Couples Counseling 101: Steps to Improve Communication

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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
“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 Triple A’s

- Awareness
- Analyze
- Action 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

- 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

The Impact

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

• **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

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  John Gottman, PHD
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- The Feeling Wheel pdf
- Gottman Institute-Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox