

Effective Communication: The Dyadic Model

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Stage 1: The Sender and Receiver of a Message

- The **sender** of the message is the person who is trying to express their thoughts, feelings and/or views to their partner.
- The **receiver** of the message is the person who is listening and trying to understand the message that is being sent.

Sender

Receiver

Responsibilities of the Sender of the Message

1. Choosing the right time and place

- Do not express yourself when you are very emotionally upset/distressed
- Step back and take a few minutes/hours to reflect on why you are upset

- Think about what you need to communicate to your partner
- Find a time and place to talk that is good for both of you
- Do not do this around your children, extended family and/or friends

2. Formulating and delivering a clear, specific message

Speak in a clear, direct manner that expresses what you specifically think and feel using the “I think/I feel” statement approach

3. You absolutely must NOT do any of the following:

- attack and/or criticize your partner
- accuse and/or blame them
- threaten them
- bring up the past or “old history”
- use global words like “always” or “never”
- use judgmental words or loaded terms
- make negative comparisons
- scream and/or yell
- swear at, or call, your partner names

4. Do not trigger your partner to become defensive:

- Using some, or all, of the above will make your partner defensive and render them much less likely to listen to you
- You will thus have failed at getting your point across and being understood
- Venting without being listened to or understood is waste of your energy

Example 1 – very poor communication:

“You always do this – you are always on your ipad when we try to spend quality time together. You really don’t get it – this infuriates me! My mother was right – I should never have married you!” (you then storm out of the room).

Example 2 - effective communication:

“John, I really look forward to spending quality couple time with you especially after the kids go to bed. I thus feel sad and disappointed when you focus so much on your ipad. I really love it when we focus on each other – it means a lot to me.

Responsibilities of the Receiver of the Message:

1. Practice deep, active listening

-Put your own thoughts and feelings aside for a few minutes and listen carefully and attentively to what your partner is saying

-This takes practice as most of us are horrible at listening!

2. Do not be formulating your counter-reply or “comeback” while your partner is talking.

-It is NOT your turn to express yourself!

3. Listen with the goal of understanding what your partner is saying

Put yourself in your partners “shoes” and try to relate and fully grasp what they are thinking and/or feeling.

Understanding does not necessarily mean you agree with what they are saying - it simply means you get their point of view and/or feelings.

It does not matter at this point in the communication sequence if you agree or not. It is imperative that you understand!

4. If you do not fully understand – ask questions to clarify

These should be simple, direct questions that they can answer and that will help you understand what they are thinking/feeling.

5. You absolutely must NOT do any of the following:

- interrupt your partner under any condition
- minimize and/or refute their reality – especially their feelings
- use what they are sharing with you against them
- bring up the past or “old history”
- show annoyance, irritation and/or frustration towards them
- threaten and/or manipulate them in any way

6. Remain open and receptive to what they are saying

Avoiding the items on the “do not do” list will convey the message that you are open and trying to understand.

7. Paraphrase what your partner just expressed in a simple and clear sentence or two:

After having listened carefully and understood your partner’s message, reiterate/summarize the key things they said focusing primarily on their feelings – this shows them that you understood.

Example of a good reflection:

“I understand that you feel really hurt and disappointed when I am on my ipad after the kids go to bed – you really look forward to spending quality couple time. I understand that this must be very frustrating for you”

A partner who wants to problem solve will go on to propose:

“Moving forward, I will make a strong effort to spend quality time connecting with you. I know that this is important for our relationship”.

Stage 2: When the Receiver Becomes the Sender of the Message

After listening attentively to your partner and fully understanding what they said, you could send a message yourself related to the issue at hand or another topic of concern to you.

You must follow the steps outlined earlier under “**Responsibilities of the Sender**”

Your partner (who is now the receiver) must follow the guidelines outlined under the “**Responsibilities of the Receiver**”

Stage 3: Conflict Resolution Phase

After you have each expressed your thoughts and feelings on a specific issue the following may happen:

1. You now better understand each other on the specific issue and you have more empathy for how your partner feels. This may now motivate you to try and meet your partner’s need -e.g., spend more quality time together.
2. If after effective communication you still do not agree on a solution – you then need to problem-solve further.
3. You could try to reach compromise – examples:

Is it OK if after spending one hour of couple time I use my ipad as it helps me to relax and unwind?

Could we spend couple time in a way that we both enjoy as I find it hard to just sit and not do an activity? Propose suggestions of things you could do that both you might enjoy.

Examples:

- watching a movie together
- going for a walk
- enrolling in a fun class/course
- taking a bath together
- giving each other a massage
- spending more quality time together could also improve your sex life

4. Arrive at a reciprocal agreement

Is there something your partner could do for you that would render you more open to compromise? If so, tell them what you feel you need.

When trying to problem solve together try to be open and receptive to your partner's needs and feelings and try to practice "**goodwill**" – do the right thing for your partner and the relationship.

When practiced regularly the effective communication skills outlined above will:

- reduce negative feelings between partners
- reduce conflict
- promote better understanding between partners
- promote greater empathy
- lead to better problem solve skills
- enhance emotional intimacy
- stimulate sexual intimacy
- protect your relationship from the hassles and challenges of daily life

5. Problem solving when you disagree with each other:

It's possible that even after thorough discussion and practicing the above techniques you may reach an impasse on an important issue or decision

In such situations you need to continue problem-solving and try to arrive at the **couple solution** to the issue.

The couple solution entails an agreement that you could both live with and not feel resentful towards each other. It entails a lot of goodwill and the ability to compromise for the well-being of the couple and/or the family.

Consider the following example:

Your partner believes in "living for today" and would like to take at least 2-3 vacations per year. You, on the other hand, feel strongly that one should save money and maximize your investments as much as possible to secure the family's future.

If after several thorough discussions employing the dyadic, effective communication model, you have not reached consensus – you need to find the **couple solution** that you could both live with.

Examples of possible couple solutions:

- agree to go on one long (more expensive) vacation per year and one short, less expensive one. Agree to invest the money you save.
- agree to go on two vacations every 2nd year and invest the money you save.
- try to find other examples of "living for today" that would not be as expensive as 2-3 family vacations per year.
- try to find other ways to reduce your household expenses so that you will have extra funds to take two vacations per year and save money.

