

## Effective Communication

- 1) Speak in First Person –
  - Focus on expressing what you feel or think.
- 2) Level with each other –
  - The voice says words that match facial expressions, body language & position and the vocal tones.
- 3) Listen to each other –
  - Do not think ahead in the conversation (while your partner is talking) to how you will respond or the points you want to make.
  - Paraphrase what you believe your partner stated, including their feelings if appropriate.
- 4) State your point concisely –
  - If you can't state your point in a couple of sentences, then drop it until a time when you can. Sometimes when we go on and on with a lecturing-type format, we lose our point.
  - A long, lengthy dialogue introduces the possibility for conflict to escalate.
- 5) Describe what you need and avoid mind reading –
  - State your desires/needs clearly
  - No matter how well you believe you know each other, you can't read anyone's mind.
- 6) Show appreciation –
  - Spouses are more likely to hear a complaint/concern if the request is in a more positive context. (i.e. I liked it when you helped with the house cleaning last Saturday. I feel loved when you ask me what I want to do for entertainment in the evenings. I feel respected when you consult with me regarding financial expenditures before a major purchase.)
- 7) Start softly –
  - When we start softly, we set the tone for the course of interaction
  - Lighter tone will often times lead to a non-defensive response from our partner.
  - By considering the use of soft emotions (fear, worry, insecurity) rather than hard emotions (anger, resentment) each partner begins to accept the idea that the reality of the process involves more than just his or her perspective.
- 8) Apologize at the end of an argument –
  - At the end of an argument, an apology or admitting that you were wrong helps keep anger under control.
  - It's a way to restore the relationship and to take responsibility for one's own action or words.

## Obstacles to Effective Communication

- 1) One or both partners fail to listen to each other.
  - Either external (loud noise, child crying) or internal distractions (fatigue, anxiety) can interfere with the process of listening.
  - Many people will feel that his/her partner doesn't "understand," "doesn't hear," or "doesn't respect" him/her.
  - Suggestions for overcoming the obstacle:
    - Pick a time and place to talk where it is quiet
    - Make sure there are no distractions
    - Make sure both are relaxed and ready to listen to each other.
- 2) Men and women have different expectations for intimacy independence.
  - Because of a basic misunderstanding regarding their partner's needs. (i.e. She expects him to check with her to see if there are plans made before committing them to something and he can't believe she has to first get her permission.)
  - Suggestions for overcoming the obstacle:
    - Develop an understanding of what each other's expectations are in context to their individual needs.
    - Always try to avoid mind reading in regard to what each is thinking or feeling.
- 3) Both partners exhibit different styles of communication. (i.e. If one spouse was raised in a family where they were not allowed to express their anger, then any expressed anger would potentially shut-down communication.
  - Each partner has a different pattern of communication techniques, ie. One partner maybe more expressive than the other or maybe one is very soft-spoken.
  - Suggestions for overcoming the obstacle:
    - Take time to become familiar with each other's different communication styles.
    - Learn about the history involved in both partner's communication styles.
    - Help each to accept and allow each other's communication styles.
- 4) The couple believes their problems cannot be resolved.
  - The couple believes their problems have gone on too long and they believe their partner cannot or will not change because of his/her personality. Unfortunately, when one believes his/her partner's behavior is a personality trait instead of a behavior choice they often respond according to their beliefs – which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, where partners expect the worst.
  - Suggestions for overcoming the obstacle:
    - Partners need to not have expectations regarding their partner's behavior patterns – to try and elicit a more positive response.
    - Try changing the environment where discussions normally take place.
    - Challenge the idea that things will not change – begin with your behavior.