

COMMUNICATION  
AND  
CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

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*A SHORT COURSE IN ATTACKING EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF THE  
PROBLEM--*

WIFE "I've got nothing to DO all day?? I put in three times the hours you do!"

HUSBAND "Doing what?! I remember when we used to have REAL meals - not T.V. dinners!"

WIFE "You agreed on TV dinners when I <sup>†</sup>ook the part-time job. You are as unreasonable as your mother. I suppose you have told her about the TV dinners, too!"

HUSBAND "Well, she asked me how come you were putting on all that weight, and I told her it couldn't be our dinners. TV trays don't hold enough food to feed a cat!"

WIFE (CRYING) "You don't love me!! All you want is a housekeeper who cooks like your mother. You're cruel! Boo Hoo! You're mean! Boo Hoo Hoo!"

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A woman talking to a marriage counselor: "When I got married, I was looking for an ideal - then it became an ordeal - and now I want a new deal!"

**UNFAIR!**

"Am I supposed to jump up and down and lick his boots?"

"You did it only because you feel guilty!"

"Anyway, look at how filthy this room is!"

"You never let me finish!"

"I try much harder than you."

"Why make a big deal out of nothing?"

"But, that's not true. I didn't....."

"All right, we'll see what you say when I divorce you!"

"You're just like your father, that no-good bum!"

"How can you be so stupid?"

"That's all in your mind."

"Boo-Hoo; Boo-Hoo."

"Sure, sure, I'll bet!"

" \_\_\_\_\_ "

### *YOUR OPINION ON COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE*

(A statement is made in each case. Write "Agree" or "Disagree" after each statement).

1. It is sometimes necessary to nag another person in order to get him/her to respond.
2. Too much talking is more of a problem in marriages than not enough talking.
3. We communicate more through our non-verbal behavior than through the actual words we use.
4. Men are more logical and less emotionally inclined than women.
5. If a person "wears a mask" in marriage and then starts to become honest, it can lead to more conflict than previously existed.
6. It is a good policy to bring outside opinions (especially relatives) into a disagreement.
7. Crusades to change a spouse's behavior usually backfire, so we should learn to be more accepting and simply pray about it.
8. Most "in-law" problems come from the mother-in-law, not the father-in-law.
9. Sometimes to save a marriage it is necessary to accept irritating or irresponsible behavior on the part of the spouse.
10. It is sometimes necessary in a marital relationship to modify the truth in order to build a relationship and lessen hurt.
11. If our mate does something that bothers us, we should let him know and try to change that behavior.
12. In communication it is more important to use the word "you" rather than "I."
13. A man is apt to be the less verbal member of a marriage.
14. The Bible teaches that quarreling is wrong. Therefore, married couples should not be involved in quarrels with one another.

WHICH TERMS DESCRIBE YOU?  
WHICH TERMS DESCRIBE YOUR SPOUSE?

YOU

SPOUSE

PRECISE

ORGANIZED

DISCIPLINED

OUTGOING

INTROVERTED

IMPULSIVE

CAREFUL

EXPRESSIVE

MOODY

CARING

TENSE

PERSISTENT

SENSITIVE

HUMOROUS

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

### BLOCKS TO HELPFUL COMMUNICATION

1. WITHDRAWAL - Other activity or topic change.
2. DISALLOWANCE OF FEELINGS - "That's stupid, dumb, etc." Also, denunciation and belittlement. Solution is understanding.
3. DEFENSIVENESS - "You're NEVER home anymore!" "What do you mean? I was home on a Tuesday evening only a week or so ago!" (Never faces the problem).
4. COUNTER-ATTACK - "Husband/wife situations"
5. SUPER-GUILT - "I just don't know how you put up with me!" (Doesn't have to change behavior any, just have to feel guilty).
6. "PEACE AT ANY PRICE" - Refusing to deal with the problem.

"WHAT GRIPES YOU WHEN IT COMES DOWN TRYING TO COMMUNICATE?"

### COMMUNICATION DETRACTORS

Overtalk	Counter-complaining
Undertalk	Topic avoidance
Fast talk	Topic shifting
Slow talk	Topic persistence
Loud talk	Remote statements
Quiet talk	Over responsiveness
Emotional talk	Under responsiveness
Verbal obtrusions	Excessive question-asking
Abusive talk	Dogmatic assertion
Acknowledgment deficit	Presumptive attribution
Positive talk deficit	Double-level messages
No eye contact	

**OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING**  
**(CONDITIONS, SITUATIONS AND ATTITUDES WHICH INFLUENCE**  
**OUR LISTENING)**

**I. DEFENSIVENESS**

1. Why he is wrong, and I am right.
2. Thinking how to "shoot down" their words.
3. Carrying on conversation on the inside.
4. Become more sensitive to situations in which we raise our defenses.

