

Setting The Stage for Effective Communication With Your Loved Ones **By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

When you want to solve some important relationship or logistics issue, you help assist help ensure your effectiveness by appropriately setting the stage for communication. Remember these guidelines while trying to solve a problem in your relationship.

1. Think about what you want to say beforehand. Make sure that the issue that you are getting ready to bring up is actually the one you want to problem solve about. One of the causes of couples struggling in problem-solving is that they are working on different issues. A common example is one where couples are in conflict over some logistic issue like taking out the trash. One partner may actually be talking about the trash as an issue and the other is trying to problem solve about not feeling loved, and his/her not taking out the trash is a trigger for feeling that.
2. Identify a good time for a long discussion. Find a time slot that gives you enough time to work through a problem. Find a time when you won't be interrupted. Turn off diversionary electronics.
3. Be prepared to listen to your significant other's point of view and to compromise on a solution. Use active or reflectively listening when your partner is making their case. Reflective listening is simply telling the other person what you heard him/her say, without an editorial comment. Don't defend or argue with their perception of events.
4. Use "I" messages instead of "You" messages. Start conversations with "I". "I have a problem that I would like to discuss. Use "I want, "I need", "I feel", and "I will".
5. Avoid absolutes like "always" and "never". Give specific examples like this: "Yesterday when you said that you didn't want to go to my mother's house, I felt disappointed, hurt, and angry". Not, "You never want to go to my parents' and you just don't care that it hurts my feelings or that I am angry about it!"
6. Stay on topic. Don't use Dirty Fight Tactics.
7. De-escalate as needed. De-escalation is about bringing down the emotional level of a conversation. You cannot problem-solve, when tempers are flaring and you are using dirty fight tactics. When you feel compelled to use a dirty fight tactic, your blood pressure is rising or your temper is coming up, you know that it is time to de-escalate.

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