remember to work as a team and that the goal is to solve your problem, not win a battle. Compromise is not a bad word – neither of you has to sacrifice anything to come to a functional agreement.

**Step 4- Follow-up:** At the time of your Problem-Solving Session agree upon a “follow-up” time at some point in the future. Depending on the problem you are discussing, perhaps 1 week to 1 month would be appropriate. The reason following up is important is because often as you begin to make the changes to solve the problem you become aware of new information that uncovers hidden obstacles. These obstacles or new information may lead you to see that your solution will not work. Plus, if your solution isn’t working out or if you aren’t following through with it, having a pre-scheduled follow-up date will help you make sure to stay on top of it and not allow it to lead to a feeling of failure.

If it doesn’t work the first time, start back at step 1.

*Congratulate yourself on taking concrete steps toward excellent communication!*