

# How to Improve Your Communication In Relationships

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Communication is vital for healthy relationships. Being able to talk openly and honestly with the people in your life allows you to share, learn, respond, and forge lasting bonds. This is a vital part of any relationship, including those with friends and family, but it can be particularly important in romantic relationships.

While all relationships are different and each one has its own ups and downs, being able to talk to your partner means that you'll be able to share your worries, show support for one another, and work together to handle conflict more effectively.

In this article, learn more about why communication in relationships is so important. Also, explore some of the characteristics of good communication, learn to spot the signs of potential problems, and explore tips that can help you improve your communication skills.

## Benefits of Communication in Relationships

According to Dr. John Gottman, a clinical psychologist and founder of the Gottman Institute, a couple's communication pattern can often predict how successful a relationship will be. Good communication can help enhance your relationship in a variety of ways:

- **It can minimize rumination:** Instead of stewing over negative feelings, good communication allows people to discuss their concerns and resolve them in a more positive, effective way.
- **It fosters intimacy:** Forming a close emotional connection with another person requires a mutual give-and-take when it comes to sharing things about yourself and listening to the other person. This reciprocal self-disclosure means talking about your experiences, beliefs, values, opinions, and expectations. In order to

do this, you both need to possess communication skills that foster this connection and allow it to grow and deepen with time.

- **It reduces and resolves conflict:** Every relationship is bound to experience conflict from time to time. When you are able to talk about your problems in an open and honest way, however, you can resolve arguments and disagreements more readily. Rather than getting caught up in a cycle of misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and emotional strife, you can address your problems and take steps to improve your relationship.

## Communication Isn't a Panacea

While the common assumption has long been that if you want to improve your relationship, you should start by improving your communication, some research has suggested that the answer might not be so simple.

A study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that while there is certainly a connection between communication and relationship satisfaction, good communication alone doesn't definitively predict how happy you'll be in your relationships.

Other factors—including how much interaction a couple has, the personality characteristics of each partner, and stress—all play a part in determining how satisfied people feel in their relationship.

So while research suggests that communicating well isn't a guarantee for a happy relationship, there is plenty of research indicating that good communication skills enhance relationships and well-being in a number of ways.

Effective communication is one way to foster a positive, supportive relationship with your partner. When you actively listen and respond to your partner (and they do the same for you), both of you are more likely to feel valued and cared for.

For example, one study found that when people feel that their partner values them, they are more likely to sleep better. And ultimately, feeling more valued, positive, and happy in your relationships can have a beneficial impact on your overall well-being.

## Recap

Communication is just one part of a good relationship. Research suggests that people who are happy in their relationships are more likely to communicate well with one another.

## Characteristics of Effective Communication

So what do experts mean when they talk about "good communication?" Are you and your partner both on the same page or are there signs that might indicate a problem in how you relate to one another?

First, it is important to think about what we mean by communication. On the surface, it involves the words that people use to convey information to one another. But it can also involve other ways of transmitting information including tone of voice, body language, and other forms of nonverbal communication. In many cases, what you don't say can mean just as much if not more than what you do say.

Some of the hallmarks of effective communication in relationships include:

- **Active listening:** Active listening involves being engaged in the conversation, listening attentively, and reflecting back on what people have said. It also involves asking for clarification when needed and avoiding making judgments.
- **Not personalizing issues:** When communicating in relationships, people who are good at it avoid personalizing their partner's actions. Instead, they focus on the situation and how things can be resolved.
- **Using "I" statements:** I-statements can be helpful in interpersonal conflicts. Instead of saying, "You never clean up after yourself," try using an I-statement like, "I feel uncomfortable when there is clutter accumulating around the house."
- **Kindness:** Kindness is important because it makes people feel cared for and understood.
- **Being present:** When talking with your partner, it is important to be fully present in the moment. Getting distracted by outside sources—including electronic distractions such as your phone—can lead to a lack of communication and a poor connection.
- **Showing acceptance:** Healthy communication is about accepting and validating the other person, even if you might not agree with them. When you communicate well with your partner, you're able to recognize that people have a right to feel their feelings even if those emotions and reactions are different from your own.

## Recap

Communicating well in relationships involves actively listening, avoiding judgments, and practicing kindness instead of trying to win the argument.

