

The Power of Kind Words

Kind words can do so many things. They can affirm, show appreciation, praise, support, give feedback, paint word pictures, brainstorm, share details of an event, write love notes and love our mate and his or her children. These are only a few ways to create intimate communication.

But every one of these takes a conscious choice to communicate with kindness. Even when you're in the midst of a stressful situation—or angry as a hornet—you can still maintain the right heart attitude as you convey information, discuss difficult topics and even vent.

In whatever situation you are in, you can show your respect, support and love by consciously choosing your words and speaking them with a kind and loving attitude. Yes, it takes diligence and restraint, but if you choose to be careful about what you say and how you say it, you can succeed, even in the toughest situation.

Caring for the Other

Kind communication is other-centered and honest. Using “I” statements instead of the accusatory “You” statements is a simple way to communicate well.

Instead of saying, “You never clean the counter,” you can say, “I feel unappreciated when I have to always clean the kitchen counter.” It's a simple twist with a big reward. The listener feels empathy for you, instead of feeling accused by you.

For both Dale and I, this type of communication takes a conscious effort since we didn't learn it as we grew up. We have to choose to be careful about what we say, and we try to avoid saying things that will hurt the other.

Though there are times when one of says something that irritates the other, we try to assess if we really need to

address it or whether we need to let it go. Our motto is: "If we can't say something nice, just don't say it!"

Listening to the Other

Intentionally listening to someone shows you love and care about him or her. It takes concentration, acceptance, empathy and choosing to care enough to hear what's behind the words. When you hear your future mate's heart, understand his or her message, and accept each other with all his or her shortcomings, you create a place of safety, a place to build and mature as individuals and as a couple.

Many of us have never really learned to listen well. We've learned to be selective listeners—sifting information, ignoring details, and allowing ourselves to be distracted by everything around us.

In today's media-driven world, we are often living on information overload. We have concerns at work, at home, with the kids, with friends, in our community, in our nation and around the world. That breeds distraction, and we have to proactively be careful not to allow the cares of the world to break down our relationships; we have to choose to listen carefully to those we love.

To listen well, you have to be considerate of the other person's need to communicate with you. That means you have to choose to shut out the distractions around you and engage with that person with your whole being—your eyes, ears and heart. You need to give them your undivided attention. Sometimes just shutting off the music or muting the television shows interest and respect for the other and contributes to good communication. Other times, it might take going for a walk together or a drive to get away from the distractions of home.

Dale and I still struggle with this. We might be in separate rooms or even on separate floors, but we somehow think the other will magically tune in to what the other is saying. Over

time, we've begun to recognize times when we're best suited to talk and share, and the times when we're not.

We've learned that when we are driving in traffic, it's hard for us to concentrate on a deep discussion. Dale also knows that when I'm in my writing mode and on the computer, it's hard for me to listen well or try to have a discussion. We laugh about it. We try to do better. But the reality is that we're still working on improving our listening skills and changing our tendency to try to communicate when the other is busy or distracted.

Your objective is to find the right time to talk and then find out what he or she is really trying to say. It helps if once you've heard the person, you then verify what he or she actually said is really what you heard.

You have to be continually intentional to be good, kind communicators and listeners, because good communication takes a lifetime. So never stop working at it; that's what matters.

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