

NINE PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR COUPLES

Every relationship experiences its fair share of highs and lows, and navigating those moments can be challenging. Here are some suggestions to consider for improving communication with your partner.

PREPARE WITH SELF-REFLECTION

If you struggle to communicate your needs, taking some time for self-reflection can work wonders. Ask yourself, 'How would I like our communication to be different?' Write down the issues causing tension and how they make you feel.

"Writing down your thoughts beforehand often makes tough conversations less contentious. Identify topics you'd rather avoid and the reasons behind them," advises Tom Waldecker, Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office director. "This preparation paves the way for a more productive conversation and allows your partner to address your unmet needs."

BEGIN EVERY CONVERSATION BY LISTENING

Start by listening to your partner, making them feel understood and valued. This is fundamental for meeting both of your needs and supporting each other. Listening doesn't mean you have to agree with their perspective, but it does ensure that you "hear" their point of view, making them feel acknowledged.

"To ensure your partner feels heard, face them directly and maintain eye contact," adds Tom. "This includes being at the same level as your partner, like sitting at a dining table together, and looking at them when they talk."

In addition, reflect on what you hear from your partner by restating what they shared and asking if you understood them. This technique helps you stay focused on their words rather than formulating your response.

9 TIPS FOR MAINTAINING OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR PARTNER

Here are some helpful tips to foster open communication:

- Listen and articulate what you would like instead of focusing on what you don't.
- Schedule regular emotional check-ins with your partner and keep these appointments consistent.
- Plan out how you want to express your feelings. If you can't articulate it in writing, verbal communication will likely suffer.
- Share your feelings honestly, using statements like "I am concerned," or "I really appreciate it when..."
- When you're upset or feel the need to criticize, remember it takes 4 to 5 positive statements to balance out each negative critique, ensuring your feedback is constructive rather than purely negative.
- Be clear about your desires and own up to any mistakes.
- Accept that each person's feelings are valid—they are neither right nor wrong.
- Avoid interrupting during discussions. If something your partner says isn't clear, ask for clarification before responding.
- Express your goals and feelings instead of trying to correct your partner.
- Effective communication is about mutual understanding and requires effort and patience from both partners. By incorporating these strategies, you can strengthen your bond and enhance the quality of your relationship.

NEED MORE SUPPORT? WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

If you'd like to learn more about mental health services or are interested in support, counselors are available at no charge to you for confidential services. If you work on an academic campus, reach out to the Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office (FASCCO) at 734-936-8660 or via email at fascco@umich.edu.



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