

Communicating Effectively When Arguing

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Communicating with each other during an argument will take a sincere effort on both partner's part.

One of the most difficult things when partners don't get along, is having to talk face-to-face or correspond with your partner. Conversations can start out to be civil and quickly turn to chaos by a snarky comment. This can result in a volleying of insults, that escalate to pulling out every transgression that ever took place between you. Trying to cause your partner as much pain, grief and anxiety as possible is not a good strategy.

Even though you are emotionally charged, it's time to learn some relaxation techniques and remember that the person you are angry with is someone you love. Look for some middle ground of communicating by focusing on only facts and keeping the emotions it stirs up for your therapist.

Following are a few suggested strategies for effective communication with your partner that can help during arguments and disagreements:

Follow a Few Simple Rules

Whenever you speak, be aware of your tone of voice and your choice of words. Choose words that are respectful and not sarcastic. No yelling or speaking over the other person.

Actively listen to your partner. Paraphrase back to your partner what they have said. By paraphrasing it indicated to your partner that they have been heard. It does not mean you agree with what is being said, only that you understand what they are saying. If you find yourself arguing, take a timeout before continuing.

No blocking. Everyone is allotted equal time to speak. Only one person speaks at a time. Stay in the present. Discuss only one item at a time.

No Judgement. Do not judge, put words in their mouth or jump to conclusions. Wait until your partner is finished. Paraphrase what they just said before you respond.

No "Why" Questions. When you ask "Why" it causes the other person to feel they are being attacked or judged. Use "I" statements to get across how the action made you feel.

Using “I” Statements

When you are corresponding with your partner, it is important that you use language that does not offend or put up a wall, that will shut down any productive communication. The best way to do this is to communicate with “I” statements: I feel, I need, I see. Do not use “You” statements, stay away from: You always, You never. “You” statements are accusations, and are “heard” as you are attacking them. This can lead to arguments and conversations spiraling out of control very quickly.

This is easier said than done. When we have a contentious relationship or an argument with our partner, it is very easy to fall into bringing every hurtful event or action into the argument. You may be starting with and focusing on one issue, the next thing, is both of you are pulling things from the past into the discussion. You begin throwing so many accusations at each other, the original issue that started the discussion never gets resolved. Emotions and anger can cloud the discussion to the point where both of you need a cooling off period, before you can resume any productive conversation.

Bringing things in from the past is a deflective tactic. It keeps you from dealing with an issue that needs to be addressed or decided on right now. When you practice using the “I” statements, you can talk about the issue that needs to be discussed without emotion. Instead, by letting your partner know how the event made you feel, allows you to be heard. You are not accusing your partner of anything, you are simply stating that the event that occurred gave you a certain feeling.

When you focus on how the event made your feel, it allows your partner to not be on the defensive. You are stating how it made you feel, which has nothing to do with them. What you have given, is information to your partner so they will be able to respond with the intention of the event or comment. Making you feel a certain way was not their goal. You now have more information as to what your partner’s intentions were when the statement was made or the event took place. You are now in the position to have a discussion without the emotions of anger being brought up for you. If your actions caused the misunderstanding with your partner, take responsibility and apologize for it, then discuss how best to communication with one another in the future.

Remember that the goal of a successful relationship is to have an emotionally aware connection. You are two individuals who bring your own unique thoughts and personalities into the relationship that may, at times, cause disagreements and conflicts, but who are always looking in the same direction to minimize any stress and drama.

No Texting During an Argument

Today texting is the easiest and most efficient way to stay in touch or convey information. I am going to add a caveat to this statement and say, unless you are in the middle of a heated argument. Texting can be a dangerous medium to use. It is customary to read a text message and formulate a response to what has been said or requested, immediately. Correspondence with your partner, when you are angry and emotional needs to be carefully constructed.

The issue with texting is that emotions are running very high. The chances are without the proper editing, the text will convey all those emotions, accusations, and a lot of verbal dumping. You don't have the chance to review a final draft before you hit "Send". You need time to cool off and think about it, before you give a response. The problem with an emotion filled, immediate response, is the damage has already been done. The words and tone used will not be forgotten, and will probably start a chain of text's back and forth that only will fuel the anger. Getting no one closer to resolving the problem.

Use E-Mail and Keep Communication Short and Factual

One of the first rules I counsel partners on, that needs to be a top priority, is never respond when you are angry. Wait several hours, get all information you need, then communicate it in an e-mail. If responding to an accusation, stick to the facts. Use "I" statements and respond truthfully. Once you have sent your e-mail response, give them time to digest it.

Using e-mail is the best way to communicate because you can do several drafts before you hit the "Send" button. If you are angry and frustrated, it is fine to draft an e-mail without putting any name in the "To" line. Once you have finished it, delete it! This gives you the opportunity to get your emotions out and focus on just the facts in the next draft. Once you have drafted the e-mail that you feel is factual, displays no emotions, has no "you" accusations, no sarcastic digs, and tone is appropriate, then you can send hit "Send".

Be patient in waiting for a response. Sometimes it may also take them some time to digest what you have conveyed. They may need to work with their own emotions or get additional facts before drafting a response to you. Discuss ahead of time the acceptable amount of time you both will allow to respond to e-mails and correspondence.

If you believe that the e-mail was not understood or not responded to in the agreed to timeframe, it may be necessary to sit down for a face-to-face meeting. Look at this as an opportunity to discuss a resolution, to keep misunderstandings from taking a life of their own. With successful relationships comes the responsibility for being truthful with yourself. Own it, if you have slipped up or misbehaved in a way that does not fit with your commitment to the relationship.

Following and committing to the list of simple tools above, in communicating with your partner, will bring you greater happiness and harmony in your relationship.