

10 Concepts for Successful Communication

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.
Genesis 2:25 (ESV)*

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)*

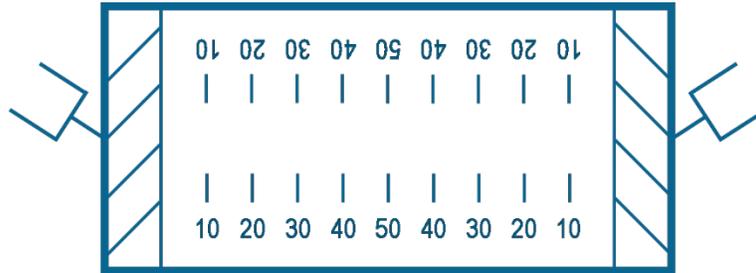
The worst way to communicate is to say nothing or do nothing to confirm that others understand you. The best communication is intentional, honest, intimate, affirming, and confirming.

Unresolved miscommunication increases the likelihood of fruitless conflict.

Implement these concepts when communication with your partner is not working well.

1. The best communication starts with vulnerability. Communicating well while hiding your deepest feelings, thoughts, or insecurities is not possible. Your partner needs a clear picture of where you are emotionally to fully understand you.
2. Your past affects your communication. No matter how much you've put the past behind you, your current emotional well-being is a product of the good and the bad you've endured over the years.
3. Good communication requires intentionally and persistently pursuing your partner. Finding the right balance takes time and skill. If you are too aggressive, the conversation becomes too heated. If you are too passive, the conversation lacks enough energy to keep you engaged. Good communication means finding the optimal connection level.
4. Don't assume your partner knows what you want or even what you are thinking. You must tell them every time. Hearing "I know" is better than not clearly explaining your needs to your partner which might result in a bitter fight.
5. Ask for permission to talk. Is your partner ready to hear what you have to say? Scheduling a time to talk is better than spontaneously dumping your ill-timed complaint on your partner. Ask if there is a better time of day to talk. Get their buy-in so you know they will be ready to try to receive what you have to say.
6. Realize you don't have to resolve the misunderstanding or conflict right now. Unless this is a life-or-death situation (if it is, you need more help than improving communication), you have days and weeks to continue talking about your concerns. Spread out the work over a longer period to decrease the volatility of the communication. Learn to recognize that you are okay in the present moment (you aren't going to die tomorrow without the resolution).

7. Seek understanding before agreement. You'll be better off when you understand each other, even if you continue to vehemently disagree. Disagreement is a different problem than misunderstanding. If you reach a clear disagreement you no longer have a communication problem, you have a negotiation problem.
8. Your partner isn't meant to completely satisfy your need for security (or love, or significance, or . . .). If you are putting the full burden of your emotional stability onto your partner, you will inevitably end up in an intense struggle for attention.



9. If your conversation goes all over the place or becomes extreme and unproductive, you need more structure. Structure provides a playing field with an out-of-bounds line, a game clock, game rules, and a goal line. No one has fun playing where you make up the rules as you go.
10. If you've attempted the first 9 principles on your own without success, you need a referee to enforce the rules. When your attempts lead to ever-escalating conflict, misunderstanding, and hopelessness, you need a counselor. A counselor can hear your concerns when your partner is unable to meet your needs and can much more easily remain calm and neutral. Your partner may be too needy to meet your needs. Instead of increasing unresolved frustration, a counselor helps absorb some of the hurt feelings by being available to listen, understand, translate, and communicate with hope what is good and true.

Next Steps

- Instead of abruptly starting a conversation, ask your partner if now is a good time to talk about your concerns (be specific about what these are).
- Start with smaller, more achievable goals. Seek understanding before agreement.
- Set a time limit for especially draining conversations. Start your time together understanding that you don't have to solve everything right now. Balance serious time with fun time.
- If you don't finish the conversation, schedule another time to continue. If you are still upset and wanting to talk, but your partner isn't, find a neutral, trusted friend or counselor to speak with so you will be in a better place when your partner is ready to talk again.
- Keep at the problem until you reach a mutually satisfying resolution. Avoiding the conflict doesn't prevent it from growing and festering. It won't go away; eventually your debt will come due.
- If you've found this helpful and want more, check out my book *Marriage from Roots to Fruits* because it contains more in-depth discussion of communication, repentance, forgiveness, healing, conflict resolution, and trust.
- When all else fails, seek the help of a good counselor who can join with both of you to help you become unstuck.