

# Practical Steps to Fixing Broken Communication With Your Spouse

Communication can be difficult. You and your spouse seem to speak different languages. Attempts at talking seem to end up in a fight or in someone walking away. Emotions flare up easily. You want to communicate better, but what do you say? It would help to have some healthy communication examples you could adapt for your own marriage.

Your words have a powerful effect on your spouse. Words can emasculate your husband, rip your wife apart, or bring out the worst defensiveness in your spouse. Your words also have the potential to sooth your spouse's volatile emotions, solve serious problems, and open the door to true intimacy.

Learning to hold your tongue and do your homework before communicating about something difficult or negative is a huge step. In planning what to say when you do talk, these examples of what to say and what not to say will show you what it means to:

- Express what you need, think, feel, and want clearly
- Demonstrate respect and love for your spouse
- Communicate with a goal of understanding first
- Solve problems instead of attacking the person

Don't try this until you have an open heart. Once your heart is open, see how these examples may help you develop some healthier communication patterns in your marriage.

## **You're Angry Over Money**

Old way: "How could you do this again? You must think we're made of money. All you care about is what you want, and you

never think about the rest of the family. You always spend money without even considering how I might feel. You just keep getting us deeper in debt, and we'll never get out. If I had known how irresponsible you are I wouldn't have married you. Your selfishness will get us out on the street one day."

Why it doesn't work: These words blame your spouse for your feelings. They disparage your spouse's character and are guaranteed to make your spouse defensive. Should your spouse ever want to talk about money, these words guarantee they will be even less likely to do so in the future. These words show disrespect, and take one incident and enlarge it into a description of your whole relationship.

Healthier option: "Honey, I just tried to use the credit card to buy gas and it was declined. When I discover you've spent money without us talking about it I feel disrespected and that you don't care about me. It makes me afraid that our money won't last as we need it to. I want to feel as though we are in a partnership in our marriage. Can we sit down and make a plan for spending that we can both live with?"

Why this works: You are describing a specific behavior and how that impacts you personally. You demonstrate that you value your relationship and want to make it better. You show you are open to listening to your spouse's point of view, that you value their feelings and that you want to work for a solution.

### **You're Lonely and Upset Over Your Spouse's Emotional Distance**

Old way: "There you go again, refusing to talk to me. Can't you ever show a little kindness, a little consideration? You must have a heart of stone. All I do is take care of your needs, and you never even say thank you. Marriage is a two-way street, you know. If you'd tear yourself away from your precious TV and just talk to me once in a while, maybe we could have a relationship. Why do I even try?"

Why it doesn't work: While criticizing your spouse, these

words actually make it all about you. They blame your spouse for your unhappiness and assume your spouse doesn't care. Your spouse is certain to respond defensively. These words close the door to connecting, and blames your spouse for the entire problem. They make understanding and connection even less likely than before.

Healthier option: "Honey, I'm feeling really stressed. It would help a lot to talk with you. When you keep paying attention to the TV instead of focusing on me I feel unheard and even lonely. I know you need time to relax, but would you find a way to give me some undivided attention? You don't have to fix anything. When you listen to me it helps me feel better, and I really need that from you right now."

Why it works: These words show what about your spouse's present behavior is hurtful, and what your spouse could do that would make things better. (That helps men, especially, know how to respond.) This shows your spouse that you value who they are to you, and makes a simple specific request. It makes your spouse part of the solution while respecting their needs also.

Communication is a skill you can learn. You can express your own feelings, needs, desires and more while still honoring, respecting and loving your spouse.

Adapt these ideas to your own communication challenges, and the connection between you and your spouse will only get better.

Your Turn: How might your communication with your spouse change by adapting these examples in your own marriage? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

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