



# Communication is Everything

## Say it BETTER and be HEARD

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*“We can’t talk about anything. I’m afraid he’s going to get mad at me, so I feel like I walk on eggshells. Before I even have a chance to talk, the next complaint about me is coming out of her mouth.”*

The number one reason couples see me for therapy is the breakdown of communication. The term, “communication,” is used so loosely that most people don’t even know what it means. They know they don’t have it, they want to get it, but they don’t know how to do it.

What makes communication break down? After a certain amount of time of miscommunication, a couple starts to feel unsafe in their relationship because every time they try to talk to their partner, it ends up in a fight. When you don’t feel safe, you start to monitor what you say, which creates a wall between the two of you, built with resentment, anger, hostility, and distrust...and eventually contempt.

### **What is my definition of “good and safe communication?”**

It is a message that you send verbally to your partner, who is ready to receive it by making it safe for you to talk. Your partner makes it safe by being open and receptive to listening, acknowledging what you’ve said, and understanding it.

If that doesn’t happen, the verbal exchange is open to miscommunication, misinterpretations, and assumptions, which equal frustration, resentment, and distancing.

### **How do you start communicating with your spouse?**

1. Speak clearly, succinctly, and nicely. The clearer you speak and say what you feel, the more likely your partner will hear what you’re saying and respond clearly in return.
2. Be a good listener. Clear your mind of your own stuff while your partner is talking to you, so you can put yourself in their shoes and respond to what they’re talking about, not what you want to say next. When you’re not really listening to your partner, they’re not going to feel safe to talk.
3. Use “I” statements. “I” statements are a clear way to communicate, because rather than blaming your partner by saying “you always do this,” you’re telling your partner how you feel. “You” statements end up feeling like an attack, and the only way your partner can respond is by defending himself.

4. Checking it out. A good way to have clear communication is to check out with your partner what he/she heard you say and vice-versa. That way you can see if your message was received correctly to avoid the recipient making the wrong assumption about the message.

5. Having patience. Be patient with yourself and your partner. Good communication means giving your partner the benefit of the doubt and being clear and kind in your communications. Remember, you want to make it safe for your partner to talk to you.

6. Don't ramble. Try to make your message clear and to the point. It's confusing to hear a rambling message, and it's likely that the recipient of the message may get annoyed and frustrated, which then makes the sender feel unheard and unappreciated.

7. Listening vs. hearing. There is a big difference between listening and hearing. When you hear your partner, you hear only the words and often react to those words with anger. That's where the communication starts to break down. When you really listen to your partner, you're going beyond the words to their feelings; you're putting yourself in their shoes and are less concerned about your own reaction.

### **What are the benefits of good communication?**

Good communication takes practice and is an invaluable tool that has the potential to make all of your relationships healthier, safer, stronger, and more fulfilling.

[\[Click Here to Contact Sharon\]](#)

*Also known as the "last ditch effort therapist," Sharon M. Rivkin, therapist and conflict resolution/affairs expert, is the author of *Breaking the Argument Cycle: How to Stop Fighting Without Therapy* and developer of the *First Argument Technique*, a 3-step argument resolution system that helps couples fix their relationships and understand why they fight. Her work has been featured in *O Magazine*, *O Newsletter*, *Redbook*, *Reader's Digest*, *Time.com*, *CNN.com*, *Prevention.com*, and *WebMD.com*. She's appeared on TV, *Martha Stewart Whole Living Radio*, and makes regular radio appearances nationwide. For more information or to contact Sharon, please visit her website at [www.sharonrivkin.com](http://www.sharonrivkin.com).*