

The Art of Communication



RECAP



On the last session I discovered that my partner's top three emotional needs are for:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

(If you can't remember, look back to the Conversation 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' on page 18–19.)

Say to your partner:

'Thank you for meeting my need for..... when you.....'

Find out from your partner what they think is most important for you to stay connected as a couple on a regular basis.

Session 2 – The Art of Communication

We all have a deep longing for emotional connection; it is a fundamental human need.

Emotional connection in marriage will only be achieved where there is good communication.

Effective communication

Different levels of communication

Level 1: Passing on information

Level 2: Sharing our ideas and opinions

Level 3: Being open about our feelings and needs

Level 3 takes vulnerability and requires trust.

Effective communication involves speaking and listening well.

Good communication is multilayered; it involves

- our words
- our tone of voice
- our body language



Our aim in marriage should be to listen twice as much as we talk.

CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



A SIGNIFICANT MEMORY

- Take it in turns to spend one minute telling your partner about a happy, or some other significant, memory of something that happened to you before you met.
- As you're talking, be sure to express what you felt as you recall this memory. Don't just describe the facts.
- When it is your turn to listen, summarise what you have heard, taking particular care to describe your partner's feelings. This will show you have been listening and empathising with what your partner feels about this memory.

The importance of talking

Important to tell each other our thoughts and feelings

- we may have been taught to hide our feelings during our upbringing
- some people have difficulty recognising what they are feeling (if this describes you, please see the Continuing Conversation 'Identifying Emotions', page 38)
- it takes courage and practice to learn how to talk about feelings
- if your partner finds this hard, help them to feel safe enough to open up

CONVERSATION 2

5 minutes



BARRIERS TO TALKING

Take a few minutes to look together at the diagram below and tell each other if any of these barriers apply to you.



Does anything else stop you from opening up and talking?



The importance of listening

Good listening is one of the most important skills to learn for a strong marriage

- listening has great power to make our husband or wife feel loved and valued

Research indicates that the average individual only listens for 17 seconds before interrupting.

CONVERSATION 3

5 minutes



THE POWER OF LISTENING

Discuss the following questions as a couple:

- How do you feel when you are listened to?
- How do you feel when you are not listened to?
- To whom would you go if you needed a listening ear?
- What makes that person a good listener?

There is no one who is more important to listen to than our husband or wife.

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.

- PROVERBS 18:13, NLT

Hindrances to listening

Five bad listening habits

1. Disengaging

When we have a separate conversation going on in our head or we're not listening properly because of our physical environment.

2. Reassuring

Not allowing our partner to voice negative emotions.

3. Giving advice

Focusing on solutions rather than empathising with our partner.

4. Going off on a tangent

Taking over the conversation with our own agenda.

5. Interrupting

Failing to let our partner finish what they want to say.

These habits can prevent the speaker from saying what they're feeling, which may eventually cause them to shut down.

We need to listen first before coming in with our contribution.

We can all learn the art of effective listening, but it takes time and requires us to be intentional.

CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



IDENTIFYING BAD HABITS

Take a few moments to identify your own bad listening habit(s).

Check to see if your partner agrees!

Five steps for reflective listening

1. Try to put yourself in your partner's shoes

Put your own views to one side and really appreciate what it's like for your partner to be feeling the way that they do. Allow your partner to finish what they are saying. Maintain eye contact and do not do something else at the same time. Do not rush them and do not be afraid of silences.

2. Acknowledge what they've said

When you have listened to what your partner wants to say, reflect back what they said without deflection or interpretation. At this stage you're not agreeing or disagreeing or giving your own opinion. (Your turn will come later.)

3. Find out what is most important

Then ask your husband or wife: 'What is the most important part of what you have been saying?' Wait quietly while your partner thinks about what they want to say. When they have spoken, reflect back again what you have heard.

4. Help them work out what they might do

Now ask: 'Is there anything you would like to do (or, if appropriate, like me or us to do) about what you have said?' Again give your partner time to think quietly. When they have finished, reflect back what your partner has said, enabling them to hear their own ideas.

5. Ask if your partner has said all they need to

Don't assume you already know everything your partner wants to say. If there is more, reflect this back too.

So often we think being a good conversationalist is all about having interesting views or fascinating stories to tell. But asking the right questions is what enables deep conversation.

