

## 10 Tips for Talking and Listening to Each Other

Talking to your partner each day is an essential ingredient in a happy, long-lasting relationship.

Actively listening to your partner and being interested in what they have to say, is even more important.

Like most relationship skills, listening and talking to each other properly requires some effort.

Here are ten good communication skills worth practising until they become natural for you. Some are specifically for men (M), some for women (W) and most are for both (B):

### 1. Listen actively (B):

A good listener isn't someone who just sits there quietly letting you talk. It's someone who actively listens to you. Their body language will show you if they're genuinely interested. They'll lean forward, eager to hear what you're about to say. If you're sharing something funny with them, they'll laugh with you. If you're worried, they'll look concerned as well. They'll acknowledge what you're saying every few sentences with an 'uh-huh' and comment on the subject. When you've finished the conversation, you'll feel as though they've heard every word you said and tried to experience it with you.

### 2. Don't allow your emotions to stop you from listening (B):

When you're having a discussion with someone and something they've said has triggered an emotional response in you - such as anger, shock or hurt - don't get stuck there and tune out of the discussion. If you need to, ask them to stop what they're saying, so you can clear the air, and then continue your discussion. Issues seldom get resolved between two angry people if one of them shuts down and walks away or refuses to listen and continue the discussion.

### 3. Take turns (B):

Ensure that you each have an equal opportunity to speak without interruption. If that's not occurring naturally, try using a 'talking stick'. A 'talking stick' can be any object readily at hand, from a wooden spoon at home to a ruler in the workplace. Give the person who's speaking the 'talking stick' and tell them they have your undivided attention, to speak without any interruptions from you, for the next 5 minutes. Then swap over and ask them to do the same for you. To ensure that you've each understood the other's point of view, mirror back what they've just said to you in your own words.

### 4. Don't blame or accuse! Use 'I' statements instead, to convey your feelings and the impact on you of the other person's behaviour (B):

Instead of saying, 'You're a \_\_\_' or 'You made me feel \_\_\_', say, 'I felt \_\_\_ when you behaved in that way.' 'I' statements were introduced by Dr Thomas Gordon in the late 1970s as an assertive communication skill. 'I' statements help us to express our point of view calmly, without blaming the other person or treading on their toes, as opposed to a command, threat or complaint. They also help us communicate in a way that won't make the other person defensive.

### 5. Be specific (B):

If you want someone to know you really care about them, be specific in your communications with them. Ask them specific questions and acknowledge or wish them well with specific things you know are coming up for them. For example, instead of just asking your partner, 'How was your day?' each day, ask them 'How did your meeting with the shed guy go today?' or, instead of the stock-standard 'Have a good day!' say to your child, 'Have a good time at your friend's party this afternoon!'

### 6. Be patient (M):

When listening to a woman speak, accept that often, women tell long stories, unlike men who, generally, just summarise. Accept she'll tell the whole story. Don't say 'Can you get to the point?'

### 7. Don't jump in with the solution (M):

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When a woman is talking to you about a dilemma, don't assume she's asking you for an answer and jump in with one. She might just want to talk about her dilemma with you. If you're not sure what's expected of you, then ask her 'Are you wanting my advice or are you just talking this through?'

## **8. Don't rush him (W):**

When raising an emotional issue with a man, give him time to think about what he feels before expecting him to give you a response. Not all men find it easy to express their emotions. Give him an opportunity to search for the right words to explain what he feels, as chances are, he might not have previously thought about the issue at all.

## **9. Don't interpret silence as disinterest (W):**

If you don't receive an immediate response to what you've just said, don't assume that means he's not interested. He might just be thinking it through before responding. This is one of the main differences between how men and women communicate: women tend to think out loud, men tend to work things through in their heads.

## **10. Work out how you communicate best and work with your strengths (B):**

Do you find it easier to explain yourself verbally or to write things down? If you're about to tackle an issue with someone that could potentially lead to an argument, consider writing down everything you'd like to say down and handing them a letter, then discussing what's written. This way, you can state, clearly and specifically, all the points you'd like to get across. What's the perfect position to talk with your partner intimately? It's sitting face to face, about five feet away from each other. Apparently, women are uncomfortable discussing personal matters from any further away and men don't like it when women are any closer.

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