## Signs of Communication Problems

Some signs that your relationship is being negatively affected by communication problems include:

- Assuming that you know what your partner thinks or feels
- Constantly criticizing one another
- Engaging in passive-aggressive behaviors
- Feeling like you can't really talk to your partner
- Getting defensive when your partner tries to talk to you
- Giving each other the silent treatment
- Having the same arguments over and over without reaching a resolution
- Refusing to compromise or listen to the other person's perspective
- Stonewalling in order to avoid problems or conversations

It is also important to learn to recognize some of the more subtle signs of poor communication. This can include avoiding arguments for the sake of keeping the peace. If you never disagree, it means that one of you is hiding what you really feel or think just to avoid a fight. This deprives you both of experiencing authentic, open, and honest discussions.

Withholding issues can be another common communication problem in relationships. Instead of having tough conversations with your partner, you might avoid the issue and then end up dumping all of your anger, irritation, worries, or problems on the other people in your life.

For example, when you don't tell your partner you are upset, you might end up ranting to your friend about your frustrations. While this might provide you with an emotional outlet, it doesn't do anything to resolve the problem. And it might result in passive-aggressive actions designed to "punish" your partner for not being able to read your mind.

## Recap

Criticisms, defensiveness, silence, and feeling misunderstood are just a few signs of communication problems in a relationship. And a lack of arguing isn't necessarily a

sign that you're communicating well. Instead, it may mean you are holding back in order to avoid conflict.

## How to Improve Your Communication

If you think that poor communication is having a negative impact on your relationship, there are strategies that can help you improve your connection.

### Consider Your Attachment Style

Think about how your attachment style might affect your communication patterns. Attachment styles are your characteristic patterns of behavior in relationships. Your early attachment style, which emerges in childhood based on relationships with caregivers, can continue to affect how you behave and respond in adult romantic relationships.

If you have an insecure attachment style, you may be more likely to engage in communication patterns that can be seen as anxious or avoidant. Recognizing how your attachment style affects how you interact with your partner (and how your partner's style affects how they interact with you) can give you clues into what you might need to work on.

### Recap

If you or your partner have an insecure attachment style, it can have an impact on how you communicate and interact with your partner. Knowing your style and being aware of how it may manifest as anxious or avoidant behavior can help you find ways to overcome less effective communication patterns.

### Be Fully Present

In order to make sure that both of you are listening and understanding, minimize distractions and focus on being fully present when you are communicating. This might involve setting aside time each day to really focus on one another and talk about the events of the day and any concerns you may have.

Limiting your device use at certain times of day, such as during meals or at bedtime, can be a great way to focus on your partner without having your attention pulled in different directions.

## Use “I” Statements

Sometimes the way that you talk to each other can play a major role in communication problems. If you are both focusing on arguing facts without talking about feelings, arguments can quickly turn into debates over who is “right” or who gets the last word.

“I” statements are focused on what you are feeling instead of your partner’s behavior. For example, instead of saying “You are never on time,” you might say “I get worried when you don’t arrive on time.”

Using this type of statement can help conversations seem less accusatory or blaming and instead help you and your partner focus on the emotions behind some of the issues you are concerned about.

## Avoid Negative Communication Patterns

When you are tempted to engage in behavior like ignoring your partner, using passive-aggressive actions, or yelling, consider how your actions will negatively affect your relationship. It isn’t always easy to change these patterns, since many of them formed in childhood, but becoming more aware of them can help you start to replace these destructive behaviors with healthier, more positive habits.

## Focus on Your Relationship

While good communication is important, research suggests that it is just one of many factors that impact the success, duration, and satisfaction in relationships.

In fact, research seems to suggest that your satisfaction with your relationship might predict how well you and your partner communicate. The more satisfied people are in their relationship, the more likely they are to openly talk about their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and problems with one another.

## Recap

If you want to improve your communication, focusing on improving your relationship overall can play an important role.

## When to Get Help

There are many steps you can take to improve the communication in your relationship on your own, but there may be times that you feel like professional help might be needed. Couples therapy can be a great way to address communication problems that might be holding your relationship back.

A therapist can help identify unhelpful communication patterns, develop new coping techniques, and practice talking to one another in more effective ways. They can also address any underlying resentments or other mental health issues that might be having a detrimental impact on your relationship.

## A Word From Verywell

Effective communication in a relationship allows people to tell other people what they need and to respond to what their partner needs. It allows people to feel understood, validated, and connected to another person.

Always remember that the goal of communicating is to understand one another. It isn't about sweeping problems under the rug in order to prevent all conflict. Instead, focus on listening to understand and responding with empathy and care. If you and your partner are struggling with communication issues, consider talking to a therapist for advice and tips on how to cope.

### 4 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

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