



# Basic Healthy Communication

*"It takes two to speak the truth...one to speak and another to hear."  
—Henry David Thoreau*

## ASSERTIVENESS

**Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in the relationship.**

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to be quite assertive. Rather than assuming their partner can read their minds, they share how they feel and ask clearly and directly for what they think.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using "I" statements. They avoid statements beginning with "you." In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. They use polite phrases such as "please" and "thank you".

### Examples of Assertive Statements

*"I'm feeling out of balance. While I love spending time with you, I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this."*

*"I want to take a ski vacation next winter, but I know you like to go to the beach. I'm feeling confused about what choice we should make."*

## ACTIVE LISTENING

**Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.**

Good communication depends on you carefully listening to another person. Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. Acknowledge content AND the feelings of the speaker. The active listening process lets the sender know whether or not the message they sent was clearly understood by having the listener restate what they heard.

### Examples of Active Listening

*"I heard you say you are feeling 'out of balance', and enjoy the time we spend together but that you also need more time to be with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this."*

*"If I understand what you said, you are concerned because you want to go skiing next winter. But you think I would rather to go to the beach. Is that correct?"*

When each person knows what the other person feels and **thinks** (assertiveness) and when each knows they have been heard and understood (active listening), intimacy is increased. These two communication skills can help you grow closer as a couple.



# COMMUNICATION

*"It is a luxury to be understood."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

**Assertiveness** is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

**Active listening** is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your Active Listening skills.

**Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## SHARING YOUR WISH LIST

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other, keeping in mind the following:

- Speaker's Job:
  - Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...").
  - Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.
- Listener's Job:
  - Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
  - Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

### COUPLE DISCUSSION

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

- How good were each of you at being assertive?
- In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?





*"Marriage is a team sport; you either win together or lose together."*

## DAILY DIALOGUE AND DAILY COMPLIMENTS

**Daily Dialogue** is an intentional effort to talk about your relationship, rather than discussing your activities that day. The focus of this dialogue should be on your feelings about each other and your lives together. Set aside five minutes per day to discuss the following:

- What did you most enjoy about your relationship today?
- What was dissatisfying about your relationship today?
- How can you be helpful to each other?

**Daily Compliments** help you focus on the positive things you like about each other. Every day give your partner at least one genuine compliment. These can be general ("*you are fun to be with*") or specific ("*I appreciate that you were on time for the concert*").

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INCREASE INTIMACY

1. **Give full attention to your partner when talking.** Turn off the phone, shut off the television, make eye contact.
2. **Focus on the good qualities in each other and praise each other often.**
3. **Be assertive.** Share your thoughts, feelings, and needs. A good way to be assertive without being critical is to use "I" rather than "You" statements. (e.g. "*I worry when you don't let me know you'll be late*" rather than "*You are always late*").
4. **Avoid criticism.**
5. **If you must criticize, balance it with at least one positive comment.** (e.g. "*I appreciate how you take the trash out each week. In the future can you remember to also wheel the trash can back from the end of the driveway?*").
6. **Listen to understand, not to judge.**
7. **Use active listening.** Summarize your partner's comments before sharing your own reactions or feelings.
8. **Avoid blaming each other and work together for a solution.**
9. **Use the Ten Steps approach.** For problems that come up again and again, use the *Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict*.
10. **Seek counseling.** If you are not able to resolve issues, seek counseling before they become more serious.