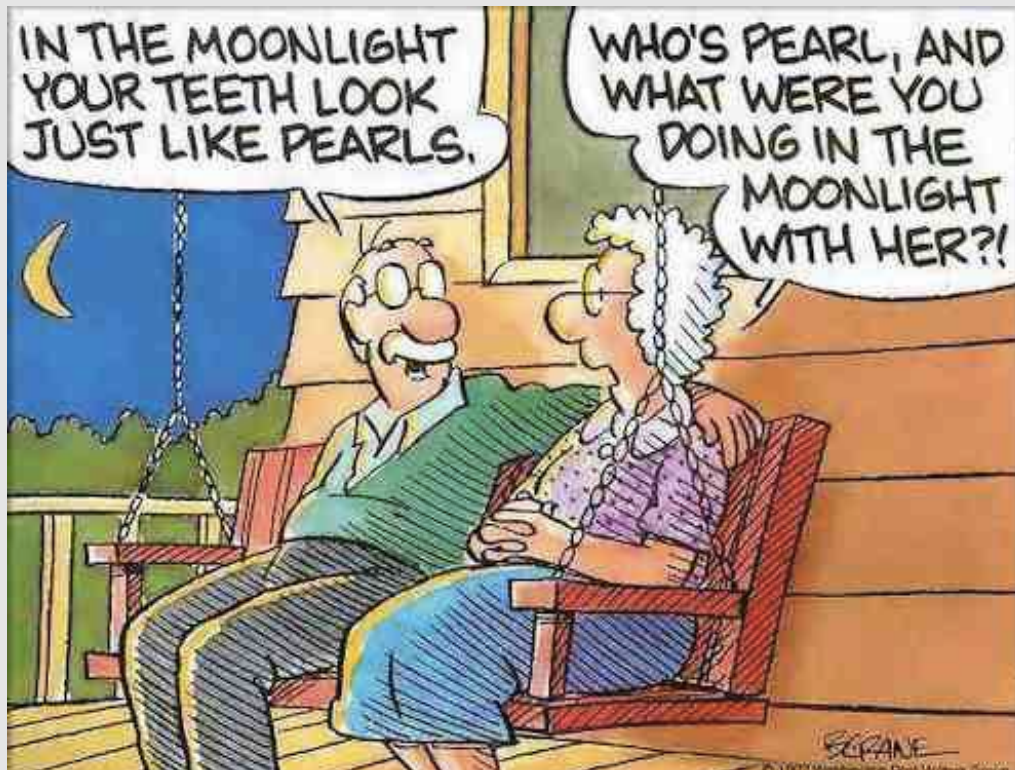


# Couples Counseling 101: Steps to Improve Communication

Catrina Spicer, MSW, LISW-S  
Outpatient Therapist

# Couples counseling 101: Steps to Improve Communication

- Understand the four basic styles of communication
- Learn effective and healthy ways to communicate
- Develop a plan for change



A missed opportunity to receive an appreciation

“Find some way every day to communicate genuine affection and appreciation toward your spouse.”

~John Gottman PhD

Time: 5 minutes every day

Total: 35 minutes a week.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work  
John Gottman PhD

# The Triple A's

- **A**wareness
- **A**nalyze
- **A**ction Plan

# Awareness

“To be aware of a single shortcoming in oneself is more useful than to be aware of a thousand in someone else.”

-Dalai Lama

# Four Styles of Communication

- Passive
- Aggressive
- Passive Aggressive
- Assertive

# The Passive Communicator

## Looks, Sounds and Behaves

Speaks softly

Slumped body posture

Poor eye contact

Trouble identifying own feelings

“No one considers my needs”

## The Impact

- Anxiety-life out of control
- Depression-feel stuck
- Confusion-ignore own feelings
- Resentment-needs are not being met.

# The Aggressive Communicator

## Looks, Sounds and Behaves

Speaks loudly

Talks over others

Dominating stance

Uses control and humiliation

Uses “you” statements

“I’m right. You are wrong”

## The Impact

- Difficult to feel safe around
- Not listening
- Breeds intimation and dislike
- Doesn’t take ownership
- Lack of intimacy



# The Passive Aggressive Communicator

## Looks, Sounds and Behaves

## The Impact

Appear passive but acting out

Smiley when angry

Mutters to self (what did you say?)

