

# GÜDLIFE

## THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF COUPLE COMMUNICATION



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## THE DO'S & DON'TS OF COUPLE COMMUNICATION

Here's a request I get a lot by couples.

***"Help us learn how to communicate right!"***

Sadly, many of the couples asking the question have been married for several years! By then they developed some awful patterns of communicating. In this lesson, I will address these common mistakes so you can avoid them as you are starting out.

Did you know that the number one reason why couples seek counseling is because they do not know how to communicate? But what they don't know and you are going to get in this series, **A Beginners Guide to a Remarkable Marriage**, is that it takes more than using effective tools. You will also discover certain dynamics that influence communication and learn how to manage them so that you can achieve mutual satisfaction in your marriage.

In this first lesson, let's look at the do's and don'ts of couple communication.

### #1: DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUR SPOUSE

Here are two major assumptions couples make that can derail communication quickly:

- My spouse should know what I need
- I know what my spouse is thinking

Let's start with the first assumption: *"If spouse loves me, he/she should know what I need.."*

One major faux pas in couple communication is assuming your partner knows what you need when you need it. The mistaken belief is that couples in love are always tuned in at a deeper level. The reality is that your spouse is not going to be tuned into you 24/7.

Another major faux pas is when couples make assumptions about what each other is thinking without checking it out first. Acting on what you assume your partner is thinking is not a good strategy and often fuels conflict.

Now, let's examine how to handle assumptions.

## DO CHECK-OUT ASSUMPTIONS WITH YOUR SPOUSE

Mind-reading rarely works. A more effective approach is to check-out your assumptions with your spouse. This can work on the two major assumptions. Let's start with the first:

- My spouse should know what I need

Here's a better approach:

1. **Check-in with your spouse about how you're feeling.** *"It's been a rough day at work and I am overwhelmed with all the household work staring at me."*
2. **Ask a curiosity question and see if the response matches your need.** *"Do you know what I need right now?"*
3. **If your spouse's response is not what you expect then clarify your need.** *"No, what I really need is a hug and a little help with the dishes."*

Clarifying your need and asking your spouse for support is a reasonable request. It is not a sign of weakness on your part. Nor is it a bad sign if your spouse doesn't know what you need at the time. Throughout married life we are students of each other. Students learn and get better at anticipating needs, but early on we all have to be taught.

## #2: DO NOT TALK OVER YOUR SPOUSE

Talking over someone is a clear act of disrespect. You have something to say too, but if you interrupt your partner, the conversation will slide into a danger zone. Next thing you know, your mate is talking over you and the interaction escalates.

Couples talk over each other for a variety of reasons:

- when they feel really excited about something and want to share it, but can't wait for their partner to stop talking
- when they feel like the only way they can get a chance to speak is to interrupt
- when they disagree with the facts of a story and feel the need to correct the narrative
- when they feel something negative coming from their partner. This is a knee-jerk reaction to defend oneself.

Interrupting is rude and signals to your partner that you care more about your voice being heard than hers or his. Is this what you want?

## DO LISTEN WITH GENUINE INTEREST

When your spouse is talking to you, show genuine interest. Stop what you're doing, put down your device, and look her or him in the eye. This courteous act conveys respect.

Sometimes you might not like or agree with what your spouse is saying. The temptation to interrupt is strong. Don't do it! Interrupting will likely escalate the situation and get you into a reactive dialog with your mate. You'll get your turn to talk.

Hold back and let your partner finish talking. Slow down, be patient, and try to understand the gist of what he or she is trying to say. Doing this will likely lower the heat and help you both resolve the issue.

## #3: DON'T USE HARSH LANGUAGE

Misunderstandings between couples can cause things to heat up really fast. Reactive dialogue has a rapid back-n-forth motion with a lot of talking and very little listening.

When things heat up a couple is in danger of using harsh language. No one likes to be on the receiving end of this. Expect damage you will have to repair afterward.

Developing a pattern of harsh language will do serious damage longterm. Couples build walls with each other that inhibit intimacy.

## DO SPEAK WITH RESPECT

Think before you speak. Not just what to say, but how to say it. The difference between a complaint and criticism is the tone you use. A tone of respect conveys your message more effectively.

Here are a few pointers that help you speak with respect:

- Get a quick grip on your emotions
- Take a few deep breaths
- Don't blame your partner for how you feel
- Use "I" and "we" language when you speak
  - Avoid saying, *"You made me angry!"*
  - Instead say, *"I am angry about what you said."*

## #4: DON'T BLAME PROBLEMS ON YOUR SPOUSE

Amongst the furniture in your home is a hot seat. You can't see it, but you will know when you're on it. No one likes being on the hot seat. Yet, in every marriage one of you is going to be sitting on it!

Mistakes, mishaps, and failures happen in every relationship. Because you are an imperfect person, with an imperfect spouse/partner, you have an imperfect relationship. Undoubtedly, you will do something wrong.

Blaming your problems on your spouse is bad form! You have to own your faults and take responsibility for your actions. Assigning blame to your partner is a sign of weakness on your part and will build resentment in your spouse.

### DO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS AND REPAIR THE HARM CAUSED TO YOUR MATE

Lies, diversions, or blaming others makes matters worse. Owning your mistakes is a sign of maturity that builds trust.

When you are on the hot seat think repair. You want to repair the offense against your mate. Here are 5 simple steps to follow to repair a conflict:

1. Admit your offense.
2. Acknowledge how your actions specifically hurt your partner.
3. Accept responsibility without blaming others.
4. Ask for forgiveness.
5. Agree with your partner that you will work on changing the behavior that caused harm.

## #5: DON'T TRY TO WIN EVERY ARGUMENT

If you like to get your way all the time, you will have an unsatisfying marriage. Your spouse may give in to you, but he or she will silently resent you. More often than not a protest will come in the form of some passive-aggressive behavior.

You may win an argument but you will lose on something else that likely would not have occurred had you been open to a discussion. One-sided relationships have a short shelf life.

### DO SEEK WIN-WIN OUTCOMES

When you have discussion about matters that have mutual interest, be open to what your spouse has to say. Give consideration to each other's point of view.

Try a collaborative approach in your communication, giving equal weight to each other's point of view. Find compromise, seek win-win outcomes.

Remember not to talk over each other. Listen well and summarize what you hear before you give your opinion. By taking this approach you are more likely to reach a mutually satisfying decision.

## NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

So what's your plan to develop effective communication in your relationship?

Follow the short exercise below to identify areas you want to address so you can avoid the pitfalls many couples fall into.

Share your responses with each other. This will get you on a good path toward building a close relationship.

### Review of Communication

Place a check next to the area(s) you need to work on.

- I have a tendency to assume my partner knows what I need.
- I have a tendency to assume I know what my partner is thinking.
- I have a tendency to interrupt and talk over my partner.
- I need to work on slowing down and being a better listener.
- When I am upset, I tend to speak harshly and say things I regret
- I need to work on slowing down and listening to my partner.
- I need to work on speaking with a tone of respect.
- I have a tendency to blame my partner for my mistakes.
- I need to own my problems and repair my mistakes.
- I have a tendency to want my way.
- I need to be open to my partner and seek win-win outcomes.