

Marriage Matters# 2 - Time to Communicate

Introduction

Strong marriages don't develop automatically so we have written these *Marriage Matters* studies as a brief dip into some of the ways in which we can continue to build our marriage and keep our love growing throughout our lives together.

This topic, Communication, is a vital aspect of any healthy relationship. It involves both talking effectively and listening effectively and for both of these we need time. Nor can we assume that we know perfectly well how to talk or how to listen, no matter how old we are!

1. We come from different backgrounds, families or cultures, and have different experiences of how to communicate. We may have experienced loud, emotional discussions with much interrupting or quiet exchanges taking it turn to speak, waiting for another to finish. Neither is wrong they are just different. ***Take a moment to share your experiences with each other.***
2. If we are going to have effective communication we need to be deliberate about it and set aside time daily and routinely to catch up with each other and more deliberately if there is an issue to be discussed. ***Consider together how you connect daily with each other.***
3. Effective talking means being able to talk about our feelings as well as on the much lighter levels of facts ("Nice weather today.") and comment ("I think John next door is looking a bit down, should we have a word with him?"). At the level of feelings we share our deep concerns, hopes and dreams. If we do not feel safe to talk about our feelings then our communication will be seriously handicapped. Sharing feelings is an intimacy and intimacy requires vulnerability and that vulnerability requires trust and trust requires commitment. In marriage we should know that we are totally committed to each other. ***Share with each other how easy or difficult you find it to share your feelings and why this might be.***
4. Listening effectively can be hard work for some of us but it can pay enormous dividends in our marriage. Just think for a moment what it feels like when you are listened to. You feel valued, understood, loved and supported. But what does it feel like when you are not listened to? You feel frustrated, ignored, taken for granted, or even rejected. Author Stephen Covey describes this as, "Not just listening with your ears, but also more importantly, listening with your eyes and your heart, listening for feeling, for meaning." ***The exercise below is designed to help you practice listening effectively. Take a turn each with fairly simple issues to try working through the technique. Later there may be a more significant matter that you want to bring up.***

Exercise

5. No 1 explains the issue. No 2 reflects back what's been said – that is, they repeating back what No 1 said and particularly any feelings that have been expressed. This is to show complete understanding. If necessary No 1 should repeat the explanation until they are happy that No 2 has fully understood.
6. No 2 asks, 'What's concerning you most about what you've just told me?' No 1 replies and No 2 listens reflecting back what they have heard. If necessary No 1 should repeat the explanation until they are happy ...
7. No 2 asks, 'Is there anything you could do (or, if appropriate, you'd like me or us to do) about what you've just said?' No 1 replies and No 2 listens reflecting back what they have heard. If necessary No 1 should repeat the explanation until they are happy ...
8. No 2 asks, 'Is there anything else you'd like to say?' If No 1 answers, "Yes", then go back to Para 5 and listen to this new issue. Sometimes the first issue is a sort of testing the waters exercise that then allows a much more significant matter to be presented. Listening takes patience and patience can bring great rewards in a marriage.

Comment

The exercise above is designed help us communicate with each other. It is the way we can try and ensure an issue is fully understood. Communicating this way may resolve the issue but it may not and in *Marriage Matters#3* we consider the steps we could take together to resolve a conflict. For some the risk of raising a deep or painful topic at the wrong time is too much. One way to deal with this it to have an object, e.g. a particular ornament, which if placed in a certain place means “I have something I would like to talk to you about. Please tell me when you are ready for such a conversation.”

Action

Make sure you take time to ask about and listen to your partner each day and get used to such exchanges; listening without interrupting nor offering advice if it is not wanted. Tell your partner if you want their advice about an issue you are facing, perhaps at work, or if you just want them to know you are facing that issue.