“I’m powerless so payback time”

Uses sarcasm a lot

Difficulty acknowledging anger

- Alienate from others
- Discharge resentment without resolution
- Diminishes **friendship** and **trust**
- Remain powerless and angry.



**"I once gave my husband the silent treatment for an entire week, at the end of which he declared, 'Hey, we're getting along pretty great lately!'"**

**— Bonnie McFarlane**



# The Assertive Communicator

## Looks, Sounds and Behaves

Verbalizes  
feelings  
clearly

Uses “I”  
statements

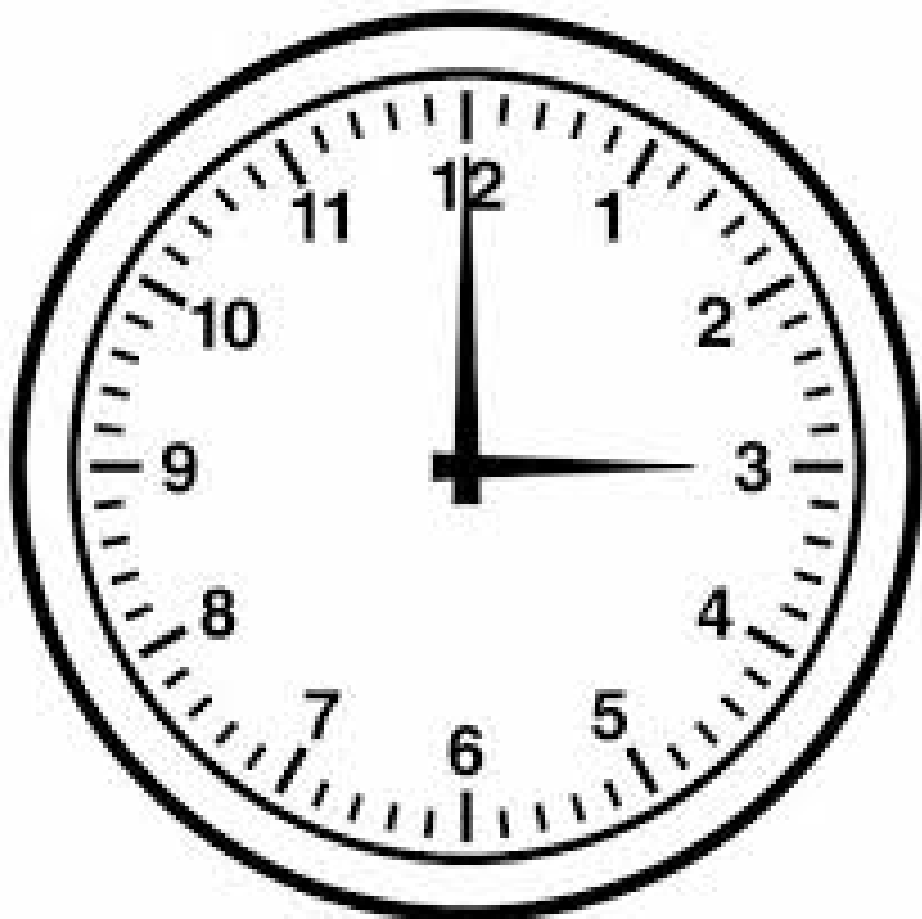
Relaxed body  
posture

Listens  
without  
interrupting

Expresses  
needs plainly

## The Impact

- Feels connected to others
- Self confident
- Treats others as equals
- Rights are respected
- Fosters intimacy, friendship and trust



Time to Analyze  
your current  
dominate style of  
communication  
(not your  
partners)

# Assertive Communication Skill

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_
- Because \_\_\_\_\_
- I need \_\_\_\_\_

