

Top tips for communicating within a healthy relationship

There are times when our anger boils over and we just say the first thing that comes into our heads. Even after this type of blast there comes a time when we need to sort out the problem.

- First of all, don't bury the problem, hoping it will go away, so neither of you can see it.
- Don't run away from the problem so that you don't have to face it with your partner.
- Don't bargain with your partner and use another problem to put pressure on your partner about the original problem, you'll never sort it out!
- Rows and arguments are inevitable. Take responsibility for your part and how you feel – use direct rather than indirect expressions of what you mean to say. Don't hint or use sarcasm.
Say 'I feel', 'I am sad / angry / disappointed because you
- Own your FEELINGS as well as your thoughts. People tend to rationalise rather than express their emotions, but suppressed emotions can lead to more trouble. Acknowledge the strength of your partner's feelings.
- Respond to the other person's feelings in what they are trying to say. In arguments people often dwell on facts rather than feelings. Don't interrupt and not listen to your partner.
- Keep to the issue in hand – don't change the topic / drag up previous disagreements or bring in other people's opinions to back you up.
- Don't make generalising complaints: *you always – you never...* Replace blame / criticism with wishes e.g. *'You never do the ironing'* to *'I wish you would share the ironing'*
- If you're angry about something, recognise and admit it. Identify its source e.g. have you brought anger home from work and taken it out on your partner? Understand why you are angry – differentiate between what is reasonable and what is not – don't assume the person affecting your anger is doing it on purpose.
- Express your needs openly to the other person. Instead of nagging, make a suggestion - e.g. replacing *'I've told you a hundred times to clean the car'* with *'why don't we clean the car together?'*
- Don't manipulate, intimate, threaten withdrawal / blackmail etc. Learn to listen to negative feedback
- Avoid giving commands. Telling your partner that he or she *'should'* or *'ought'* to do something are your life rules telling you that these would be good things to do. Remember that your partner's life rules may not be the same.
- Never assume. Always ask for clarity to avoid any misunderstandings. Don't 'mind-read'.
- Don't label your partner - e.g. you're *'heartless, insensitive, a layabout, paranoid'* etc.
- Each one of us is constantly changing as we face the challenges of life. It follows that our relationship with each other will change too. Try and establish how you as a couple manage change best.
- Remember that winning this fight might jeopardise the future relationship - whoever *wins* an argument is irrelevant if the relationship loses something. Confront the issue rather than each other. Make sure you are not just trying to have the last word as the row could drag on...and on.....