



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR SPOUSE

While romance might get a relationship started, good communication keeps it going. These healthy communication habits can help you strengthen your bonds with your spouse.

MAKE INTIMACY A PRIORITY.

With busy schedules and multiple demands, it's easy to let your need for intimate contact with your spouse slide; but intimacy strengthens a relationship like nothing else can. No matter how busy you are with work and family obligations, spend at least one hour of private time with your spouse every day. Even if you don't have time for romance, use the time to talk about the successes and frustrations of your day.



FIND A GOOD TIME TO TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

When you have something difficult to talk about, check with your mate for a specific time to discuss it. Resist the temptation to talk when he or she walks in the door after a hard day at work. Try choosing a subject you want to discuss, and both of you write about it for 10 minutes; then talk about it for 10 minutes. Make sure you stick to the time frame. If you need more time, agree on when you can talk about it again.

FOCUS ON YOUR CONCERNS.

Think about what you want to say before you begin to talk. With sensitive topics, it might be tempting to avoid talking about what's on your mind. Get right to the point and after you've stated your request, listen closely to your spouse's reply. Stay focused on finding solutions to problems rather than on emphasizing differences.

LET BOTH SIDES BE HEARD.

When you have a disagreement, remember that both of your needs are important. Use a firm and gentle tone of voice in stating what you need, why you need it and what you want your mate to do. However, try not to elevate your needs above your spouse's. Listen and show that you see things from your spouse's perspective.

BE HONEST BUT NOT ACCUSATORY.

It's easy to blame the other person when you're angry or hurt, but blaming only invites retaliation. Talk about your feelings instead. For instance, avoid saying "You ruined the plans again. You're always late." Instead, using "I" statements, say: "I'm very disappointed that you were late. I was counting on you to be home in time." This approach is less likely to provoke a defensive response and more likely to encourage an open discussion.

VALUE YOUR DIFFERENCES.

Sometimes the differences in your temperaments and communication styles will be more evident than your similarities. When you feel this way, how and what you communicate to your spouse will determine how effectively you solve your problems. Appreciate your differences and you'll learn to work together better.

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