



# Effective communication for couples

Effective communication plays a central role in healthy relationships. Healthy communication fosters trust, intimacy, respect, and mutual understanding.

At the same time, poor communication between couples leads to dissatisfaction and deterioration in relationships, such as marital burnout.

This worksheet provides helpful tips and strategies for effective couples communication and includes exercises you can practice at home to strengthen your relationship and deepen your emotional connection.

## What is effective couple communication?

Healthy relationships with effective communication include the following core components:

- **Active listening:** Mindfully listening and giving full attention to each other, without interrupting, to give each person the time to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs.
- **Assertive communication:** Whether providing constructive feedback or expressing a need, assertive communication is a healthy and effective way to communicate. When communicating assertively, you express thoughts and feelings directly without aggression or passivity but with directness, empathy, and mutual respect.
- **Emotional validation:** Another key communication skill is acknowledging the other person's feelings without defensiveness, like minimizing or dismissing their point of view.
- **Conflict resolution skills:** Conflict is a normal part of relationships. However, repairing conflict requires willingness, accountability, and practice, and it is a crucial part of healthy relationship functioning.
- **Mutual respect:** Valuing each other's thoughts, feelings, and points of view, even in conflicts.
- **Patience in relationships:** Allowing each other to express themselves and process their feelings in their own time. It can be challenging if one partner is an external processor, always ready to talk, and the other person processes internally and needs time and space to reflect before discussing an issue. Giving each other respective time is crucial to effective communication.
- **Constructive feedback:** Offering and being open to feedback is part of healthy couples' communication. Through constructive feedback, couples can focus on open dialogue rather than blame and work towards problem-solving rather than rupture.
- **Showing appreciation:** Each person in a relationship plays a vital role. Acknowledging and showing appreciation for a partner's qualities provides positive reinforcement and strengthens the emotional bond between the couple.
- **Taking responsibility:** Owning up to your mistakes matters. By acknowledging and taking responsibility for their actions, words, or behaviors, couples deepen the trust and respect in the relationship and strengthen their emotional connection.



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## Reflection

Now, reflect on these communication skills and your relationship, and answer the following questions:

How well do you listen to each other without interrupting?

Do you feel comfortable expressing your needs and feelings? If not, why?

How do you typically handle conflicts or disagreements?

Are there specific times when you feel your communication is most effective? Why do you think that is?



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## How to improve communication

The following list includes exercises to improve your communication. Pick a couple to try between therapy sessions, and you can discuss your reflections during the next appointment.

### “I statement” exercise

The purpose of the “I statement” exercise is to allow you both to express your feelings.

How to do it:

- Complete the sentence: “*I feel [emotion] when [situation], and I need [need].*”
- For example, “I feel upset when you change your plans at the last minute and don’t tell me. I need you to consult me next time.”

Try it below:

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_, and I need \_\_\_\_\_.

### Set aside time to talk

Regularly scheduled communication meetings are vital, especially if you live together. You might call this check-in a team meeting or an admin meeting. Its purpose is to discuss things that you individually or collectively feel need attention, like the division of household responsibilities, planning family trips, getting on the same page about health-related issues, and other important topics.

How to do it:

- Pick a mutually accessible time each week and mark it in your calendar.
- Devise an agenda of things you regularly need to discuss with your partner.
- Take 30 to 60 minutes to discuss these items with your partner and check in about how the meetings are going and if you need to make any changes.

### Active listening exercise

The purpose of active listening is to ensure that both partners feel safe expressing their feelings and feel heard and understood.

How to do it:

- One person speaks for 3-5 minutes about a topic. The listener does not interrupt or jump to conclusions, and instead, reflects to the speaker what they heard: “What I hear you saying is...”
- Ask your partner clarifying questions, like “Would you like to problem-solve this situation?” or “Can you tell me more about...”
- Switch roles and repeat.

**Reflection:** What was it like to listen without interrupting?



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## Appreciation exercise

This exercise reinforces your emotional connection and appreciation of one another's qualities.

How to do it:

- Write or say three things you appreciate about your partner.
- For instance, *"I appreciate how supportive you've been while I've been feeling stressed at work this week."*
- Then, take turns.

I appreciate:

I appreciate:

I appreciate:

## Picking your communication exercises

Write down two exercises you'll practice before your next therapy session.