

MARITAL COUNSELLING

COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

There are at least 4 reasons for communication breakdowns in marriages.

1. Some have never been taught to effectively communicate.
2. Some are fearful of exposing what they feel or think. They do not want to run the risk of being rejected or hurt if others disagree.
3. Some have the attitude that talking won't do any good.
4. Some don't believe they have anything to offer.

A. Defining Communication

Communication has been defined as *"the process of sharing information with another person in such a way that he/she understands what we are saying."* We all need to listen more and talk less (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19).

Communication has also been defined as *"the process that allows people to know each other, to relate to one another, to understand the true meaning of the other's life."*

"although strong marriages tend to have the same problem areas as weak ones, those marriages which succeed apparently do so because the mates are communicating clearly."

Women generally communicate with 50,000 words per day while men keep words to less than 25,000 per day. Researchers today have concluded that from the earliest years, girls talk more than boys. Harvard's Preschool Program conducted a research into communication between the sexes. They found after wiring a playground for sound that 100% of the sounds coming from girls were both audible and recognizable. Boys on the other hand, had only 68% of recognizable words used in their communication. They were often found to make sound effects like "Zoooooom", "Varooooom" and "Yaaaah."

B. The Bible and Communication

1. Constructive Communication

- a. Isaiah 50:4
- b. Ephesians 4:26,27,32
- c. Psalm 141:3
- d. Proverbs 12:25; 15:1,4,28; 21:23

2. Barriers to Communication

- a. Proverbs 11:12,13
- b. Proverbs 12:16,18,22
- c. Proverbs 18:2,13
- d. Proverbs 21:19
- e. Proverbs 29:20

"Take a big step in improving your communication by vowing never to make your partner the object of remarks which cut, belittle, or ridicule!"

C. Communication Content

"Listening does not come naturally nor does it come easily with most people. Listening is not our natural preference. Most people prefer to be the one talking. Because of this, we concentrate more on getting our word into the conversation rather than giving full attention to what the other person is saying. Also, all too often we filter the other person's remarks through our own opinions and our own needs."

1. How much is sent in a Message?

7% Content

38% Tone

55% Non-verbal (Our face is able to make over 250,000 different expressions)

D. Communication Techniques

"People communicate in a variety of ways. Words are one means by which a person can express himself. Action language is another. Silence can convey a wealth of information! Listening is an indispensable condition for meaningful communication."

E. Conflict Analysis

Most people have disagreements and conflicts in their relationships. Please indicate below (X) the approximate extent of disagreement or agreement between you and your partner for each on the following list.

- I. Always Agree**
- II. Almost Always Agree**
- III. Occasionally Agree**
- IV. Frequently Disagree**
- V. Always Disagree**

	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.
1. Handling Finances	___	___	___	___	___
2. Matters of Recreation	___	___	___	___	___
3. Religious Matters	___	___	___	___	___
4. Demonstrations of Affection	___	___	___	___	___
5. Friends	___	___	___	___	___
6. Sexual Relations	___	___	___	___	___
7. Proper Behaviour	___	___	___	___	___
8. Philosophy of Life	___	___	___	___	___
9. Dealing with Parents/In Laws	___	___	___	___	___
10. Aims, goals, things important	___	___	___	___	___
11. Amount of Time Spent Together ...	___	___	___	___	___
12. Making Major Decisions	___	___	___	___	___
13. Household Tasks	___	___	___	___	___
14. Leisure Time Interests	___	___	___	___	___
15. Career Decisions	___	___	___	___	___
16. Praying Together/Bible Study	___	___	___	___	___
17. Child rearing Procedures	___	___	___	___	___
18. Where You Live	___	___	___	___	___

F. Managing Conflict in Communication

Put an (X) beside the eight words that describe your own responses during times of disagreement. Then put an (X) beside the eight words that you believe would best describe your spouses response during times of disagreement.

SHE	HE	TYPE OF RESPONSE	SHE	HE	TYPE OF RESPONSE
—	—	1. Withdraws	—	—	11. Threatens
—	—	2. Negotiates	—	—	12. Pretends
—	—	3. Gives in	—	—	13. Looks openly at issues
—	—	4. Forces own way	—	—	14. Retreats (leaves room)
—	—	5. Clarifies	—	—	15. Begrudges
—	—	6. Becomes Silent	—	—	16. Vacates
—	—	7. Blames Someone	—	—	17. Pressures, pushes
—	—	8. Explains	—	—	18. Surrenders
—	—	9. Criticises	—	—	19. Blows up
—	—	10. Evades the Issue	—	—	20. Compromises

The best way to resolve conflict is to seek a solution that will satisfy the needs of both parties. There are at least seven principles to keep conflict at a minimum.

- 1. Adopt the Learner's Posture** - Learn something valuable through the process
- 2. Listen to Your Hearts** - Invite each other to openly share feelings and needs (Proverbs 15:31).
- 3. Keep Your Emotions Under Control** - Anger can seldom be used to achieve God's purposes.
- 4. Think Before You Speak** - Do not put your mouth in motion **BEFORE** your mind is in gear (Proverbs 10:19; 18:13; Ecclesiastes 5:1-3).
- 5. Focus on Your Part of the Blame** - Is there something you could have done different?
- 6. Keep Short Accounts** - It may be the last time you see each other. Could you live with the memory of unresolved conflict? (Ephesians 4:26)
- 7. Keep a Thankful attitude** - Thankful people go ahead in life (I Thessalonians 5:18).

G. Critical Management Styles

Non-confrontational Style - this style avoids conflict by placating (agreeing), distracting, computing (becoming emotionally detached), or withdrawing from the conflict.

