

Building a good life together is a continuous process. As we move from young love to parenthood, and then on to maturity, our needs change.

Many issues—money, in-laws, sex, children, drug and alcohol abuse, or verbal, emotional or physical abuse—are common causes of communication breakdown. All of these issues are loaded with strong emotions.

Clear communication can be the glue that keeps you growing together in positive ways.

Put a Smile in Your Style

Talking to your partner in an honest, direct way is a challenge. It's easy to fall into speech pattern traps which muddy what you want to communicate. For example, the simple habit of starting a conversation with a "why" question can put your partner on the defensive. Developing a way of talking that expresses your true feelings can be more important than your words. Your smile and touch say that your teasing is loving, not sarcastic.

Solve Speech Problems

1. Be honest. Start with "I feel..."
2. Be aware that you might be misunderstood. Ask.
3. Be open. Your feelings can draw out your partner.
4. Be creative. Use laughter to tackle tough talk.
5. Be specific. Your partner may not understand.
6. Be sensitive to reactions. Withdrawal signals tension.
7. Be expressive when you listen. Use verbal and nonverbal feedback.
8. Be patient. Interruptions can be irritating.
9. Be careful. Offer reassurance that you're interested.
10. Be fair. Avoid sore spots that end conversation.



Enjoy Verbal Intimacy

Since more time is spent in talking than having sex, verbal intimacy is the key to maintaining a satisfying relationship.

Verbal tricks include:

- Repeating back what's said so you're both in tune.
- Using "I" instead of "You" to express feelings.
- Listening without giving advice.

Nonverbal tricks include:

- Using a friendly, soft tone.
- Matching expression and gestures to your message.
- Being physically close to talk.

Argue Successfully

Change and conflict are natural stages in being together. Cooperation and compromise are what can keep you together. Here are tips from happy couples:

1. Say what's bothering you by being specific. "I feel upset when you..."
2. Be positive. "I appreciate it when you call if you're late..."
3. Listen without comment, defense or disagreement.
4. Discuss details. Avoid old issues.
5. Negotiate to agreement, even if it's to disagree.
6. Be ready to be wrong or equally guilty.
7. Assume your partner wants you to be happy.
8. Put yourself in your partner's shoes.
9. Take 10-minute breathers.
10. Remember why you like each other.

Feeling Good About Each Other *Communication* Keeps *Relationships* Fresh

If you need help, don't hesitate to call a counselor.