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L-O-V-E Conversations

To build up relationships, this activity will have you practicing communicating in a sensitive, loving way. This is not always easy, but it is an important starting point to create safety and connection in your discussions.

When we communicate with each other, we need to:

Listen with an

Open heart and mind

Validate and acknowledge each other

Express our thoughts and feelings softly, simply and slowly.

Listen: It is not by chance that L-O-V-E conversations start with listening. So often we want to do the talking, criticizing, pleading, or controlling. Necessary as it is to express our feelings and points of view, effective communication starts in the heart with a willingness to listen to the other. Listeners tune into the words, but they also tune into feelings; for what is said in words, but also for what is said by facial expression and body language. While opening your ears and heart to listen to your partner, keep a careful eye on his/her face as well. You may be inwardly groaning, because you have received many messages from your frustrated partners about your lack of ability to tune into feelings. Despite this, don't give up. Tempting as it may be to interrupt your partner, we encourage you to resist that urge. Listening without interruption will convey respect and a willingness to understand your partner's perspective.

Open: An open mind is really just another way of saying, "I'm trying to listen to you as though we have just met and I haven't had time to develop any negative assumptions." It means attempting to put aside as much as possible, the judgements and presumptions that creep in with relationship difficulties. It means being humble enough to realize that maybe there is something to learn if I listen with new ears. An open heart means taking in the partners words and allowing them to impact you.

Validate: Before thinking about reply to your partner's message, we would like to suggest that you slow down for long enough to validate and acknowledge what you have just heard your partner say. Press pause (even delete) on self-defending comments and knee-jerk reactions. Make an effort to acknowledge that what your partner has just said is a legitimate experience for him or her. Even though your viewpoint may be different, you respect his or her view of reality even though it may be different from yours.

- If you just don't get what your partner is saying, be honest, but in a supportive way. Instead of saying "That's ridiculous!" or "I reject what you're saying" which invalidates your partner's position. Try something like: "I'd like to get what you are saying, but it is

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confusing for me right now.” The partner is encouraged to be mindful to help them to understand.

- If you think you do understand, but you really don't agree with it, be honest in a validating way. Such as I am finding it hard to agree with you there, but I do get that you are trying to help me understand your experience.
- If you are feeling bad about what your partner says, share how you are impacted by his or her disclosure. Like “When you tell me how you feel, I feel bad, embarrassed, thank you for telling me honestly what is going on for you right now.”

Express: Satisfying relationships typically involve conversations about feelings, hopes, dreams, and disappointments. When one partner is willing to disclose something of his or her “inner” world and the other person listens and validates what is shared the bond is strengthened. It says “I trust you enough to tell you this personal information; you matter enough for me to want to let you in” It is scary to disclose in emotionally unsafe relationships and often is not wise to do so. Disclosure works best when the other person has sent strong signals that the other is interested, open and responsive. Maybe it involves a testing the waters question like “Would you be willing to listen to what I've been thinking about since that last fight we had?” or I've wanted to talk to you for a while now about my concerns, would it be an OK time now for me to talk to you?

Just as listeners don't always have to agree with what their partners say, disclosers can't always demand that their partners are ready to listen immediately. Especially in certain contexts (out with friends, working, children around). Studies show figuring out a mutual rhythm for when it is a good time to approach an issue is extremely beneficial to the relationship whether it be immediately or etching out space to handle it in the near future. Remember to tell yourself “Our relationship is too important to rush this.”

Remember:

- To speak in a way that does not totally demoralize or destroy your partner's sense of work or importance to you.
- Speak with softness, avoid swearing, name calling or blaming, that may bring you into a negative cycle.
- Choose simple words and slow down the pace to help your partners have the chance to listen non-defensively.
- Stay close to the essence of the feelings you are trying to convey.
- If it starts to get intense. Pause. Take a few deep breaths. Remind yourself to talk about your feelings, not your partner's faults.

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Activity: Try this at first with a positive moment. Identify the last time you had a good moment or interaction with your partner, felt close, relaxed, enjoyed an activity together, or noticed something you appreciate about your partner. Describe the situation or quality you appreciate below and the good feelings it evokes. Take turns.

Description of good moment:

Good feelings evoked:

Debrief together: How do you feel inside about sharing your good moments and feelings with each other? In this moment, how do you feel toward each other (closer, warmer, embarrassed, cautious, happy, calm, relaxed)?

If you get stuck and begin going off track in this exercise, simply stop the conversation for now and congratulate yourself and each other for trying. This is a unique way of talking that takes time to hone/make your own. Encourage each other by agreeing to meet in the near future to try again. Small steps often will go a long way.

Kallos-Lilly, V., & Fitzgerald, J. (2021). *Emotionally focused workbook for couples: The two of Us*. ROUTLEDGE.