

Opening Up Communications Within A Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

While there are numerous reasons why a serious relationship might end, a common thread in virtually all fractured relationships is a lack of communication. That can seem surprising, since communicating with others appears to be a basic part of being human. Why is it then that we are so often bad in communicating with someone who means so much to us?

One reason is that many of us have never really learned the skills necessary to communicate effectively. It's one thing to talk with an acquaintance about the weather or that TV show from the night before, but it's a very different thing to be sharing feelings, thoughts and problems with a partner in a relationship. That's a communication effort that requires certain skills if it's to succeed.

Communicating within a relationship is at its most important, and at its most difficult, when there are problem issues that need to be confronted. That's when some basic communication skills become vital. One such skill is learning to listen, truly listen, and not just to the words coming from your partner, but also to the feelings and emotions being expressed through those words.

It's also important to truly comprehend what is being said and to show that you understand. This can require asking questions when something isn't clear, and repeating back what has been expressed to ensure that you've truly heard and understood what was said.

Another common guideline for effective communication is to use "I" statements, rather than "You" statements. When "I" starts a statement it can help foster communication. When "You" starts the statement it most often is being used to assign blame and guilt, rather than to open communication.

Other skills for better communication include staying focused on current issues (rather than dredging up past hurts and problems), and making real time for significant discussions, rather than just trying to squeeze in time to talk.

Effective communication within a relationship can sometimes be difficult, but if both parties are willing to work at learning how to do so, it can often be the key to building a closer and happier relationship.

If you find your relationship is suffering from poor communication, consider talking to a professional counselor who specializes in relationship or marriage counseling. A trained professional counselor can help you and your partner open up that communications bridge and get your relationship heading in the right direction again.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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