**II. MORE TALK THAN LISTEN**

1. Interrupting - James 1:19
2. Encourage others to speak.
3. Be interested in what is said.
4. Stimulated by impatience, so be more relaxed and patient.

**III. OVERLOAD**

1. No time to ask questions.
2. Listener can't digest information.
3. Speak in shorter periods.

**IV. INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS**

1. Ways to handle.
2. Postpone and stop and listen.

**V. EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS - TV, radio, etc.**

**VI. FATIGUE - Mental and physical**

**VII. BARRIERS TO OTHER INDIVIDUALS**

1. Opposite sex and ages groups
2. Ethnic minorities, certain personality types
3. Politics, religion, physical appearance
4. Education, geographical, lifestyle

**DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING**

Hearing is the physical process of receiving sound - listening is a skill that a person learns.

*A MARRIAGE GROWS AND PRODUCES BEST WHEN--*

1. There are open and honest communication patterns.
2. Decisions and roles are based on giftedness.
3. When partners can creatively resolve conflicts.
4. Each accepts and encourages the uniqueness of the other.
5. When each can love.
6. There is an understanding and acceptance of the purpose of marriage.
7. Each person has a healthy self-concept and can be a giver.
8. When spouses are not only lovers, but friends.



### *GOALS FOR COMMUNICATION IN A CHRISTIAN FAMILY*

1. Awareness of problem.
2. Understanding.
3. Awareness of needs.
4. Respect.
5. Listen.
6. Tolerance of differences.
7. Learning to feel with
8. Priorities - God; Mate; Children; Work.

### *PRINCIPLES OF CHANGE*

1. Take responsibility for your own actions.
2. A spouse must feel understood by his mate to be open to suggestions.
3. Lack of willingness to forgive is often greater than the offense.
4. If offended, do not assume it was intentional. Go to the offender and talk it over.
5. Be an example, rather than a judge.
6. Rehearse and visualize what you plan to say and do.

### SIX MESSAGES INVOLVED IN COMMUNICATING

1. What you *mean* to say.
2. What you *actually* said.
3. What the other person *hears*.
4. What the other person *thinks he hears*.
5. What the other person *says about what you said*.
6. What you think the other person *said about what you said*.

## COMMUNICATION

### A TOPICAL APPROACH FROM PROVERBS

THE POWER OF OUR WORDS: Proverbs 11:9; 12:18; 15:4; 18:8; 18:21; 25:11; 26:22

THE SOURCE OF OUR WORDS: Proverbs 4:20-23; 6:12,14,18; 15:38; 16:2,23

LISTEN: Proverbs 15:31; 18:13,15; 19:20; 21:28

THINKING BEFORE YOU SPEAK: Proverbs 12:18; 14:29; 15:28; 16:32; 21:23;  
26:4; 29:20

TIMING OF OUR WORDS: Proverbs 15:23; 25:11

DON'T TALK TOO MUCH: Proverbs 10:19; 11:12,13; 13:3; 17:27,28; 18:2; 20:19;  
21:23

AVOID NAGGING WITH OUR WORDS: Proverbs 17:9; 21:9

USE A CALM, SOFT ANSWER: Proverbs 15:1,4; 16:1; 25:15

IGNORE INSULTS: Proverbs 12:16; 19:11

SPEAK THE TRUTH: Proverbs 12:17,22; 16:13; 19:5; 26:18,19,22; 28:23; 29:5

AVOID QUARRELS: Proverbs 17:14; 20:3; 26:21

### *A MODEL FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE*

1. Recognize conflict issues.
2. Listen carefully to the other person.
3. Select the most appropriate time.
4. Specifically define the problem, or conflict issue.
  - (1) "How would you define the problem?"
  - (2) "How would you think the other person would define the problem?"
  - (3) "What behaviors contribute to the conflict in your opinion?"
  - (4) "What behaviors do you think the other person sees as contributing to the conflict?"
  - (5) "What are the issues of agreement and disagreement?"
5. Identify your own contribution to the problem.
  - (1) Choose one word.
  - (2) State the word or subject in one complete sentence.
  - (3) Take responsibility and tell your partner the reason for the discussion.
6. Identify alternate solutions.
7. Decide on a mutually acceptable solution.
  - (1) What are the steps in implementation?
  - (2) What are the possible outcomes?
8. Achieve and resolve new behaviors.

COMMUNICATIONS  
WHAT WE TALK ABOUT

1. What expectations did you have for your marriage before you married?
2. What were some expectations your spouse had for you?
3. How did you and your spouse become aware of each other's expectations?
4. What do you do when your expectations are not fulfilled?
5. If anything would need to be changed in "communication" in your home, what do you feel it would be? Why? Is it possible to change it?
6. What are five main topics of family conversation in the morning? During dinner?
7. What topics does each family member tend to talk about?
8. Who talks the most in your family?
9. What topics of conversation do your family members avoid? Why?