# Barriers

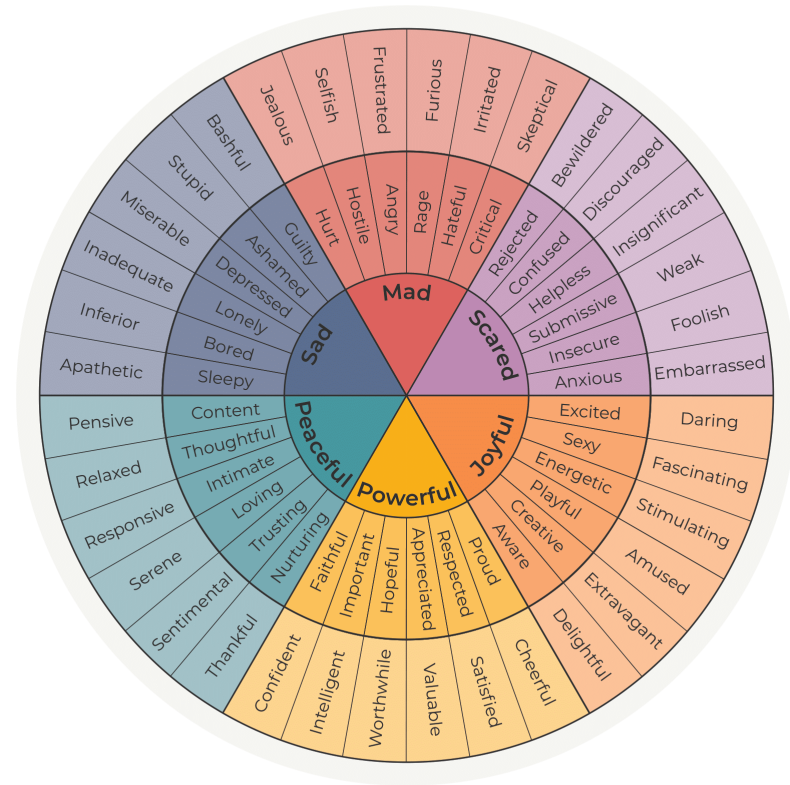
## Preventing Assertive Communication

1. Unable to identify feeling
2. Emotionally Flooded
3. Anger making it hard to hear what one is feeling & thinking
4. Willful attitude
5. Creatures of habit

“We are what we repeatedly do.” ~ Aristotle

# The Feeling Wheel

- What am I feeling?
- What signals if my body sending me?
- What nonverbal communication signals am I demonstrating?



The Gottman Institute  
Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox

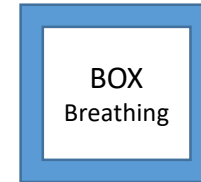
Question:

Am I emotionally  
overwhelmed?

- Check in with your  
body
- Thinking impacted?
- Fight/Flight or  
Freeze response?

Solution:

Just Breathe



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6RbW2LtdFs>



## Willful VS Willing

Turn towards not away or against from your partner.

Dr Gottman's research shows masterful relationships turn towards their partners on average 20x more versus couples in distress.

## Turn Goals into Habit

- Write it down
- Visual reminder
- Takes time and practice

# The Triple A's

- **Awareness**

1. Passive 2. Aggressive 3. Passive Aggressive 4. Assertive

- **Analyze**

Identify negative communication patterns and barriers.

- **Action Plan = Change**

Commit to practice Assertive Communication Skill

Commit to turn towards and not away/against your partner

Commit to communicate daily appreciations and genuine fondness to your partner.

Purchase index cards. 😊

Purchase relationship book (then read it)

Schedule initial visit with a relationship therapist.

“Successful long-term relationships are created through small words, small gestures, and small acts.”

— John M. Gottman, [Eight Dates: A Plan for Making Love Last Forever](#)

# References

- The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work

John Gottman, PHD and Nan Silver

Eight Dates. A Plan for Making Love Last Forever

John Gottman, PHD

Four Basic Communication Styles

[https://www.uky.edu/hr/sites/www.uky.edu.hr/files/wellness/images/Conf14\\_FourCommStyles.pdf](https://www.uky.edu/hr/sites/www.uky.edu.hr/files/wellness/images/Conf14_FourCommStyles.pdf)

Conscious Works Breathing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6RbW2LtdFs>

The Feeling Wheel pdf

Gottman Institute-Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox