

Managing communication in relationships

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Everyday our relationships may be tested by stresses and pressures. It is also not surprising to learn that some relationship challenges occur because we can be very different from our partner as individuals.

Hence, we can very quickly fall into unwelcome patterns of communication with each other. The positive news is that we can learn and adopt effective communication strategies that assist us in navigating these unprecedented times or difficult times in our relationships.

Here are some suggestions to assist you:

1. Your tone is as important as your words

Whilst what we say is super important, it is our tone that tells how truthful we are being. We might say the right words, but often our underlying attitude or feeling is less easy to disguise. Equally so, our body language can speak as loud as words. For example “*I love you*” on paper reads however you wish it to read, but said with a pause, whilst looking at your phone, followed by a snappy OK gives it a whole new feeling. Your task here is to become aware of your tone, and take responsibility when you think you might need to apologize for your tone gone rogue.

2. Be friends

When communication starts to break down, how we speak and behave might be telling our partners ‘*I don't like you*’. To bring our relationships out of the shade and into the sunshine, we might need to start treating each other as we would one of our good friends – with kindness, forgiveness and understanding. And don't forget a splash of humour – it's your choice to see someone as annoying or amusingly different to you.

3. Drop the blame game

It can be easy to point the finger, blame or criticise our partners when we start to feel challenged. However, one of the bravest moves in any relationship is to be truthful and take responsibility for ourselves. This means admitting when we are wrong, saying sorry when we hurt one another, and acknowledging the parts of problems that belong to us. And yes, in case you were wondering, there is always a bit that belongs to you! This may make you feel vulnerable, but vulnerability can bring us closer in relationships.

4. Listen more

Most of us think we are great listeners because we advise people, we solve problems and we fix people. However, the opposite is often true. People aren't broken and we don't need to fix them – but they do have big feelings and an important story to tell. So, our job is to listen intently so they feel heard and validated. Only help when you are invited and not before.

5. Get some space

This is an important point as there is a very big difference between getting some space - to steady your feelings and clear your thoughts- and walking away from someone during an argument. It's important to know how to be alone without hurting your partner and making things worse. So when tensions are high and no amount of talking is working, then it might be time to take a break. It can be as simple as *"I want to work on this with you but I'm feeling overwhelmed"* or *"I'll be a lot more helpful after I've got a bit of fresh air/had a shower/had a good sleep"*. Also, it is ok to sleep on an argument if that means you will be better equipped emotionally in the morning, as long as you both agree to it. It's worth remembering that a tired angry brain does not listen well!

6. Letting Go!

Many of our present quarrels come from past disappointments. To enjoy your relationships in the moment we may need to let go of our past difficulties. Only you can decide to let things go and forgive. This is a very personal and empowering choice. Each day we have an opportunity to clean out the things that are holding our relationships back and start fresh.

7. And lastly...go first

Conflict in any relationship is absolutely normal – we are human and all different, and difference can breed conflict. It's how we react to the conflict that truly matters. We can often become stuck in our private hurt and disappointment, which is generally followed closely by our stubborn refusal to be the one to make the first move in repairing a situation. Breakthroughs in healthy communication happen when we are brave and are the first person to make a move in letting our partner back into our heart, good books and the lounge room. Going first doesn't make you weak, it makes you kind, strong, forgiving and generous. It is also extremely smart to ensure that the ones we love most also feel their safest and most cared for whilst we spend our days together.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Communication in Relationships**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.