

Couples' Communication Skills

A. Attending

When we are talking, I tend to stay *with* you. When appropriate, I see you squarely, maintain eye contact, have a relaxed and open posture, and in general show that I am giving you my full attention.

B. Listening

I listen thoughtfully when you are talking. I pay attention both to your words and to your feelings. I rarely let my mind wander or think of what I am going to say next. I rarely interrupt.

C. Empathy

I make it a point to understand where your thoughts and feelings are coming from. I "get into your shoes" and experience your feelings with you. I can almost always say: "If I were you, I'd feel the same way." You can count on me to understand you.

D. Communicating Understanding

I let you know that I hear and understand you and that I know where you are coming from. I respond to what you say before I express my own thoughts or feelings. I check out when I am not sure I understand you accurately.

E. Respect

I let you know that I value you as a person, that I see you as a unique human being with the wisdom of your own experiences. I affirm your right to be in charge of your own life. I am on your side. I am for you. I let you know that I want you to be all that you can be, all that you choose.

F. Accepting

I accept you the way you are. I do not try to change you or your behavior. You have a right to your own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. I may disagree with you at times but I don't try to change your viewpoint. When I disagree with you, I make it a point to understand you without putting you down.

G. Assertive Without Being

Aggressive

I do not suffer in silence, but I am not a bully either. I care for you, but I put a high priority on taking care of myself as well. I express my own thoughts, feelings, attitudes and ideas. I do not expect you to always agree with me, but I do expect you to value what I have to say. I do not say "yes" when I mean "no." I want you to assert yourself in the same way.

H. Self-Revealing

I am open. I express my thoughts, feelings, wants and fantasies freely and spontaneously. I am willing to talk about my weaknesses as well as my strengths. I am even willing to tell you things that embarrass me. I let you know what is really going on with me.

I. Straight Talk

I don't use "smoke screens" like sarcasm, teasing, long-winded lectures, withdrawing, or sulking. I let you know straight what is going on even if it means conflict. I ask for what I want. I think we are both strong and mature enough to deal with reality. Yet I am sensitive enough not to hurt needlessly.

J. Immediacy

I talk about how it is with us-you and me. When a conversation bogs down, I stop and talk about what is going on between you and me "here and now" that might be getting in the way. I tell you what I like and don't like about the way we relate to each other. I want you to do the same.

FIVE STYLES OF MANAGING ANXIETY

UNDERFUNCTIONERS

- Tend to have several areas where they just can't get organized
- become less competent under stress, thus inviting others to take over.
- tend to develop physical or emotional symptoms when stress is high in the family or work situation.
- may become the focus of family gossip, worry, or concern
- earns such labels as the "patient," the "fragile one," the "sick one," the "problem," the "irresponsible one."
- have difficulty showing their strong, competent side to intimate others.

OVERFUNCTIONERS

- Know what's best not only for themselves but for others as well.
- move in quickly to advise, rescue, and take over when stress hits
- have difficulty staying out and allowing others to struggle with their own problems.
- avoid worrying about their own personal goals and by focusing on others.
- have difficulty sharing their own vulnerable, under-functioning side, especially with those people who are viewed as having problems.
- may be labelled as the person who is "always reliable" or "always together."

BLAMERS

- Respond to anxiety with emotional intensity and fighting.
- have a short fuse
- expend high levels of energy trying to change someone who does not want to change
- engage in repetitive cycles of fighting that relieve tension but perpetuate the old pattern
- hold another person responsible for one's own feelings and actions.
- see others as the sole obstacle to making changes

PURSUERS

- React to anxiety by seeking greater togetherness in a relationship
- place a high value on talking things out and expressing feelings, and believe others should do the same.
- feel rejected and take it personally when someone close to them wants more time and space alone or away from relationship.
- tend to pursue harder and then coldly withdraw when an important person seeks distance
- may negatively label themselves as "too dependent: or "too demanding" in a relationship.
- tend to criticize their partner as someone who can't handle feelings or tolerate closeness

DISTANCERS

- Seek emotional distance or physical space when stress is high
- consider themselves to be self-reliant and private persons-more "do-it-yourselfers" than help-seekers
- have difficulty showing their needy, vulnerable and dependent sides
- receive such labels as "emotionally unavailable" "withholding," and "unable to deal with feelings" from others
- manage anxiety in personal relationships by intensifying work-related projects
- may cut off a relationship entirely when things get intense, rather than hanging on and working it out

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