

## **Meetup 2017: What Makes for a Happy and Healthy Marriage?**

### **Lesson 2: How to Improve Your Marriage with Good Communication**

*February 19, 2017 / © Paul T. P. Wong*

Come and learn good communication skills that can prevent and resolve relational conflicts.

The marital relationship is, at best, difficult and fragile, and, at worst, troublesome and destructive. One needs to contend with both internal and external pressures that threaten to derail and destroy the marriage. One's unresolved emotional issues from childhood can hurt and alienate a loving spouse. A midlife crisis can also put a good marriage to a severe test.

Regardless of one's unique circumstances, communication remains the key to make or break a marriage. In this Meetup, you will learn how to replace harmful patterns of interaction with good communications skills and new ways of relating.

Conflicts and arguments are inevitable and can even be healthy in any long-term close relationship. Good communication skills can prevent unnecessary conflicts and build mutual understanding, trust, and intimacy.

It is important to keep in mind that good communication between partners involves more than words—it needs to be based on trust and positive emotional connections. When there is a lack of trust, misunderstanding occurs even with the best intentions. However, when couples trust each other and enjoy spending time together, even misstatements are forgiven. Thus, it is important to cultivate mutuality and reciprocal relationships; improving communication is simply one of the things couples need to invest time and effort in.

Another handicap to good communication is the personality factor. For example, low self-esteem often interferes with communication and marital relationships at an unconscious level. When one is insecure about one's worth because of all the negative voices from the past, one may even sabotage one's marriage to confirm the hypothesis that one does not deserve love (Firestone, 2016).

A person who has no faith in marriage because of parental divorce or past experiences of betrayal may also engage in behaviours that unwittingly injure the partner and undermine the relationship. Destructive behaviours, such as testing, prying, or falsely accusing the partner of cheating, are motivated by a strong sense of insecurity (Lachman, 2013).

Different communication styles between introverts and extroverts may also result in marital conflicts (Dembling, 2015). While extroverts like to go out and prefer to bring everything out in the open when there is a disagreement, introverts prefer to stay at home and avoid getting into any arguments at all. Introverts often acquiesce, shut down, or engage in passive aggression to express their displeasure. Such tactics only aggravate extroverts and trigger their explosions.

Finally, there are the well-known gender differences in communication styles, as popularized by John Gray’s (1992) bestseller *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Men are known to be more task-oriented and more direct and rational, while women are more relation-oriented and more concerned about emotional nuances. Gillespie (2013) has outlined in greater detail the gender differences in communication:

### Male Communication Styles

Behaviour	Possible Motivation
Challenges and points out another perspective (“the devil’s advocate”).	A desire to gather more information or expand their understanding of the issue.
Uses direct, brief, and commanding language to communicate decisions.	A desire to communicate efficiently, reinforce functional hierarchy, and demonstrate responsibility through decisiveness.
Sitting on an angle and avoiding eye contact.	Trying not to look aggressive or challenging as opposed to being disinterested.
Moving into another’s space; talking more and with authority; interrupting; using wit to command an audience.	Possibly trying to impress, and establish respect and leadership.
Solution talk, action planning, and impatience with venting.	A desire to see tangible outcomes and success in achieving goals.

### Female Communication Styles

Behaviour	Possible Motivation
Sharing personal details and feelings of vulnerability; complimenting others.	A desire to build relationships, trust, and cohesion.
Pausing and encouraging others to take turns speaking.	A desire to build respect and balance by structuring the communication.
Apologizing or seeking help.	Possibly trying to demonstrate strength and trust depending on context.
Sharing thoughts and feelings about the subject.	Trying to build mutual understanding and mutual support.
Asking questions, not using commanding language when in authority; using rhetorical questions to lead and influence.	A desire to create an atmosphere of respect and teamwork, de-emphasize hierarchical relationships, and build on intrinsic motivation.

### Resources

- [A Key Component of Successful Relationships: Good Communication \(Hope Springs Behavioral Consultants\)](#)
- [National Healthy Marriage Resource Center](#)
- [Stronger Marriage \(Utah Marriage Commission\)](#)
- [Communication Skills for Healthy Relationships \(Forum for Family and Consumer Issues\)](#)

## References

- Dembling, S. (2015, January 19). The conversation introvert-extrovert couples need to have: Talking points, before an argument. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-introverts-corner/201501/the-conversation-introvert-extrovert-couples-need-have>
- Firestone, R. W. (2016). *Overcoming the destructive inner voice: True stories of therapy and transformation*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Gillespie, D. (2013, March 25). Communication styles: Understanding gender differences. *Workhealthlife Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.workhealthlife.com/2013/03/communication-styles-understanding-gender-differences/>
- Gottman, J. M. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail*. New York, NY: Fireside.
- Gray, J. (1992). *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Lachmann, S. (2013, December 17). 10 ways low self-esteem affects women in relationships: If you can't see your own worth, how can you believe a partner will? *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/me-we/201312/10-ways-low-self-esteem-affects-women-in-relationships>