Controlling Style - wants to manipulate others by blaming and making threats; sets up win – lose framework

Cooperative Style - seeks mutually agreeable resolutions to manage differences. Works within and other-oriented, win – win framework:

- ☺ separates people from the problem
- ☺ focuses on shared interests
- ☺ generates many options to solve problems
- ☺ bases decisions upon objective criteria

H. Conflict Management Skills

Consider the following suggestions to keep focussed on issues rather than personalities when you experience interpersonal conflict:

1. Be specific when you introduce the complaint.
2. Don't just complain; ask for a reasonable change that will make the situation better. Offer solutions with your (constructive) criticisms.
3. Give and receive feedback about the major points of disagreement to make sure you are understood by your partner.
4. Try tolerance. Be open to your own feelings, and equally open to your partners feelings. Openness means that you accept change and can verbalize that attitude to your partner.
5. Consider compromise if appropriate. Many conflicts involve issues that are neither right nor wrong. Your partner may even have some good ideas.
6. Deal with one issue at a time.
7. A never assume that you know what your partner thinks. Ask.
8. Attack the issue, not each other.
9. Don't call each other names or use sarcasm.
10. Don't "gunny sack." Just as farmers use a "gunny sack" to carry feed, many people carry passed hurts into the conflict and then unleash them from the gunny sack. Forget the past and stay with the issue at hand.
11. Don't burden your partner with too many issues.
12. Think about your thoughts and feelings before speaking.
13. Never say, "You never..." ... turn down the volume ... don't exaggerate
14. Don't manipulate your mate with "It's all my fault."
15. Be humble - you could be wrong.

Adapted from (with additions)
George R.. Bach and
Ronald M. Deutsch
"Pairing" 1970

I. Handling Anger in Communication

- 1. Suppress Anger** - (Proverbs 29:11; 14:29; James 1:19)
- 2. Express Anger** - carefully
- 3. Confess Anger** - Ephesians 4:26,27

Always remember that you are responsible for your emotional reaction toward another person.

J. Myths About Conflict

Myth 1: Conflict Can Always Be Avoided - *“If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”* It is a myth that we should view conflict as inherently unproductive and something to be avoided. It happens, even in the best of relationships.

Myth 2: Conflict Always Occurs Because of Misunderstandings - Conflicts do sometimes flare up because of a lack of understanding or empathy for the other person, but there are times when individuals simply have different needs or goals. These differences, not the lack of understanding, are the source of the conflict.

Myth 3: Conflict is Always a Sign of a Poor Interpersonal Relationship - Although it is true that constant bickering and sniping can be symptomatic of deeper problems, disagreements do not necessarily signal that the relationship is on the rocks. In fact, the free expression of honest disagreement is a hallmark of a healthy relationship.

Myth 4: Conflict Can Always Be Resolved - Some people claim that with the application of a few skills and “how – to techniques,” that conflicts can disappear much like a stain from a shirt using the right cleaner. Yet not all differences can be resolved by listening harder or paraphrasing your partner’s message. Some disagreements are so intense and perceptions so fixed that individuals may have to “agree to disagree” and live with it.

Myth 5: Conflict Is Always Bad - It’s a common fantasy to dream of a limiting all interpersonal conflict from our relationships. If the relationship is conflict – free, the individuals are probably not being honest with each other. Although it can be destructive, conflict can also help us identify issues that need further discussion and lead to negotiations that give us fresh insights into the maturing relationship.

K. Guidelines for Open Communication

1. Look at the positive aspects of openness.
2. There must come a time when you sit down and say, *"Let me tell you about myself."*
3. Never use communication as a means for attack. *"Yes, this is what I did, but the reason I did it was that you were cold to me."* That's not honest, it is an attack.
4. Be honest about yourself, without excuse of justification.
5. Two parties must play their parts in the process - no one should sit in judgement.
6. Are there times when honesty and openness do more harm than good?
7. Seek to understand, not to be understood. Spend more time and effort trying to understand your mate's viewpoint than trying to make him/her understand yours (Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:2-4)
8. Listen, don't interrupt. The first duty of love is to listen. *"We can, if we are able to listen as well as to speak, become better informed and wiser as we grow older."* S.S. Hayakawa (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19).
9. Never become a nag. Do not restate your case and conclusions over and over again. Too often you can create a bigger problem, if you talk too much (Proverbs 10:19).
10. Don't jump to conclusions (Proverbs 21:23; 29:20).
11. Disagree? Yes. Disrespect? No. Always show respect for your mate's opinion even if you disagree (Philippians 2:3,4).
12. Don't force your spouse to be your carbon copy. If you truly love, you will not demand that he/she become a modified version of your ideas. Set your mate free to become an individual with his/her opinions.
13. Pray for one another. Pray for each other alone and spend time praying together for each other. *"If a husband and wife pray together they will not only stay together, they will communicate much more effectively"* (I Samuel 12:23).
14. Better communication depends upon change - changes in both of you. It may and will take time, but change is possible through Jesus Christ.
15. Yet, there is no perfect marriage, no perfect communication in marriage and therefore we should not expect it. But the glory in Christian marriages is to accept the life long task of working to improve your marriage and seeking God's power to enable you to live in love.

I can honestly see the value of making these guidelines an important part of our marriage!

Name: _____ Date of New Beginning: _____

MARITAL COUNSELLING QUESTIONS

Couple # _____

User # _____

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V. Always Disagree**

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7. Proper Behaviour	—	—	—	—	—
8. Philosophy of Life	—	—	—	—	—
9. Dealing with Parents/In Laws	—	—	—	—	—
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11. Amount of Time Spent Together ...	—	—	—	—	—
12. Making Major Decisions	—	—	—	—	—
13. Household Tasks	—	—	—	—	—
14. Leisure Time Interests	—	—	—	—	—
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