

National Relationships Repair Month

The Importance of Listening

This report is part of Third Week of the
["National Relationship Repair Month"](#).

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The Importance of Listening

Repairing a relationship rests on dealing with conflict in a healthy way, as we've been discussing, and dealing with conflict relies on really learning to listen to what is being said to you. Anger creates a hostility filter, and all that you hear is negatively toned.

Allowing your anger to take hold of your marriage relationship means that you always need to know where the alleged "perpetrator" (your "enemy") is and what he/she is "plotting." Empathy is very difficult to obtain, and it is very difficult to understand someone's communicated message clearly if you are not practicing empathy.

Taking on your spouse's point of view (empathy) can be excruciating when in the throes of anger, but with practice it can become second nature to ask the right questions. You can train yourself through this program to realize that conflict is generated by the needs of both sides looking for solutions. Once you begin doing so, you will see that the need to include the other side's point of view is vital.

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How to Speak and Listen

During any conflict, especially one that involved confrontation about a disputed method of action, putting the emphasis on your feelings and not blaming the other is very important.

Speak from the position of “I”, and avoid beginning statements with “Because you...”

In your relationship, you really want to create an environment where no one can be attacked or criticized for stating honestly what they think or feel. Value the act of being truthful and open as more important than the act of determining who is right or wrong.

Speaking and listening from the position of the self is immensely useful in creating this environment.

If someone states an “I message” (i.e., “I think ____.” or “It makes me feel ____.”) there can be no argument about the fact that the feeling exists. It obviously does exist. There is no “Well you did ____ and well, you just took ____ the wrong way” to waffle with.

The issue is no longer just what was done, but how actions make others feel in the context of your personal romantic relationship:

- How do you affect the other person?
- How do they affect you?

Of course, after acknowledging having heard the other’s thoughts and feelings, it is very appropriate to say “This is how what you said affects me.” Now you are talking in the ‘This is about me’ realm.

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Conversely, when you respond to someone else's thoughts or feelings by telling them that they "have no right" to have those thoughts or feelings, then you are operating in the realm of "This is about you."

What is of the utmost importance is to notice when "blame-shifting" begins to leak into your speech.

Saying: "I feel angry when you are twenty minutes late and you don't call me," allows you to accept your feelings better than saying: "You make me so mad by being late."

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Here are some examples:

Assertion Message:

When _____

I feel _____

Because _____

In real-time:

When you did not pick me up from work as we arranged and didn't call me, I felt forgotten and angry, because I had to take the bus and got home very late.

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Equal Opportunity Environment

By allowing each other to have “rights,” that is, to have undisputed ownership of your own feelings and opinions, creates an environment of equality that is crucial to a healthy relationship.

What will often happen in an unhealthy relationship is that rights will be drawn up along lines of power and fear. Certain topics are off limits, certain actions are not allowed by certain people, and there are consequences for demanding something beyond your “means.”

What assertive, rather than oppressive, communication does is facilitate the appropriate use of expressing feelings and needs without offending or taking away the rights of others. Not only that, things actually get resolved.

This is because, when ‘I statements’ are used, there is also an ‘out’ given. An ‘out’ is when a person says what he or she needs to feel satisfied. There is not just a rant about the other person’s horrible inadequacies. There is an understanding made that one spouse trusts the other enough to both 1) approach them with a problem and 2) approach them with a request for change. Since a request is made, it can be responded to and granted.

When oppressive communication reigns, no requests are made because problems are not allowed to exist. Each spouse will not stand to have anything negative said about their actions, so negative actions are not discussed. No requests are made for positive change, even if they are desired.

And as much as we’d like to think we can read each other’s minds because we’re just so “perfect” for each other, the fact of the matter is that no relationship functions on meeting unspoken needs. Problems must be aired

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during healthy conflict, and emphatic requests made be made, if growth is to be had.

When no request is made, the expression of frustration becomes just a spewing of feelings, too often giving the listener too many options of responding. The result is usually a defensive response, because hearing to the barrage of negative emotions arouses an immediate defensive response, such as leaving, shouting back, slamming the door in anger, etc. It is clear enough that feeling accused, impotent to repair and blamed cause an extra confusion, where it is not easy to understand what to do.

People in this situation need to learn what to do to rescue the moment and repair the relationship in a small aspect. If practiced, the 'empathic request' model will eliminate the bulk of the needless arguments that occur because of character attacks or not saying what is wanted or needed to end the conflict.

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Doing Reflective Listening

Reflective listening consists of paying respectful attention to the content and feeling of the speaking person, so that you are both hearing and understanding their message.

Listening is not simply hearing what the other person is saying; listening is actively processing and interacting with the words of the other person for better understanding. In order to do this, it is important to concentrate on the speaker alone.

Listening is giving your physical and psychological attention to another person in a communication situation. Face the person speaking to you and lean slightly toward him or her. Establishing good eye contact, avoid distraction, keep an interested silence and arrange to have your conversation in a comfortable place (if possible).

Have you ever delivered a message to someone who totally misunderstood your intent? If you're like most people, that has happened to you more times than you care to remember. Being misunderstood is a very common human experience, so when we say something important to someone, we all want to be as clear as possible.

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The components of reflective listening can be broken down into certain responses:

- Acknowledgment responses: “Sure...; I see....; Yes....”
- Reflecting content: “This issue is causing you this problem.”
- Reflecting feelings: “You are feeling _____ with me/this person.”
- Reflecting meanings (feelings + content): “You feel _____ when this happens.”
- Summarizing (arriving at a pattern): “You are struggling with this issue consistently happening and making you feel _____.”

What About Doing This Kind Of Verbal Techniques To Show Appreciation?

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You can also use this style of communication when you want to appreciate something positive in your partner's behavior:

Appreciative Assertion Messages examples:

When _____ you take care of buying groceries for us each week

I feel _____ very grateful

Because _____ is a task done we can rely on; gives us more time to be together

Be sure to observe something that is real, and consistent, and good....

When _____ you are there to listen to my work challenges

I feel _____ very privileged

Because _____ all makes more sense with your support.

Now, try yours:

Imagine the person, recollect the aspects you feel grateful for, and appreciate them in this way:

When _____ (describe the action)

I feel _____ (describe the feeling)

Because _____ (describe the impact of the action)

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Conclusion

Practice, practice and practice!

This is a new and very powerful behavior: being able to really listen, and to say the words of appreciation can make of you the best person to be with. So, keep trying....and train yourself in finding positive aspects of your loved ones to appreciate.

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Also From Creative Conflicts

 <p><u>"Stop Your Passive Aggressive Behaviour": A Solution Just for Passive Aggressive Men!</u></p>	 <p><u>"The Tao of Anger": How to manage anger in your relationships.</u></p>	 <p><u>"Turn Conflicts Into Love": Handle conflict wisely and watch your love grow.</u></p>
 <p><u>"Boosting your Self-Esteem": The Source Of Your Life Energy!</u></p>	 <p><u>"Healing Emotional Abuse": How to heal after emotional abuse.</u></p>	 <p><u>"Recovering from Passive Aggression": How to heal after a passive aggressive relationship.</u></p>

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