'Reflecting back' has two benefits: It helps us find out if we've really understood what our partner has told us and it helps them know if they've been understood... Reflecting back may feel awkward or contrived, but it works!

CONVERSATION 5

30 minutes



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Each of you pick an issue currently upsetting or bothering you that you have not discussed recently. At this point, choose an issue where there has not already been a lot of disagreement and conflict. It could be an area of concern related to work, holidays, children, your home, etc.

- The speaker should hold a table napkin (or something similar). This is to remind you whose issue is being discussed.
- The speaker tells the listener about the issue and how they feel about it (do not go on for too long). The listener listens and then reflects back.
- Then the listener asks, 'What is the most important aspect of what you are saying?' The speaker responds. The listener listens and then reflects back again.
- The listener then asks, 'Is there anything you would like to do (or, if appropriate, like me / us to do) about what you have just said?' Again the listener listens and then reflects back.
- Finally, the listener asks, 'Is there anything more that you would like to say?' The listener listens and then reflects back again.

Then switch roles so you both have a chance to speak and to listen.

This conversation is good practice for all of us, both in talking about our feelings and in listening to each other.

Continuing the Conversation

'If I were to summarise in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: seek first to understand, then to be understood.'

— Stephen Covey

Plan a date together

 <i>Morning</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>
 <i>Afternoon</i>							
 <i>Evening</i>							

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week you made me feel valued when you...



Conversation starters on your next date:



Ask your partner: When did you last feel... [pick a word]...

- | | | |
|-------------|--|-----------------|
| encouraged? | | discouraged? |
| understood? | | misunderstood? |
| rejected? | | fully accepted? |

Write down some other questions as conversation starters:

For example: *What was the best holiday you've ever had?*

When and where do you have your best conversations?



How good is your communication?



1. Areas in our relationship where I feel that we communicate effectively...
2. Things we don't talk about much that I wish we talked about more...
3. Things that we do not talk about at all...

Then, pick an area of your marriage that you haven't discussed in any depth and follow the steps for the Conversation 5, 'Reflective listening' (page 33). Please ensure that both of you are ready to do this.

Take it in turns to be the speaker and the listener.

Don't worry if it feels awkward or contrived at first. Try to follow the steps and recognise how different it feels really listening to your partner and how it feels to be listened to by them.

Some of you may experience a strong emotional reaction to what your partner is saying. Still, try to hear them out and reflect back what they say.

Please turn over

Identifying Emotions



To help those who struggle to identify what they are feeling.

1. Completing the partial sentences below will help you identify your emotions and become more emotionally aware.

Quickly add a few words to describe your feelings (either positive or negative) for each sentence. The lists to the right will help you to get started.

When we set off on holiday, I feel...

When we go out with friends, I feel...

When I'm in a room with people I don't know, I feel...

When I'm with my parents, I feel...

When I think of past successes, I feel...

When I think of mistakes I've made, I feel...

When I think of the future, I feel...

When I think of relating to God, I feel...

When my husband / wife tells me he / she loves me, I feel...

When my husband / wife and I have a disagreement, I feel...

When my husband / wife tells me something I've done that's disappointed or hurt him / her, I feel...

When my husband / wife apologises to me, I feel...

2. Complete the following sentences

I feel most loved when...

I get angry when...

I feel happiest when...

I feel rejected when...

Now show your partner what you have put.

Positive emotions

accepted

affirmed

appreciated

calm

capable

carefree

comforted

confident

content

delighted

encouraged

excited

forgiven

free

grateful

happy

hopeful

humbled

joyful

loved

liberated

peaceful

positive

relaxed

relieved

respected

safe

secure

supported

sure

trusting

understood

valuable

worthwhile

Negative emotions

abandoned

afraid

angry

anxious

annoyed

apologetic

ashamed

bored

confused

cross

defeated

depressed

disappointed

disgusted

disrespected

dissatisfied

embarrassed

exposed

frustrated

guilty

humiliated

hurt

insecure

insignificant

jealous

lonely

misunderstood

nervous

numb

overwhelmed

pressured

rejected

resentful

sad

scared

sorrowful

unappreciated

unloved

upset

used

useless

vulnerable

weak