

# WAYS FOR MARRIED COUPLES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

By Lindsay Kahl

Healthy and assertive communication is the cornerstone of a successful marriage. Sometimes communication is easier for couples in the earlier stages of marriage, and they find they must be more intentional about communicating effectively as time passes. Regardless of how long you and your spouse have been married, you can make an effort to develop good habits that will serve your relationship well.

**Make Your Expectations Clear** Though it would be nice if your spouse automatically knew what you were thinking, he cannot read your mind. Develop the habit of articulating your expectations, wants and needs, and listening to your spouse when he articulates his. This can help reduce misunderstanding and resentment.

**Practice "I" Statements** Use "I" statements to turn a criticism into a statement of how you feel. For example, instead of saying, "You always drive too fast," say, "I feel anxious when you drive fast because I worry you might have an accident." Trauma Central states that the format of "I" statements is "I feel \_\_\_ when \_\_\_ because \_\_\_." "I" statements can be particularly helpful when you disagree with your spouse, but you can use them anytime to express your feelings and help both of you to avoid becoming defensive.

**Actively Listen** David and Amy Olson describe "active listening" as listening to the other person and then verbally repeating back what you heard in your own words to make sure you understand. With active listening, you might use phrases such as "It seems as though..." or "I heard you say..." If you and your spouse practice active listening, you can ensure clear communication, and possibly avoid some misunderstandings.

**Pay Attention to Nonverbal Communication** Help Guide reports that nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expression, touch, eye contact and tone, play a huge role in your daily communication. Pay attention to your own nonverbal cues

and what they might be conveying to your spouse. Observe her nonverbal cues for contradictory messages and point them out for clarification if necessary. For married couples, touch is a potent form of nonverbal communication. Les and Leslie Parrott suggest that marital physical affection can wane, so couples should make an intentional effort to affectionately touch.

**Learn How to Fight Well** Any married couple knows that disagreements are inevitable. Navigating conflict allows you and your spouse to strengthen your communication, so serve your marriage by learning how to fight fairly and well. Les and Leslie Parrott state that you should clearly define the issue, express your feelings directly and avoid insults and criticism. When your tempers rise, agree to take a break from the conversation and revisit the issue when both of you are calm.

**Set Aside Daily Time** David and Amy Olson suggest setting aside at least five minutes each day for "meaningful dialogue" with your spouse. During this time, discuss your feelings about each other, your life together and your marriage. Often, a married couple falls into a habit of discussing everything but their marriage. Focused, daily discussion can help you and your spouse to celebrate the good things in your marriage and face recurrent issues, allowing your marriage to thrive.