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Communication *With your Partner*



Most people agree that the ability to effectively communicate with others can have a huge impact on interpersonal relationships. Learning how to say what you mean in a way that others will understand can eliminate many stresses on relationships. Take a look at our favorite tips for general communication, communicating in disagreements, and communicating about sex.

In General Communication:

- **Be Aware of Non-Verbal Signals.** Our body language (e.g., facial expressions, posture, eye contact) all change the meaning given to our words. Our voice expressions (e.g., tone, volume, rhythm) all show the feeling in our words. Work to match your non-verbal communication with what you are saying so that your message carries the meaning of what you want.
- **Listen.** Indicate that you are paying attention by nodding your head or using brief statements. Do not interrupt when you are listening. Let the speaker finish speaking before you jump in. Keep an open mind and be non-judgmental.
- **Paraphrase and Ask Questions.** Repeat back what you think you've heard someone say and use summary statements. Ask questions to clarify statements. These techniques help you to avoid misunderstandings.

In an Argument or Disagreement

- **Delay Your Reactions.** Don't jump to conclusions. Give yourself time to process what was said and understand the speaker's feelings before you respond. Wait until you have all the information before you make inaccurate assumptions.
- **Don't Make Generalizations.** Be specific and direct. Concentrate on this particular personal issue. Do not change the subject, stick to the issue until it is resolved.
- **Use "I" Statements.** "I" statements help to express your own feelings, attitudes and desires. Using these types of messages will avoid putting the other person on the defensive. Saying statements such as "I am feeling unhappy..." allows you to express your feelings without criticizing the other person.

About Sex

- **Discuss Abstinence, Sex, and Safer Sex.** You have the right to decide whether or not you want to have sex, and you should discuss this decision either way. If you decide not to have sex, talk about this with your partner. If the other person does not respect your decision, then he/she is not respecting you. If you decide you might want to have sex, plan a time to talk about what you want before you are intimately involved. Be honest about your sexual history and your sexual health. Discuss and make mutual decisions on your safer sex options. Go together to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- **Seek Clarification.** If you are getting mixed messages about what another person wants, especially if it is during sex, ask about these messages. It can be sexy to ask someone what she/he wants — be specific. If someone isn't sure whether they want to do something or not, assume the answer is no and stop. It is okay to wait until you are sure.
- **"NO" Can Be Said Many Ways.** "No" never means "maybe" or "yes." Silence is not consent — if your partner is not responding, stop and ask whether what you are doing is okay. To give consent, a person must be physically and mentally capable of making the decision — if a person is unconscious, intoxicated, or under the influence of drugs, she/he cannot give consent.