

How Simply Talking Can Help Restore Intimacy

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

The ability to convey love, affection, and commitment rests on the ability to effectively communicate and problem solve.

Without appropriate communication, relationships struggle to maintain the affection, the connection, and the sense of belonging and acceptance that are so important to all individuals. With around half of all marriages ending in divorce, it is especially important to take steps to maintain the individual and family benefits of a marriage. A pro-active stance in maintaining the good will, good feelings, and individual happiness of partners goes a long way toward keeping marital stability.

The least vulnerable marriage is one in which both partners are satisfied. Both partners in a marriage must be happy or the marriage is vulnerable. One of the major causes of divorce is conflict and ineffective communication/problem solving. Another is infidelity. Both of these problem areas for couples can be fixed or prevented.

Many couples believe that they have good communication, yet find themselves falling short of their own expectations when the conversation gets heated. Sometimes couples believe that they communicate well, when in fact, they spend very little time together, and even less, actually interacting with each other.

Often one partner will want and need more interaction and communication time while the other needs less, which puts their needs in conflict. When couples don't know that they are trying to solve problems on two different levels, unresolved relationship issues are often projected onto seemingly unrelated problems. So, instead of talking about not feeling loved enough, feeling taken for granted, or feeling unimportant, a couple will end up arguing about taking out the trash.

Taking out the trash is the issue for one partner. To the other, the meaning of repeatedly asking someone to take out the trash, means "s/he doesn't love me" or "I'm not important". When you identify that you need more quality time together, without distractions, and you take action to accomplish this goal, good things begin to happen.

Partners, secure in their commitment, feel confident in their ability to weather the changes that their marriage will go through over time. Change leads to stress. Individual partners experience shared stressors and individual stressors. Couples can use the relationship as a strength to deal with shared and individual stressors, or they can

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individually problem solve and try to sell their individual solutions to each other, thereby setting themselves up for more conflict and more stress. Effective communication makes it easier for couples to help and support each other with stress.

There are many ways to learn to effectively communicate. Couples counseling, marital enrichment programs, and structured or semi-structured communication exercises are all possibilities. One of the common goals of couples counseling is to learn to identify when you are trying to problem solve on different levels, and how to move to the same level for solutions. Couple's Feelings Meetings and The Honey Jar, a couple's conversation starter, are examples of helpful communication exercises.

If you are a spouse or a couple trying to recover the positive feelings you once had in your relationship, take action. It is not a good idea to do nothing, hoping that something will change. Change is inevitable, but it may not be the type of change you are hoping for.



"The Honey Jar" is a conversation starter for couples. It consists of 250 sentence stems, each one serving as an open-ended prompt to generate discussion. The Honey Jar is more than a jar of sentence stems. The Honey Jar was field tested by real couples for therapeutic value. It can assist couples in restoring a sense of self-confidence in re-establishing their connection and commitment. As couples use their time, attention and willingness to take risks with each other, a close, loving connection can re-emerge.

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