



Tips for Better Talks

Either of you can bring up any issue at any time, but the listener can say, "This is not a good time," as long as he or she sets up another opportunity to talk in the near future.

In the middle of a discussion that gets too heated, call a timeout.

Separate discussing the problem -- putting the issue on the table and just listening -- from solving the problem. For that first phase -- when couples normally get caught in miscommunication and negative escalation -- try active listening: One person speaks and the other paraphrases or summarizes what has been said.

Remember to give the speaker non-verbal cues -- not your head and touch your partner's arm or make body contact that shows you're receptive and empathetic.

Strive to understand -- not change -- your partner's position. Don't mind-read or anticipate what your partner will say.

Edit your comments to be sensitive to a situation or to your partner's mood on a given day, but don't squelch the feelings. They will only blow up later on.

Avoid "kitchen-sinking", griping about everything that bothered you for the past month, instead of sticking to one issue at a time.

Examine your expectations of marriage and what you think your partner expects.

Talk about your own feelings, rather than how you think the other person feels.

Also, remember you have control only over your own behavior.

Move into the future; avoid rehashing the past.

Schedule weekly couple meetings and special pleasuring sessions to talk about good stuff that's happened and to dream about a beautiful future together. Also set aside time for various types of sensual and sexual activities.



Share your perceptions of what closeness and intimacy mean. Women generally want face-to-face contact, whereas men prefer being in someone's company while engaging in an activity. It might be a good idea to combine the two: talk while driving or taking a Sunday morning walk.

Don't be surprised if you and your partner could do with some fine-tuning. Childbirth preparation classes have been instrumental in getting 90% of all fathers into the delivery room. Likewise, many men and women need an education when it comes to marriage. Studies show that a good relationship translates into a healthy family as well. In becoming a better partner, you also become a better parent.