



**By: James J Messina, Ph.D., CCMHC, NCC, DCMHS**

## **Chapter 2 Communications Warmup**

### **MWO 2 Roster**

2-1 How Well Do I Communicate with My Partner

2-2 Effective Listening

2-3 Effective Responses

2-4 Practicing Effective Responses

2-5 Effective Problem Solving

2-6 Follow-up Work-Out Plans for Improving Marital Communications

### **Prologue**

• • • Joshua and Lois Durite could not figure out how they lasted as long as they did in their marriage. Lois would often complain that Josh never listened to her. He didn't take the time and effort to understand her feelings. On the other hand, Josh complained that Lois was a nagger and complainer who never took his problems or concerns seriously • • •

The Durites, in their eighteen years together, never mastered the art of communication. This chapter gives you and your partner exercises to practice active listening, making helpful responses and solving problems effectively. Communication is often highlighted as the major reason for marital breakups. If after completing this important section you both feel unsure of your communications together refer to the "Tools for Communication": on this website at: <http://coping.us/toolsforcommunications.html> . This is a communications workbook with tools to help you both improve: Your listening skills, non-verbal communications, responding skills by learning effective communications and problem solving skills.

## 2-1 How Well Do I Communicate with My Partner

Read each statement then circle **Yes** for the ones which are true for you in your communications with your partner. Circle **No** for the ones which are not true for you in your communications with your partner. Do this exercise at first alone before comparing the results with your partner.

Yes No [1] I nag my partner too much.

Yes No [2] I rarely pay any compliments to my partner.

Yes No [3] I find it easy to be critical of my partner.

Yes No [4] I find it difficult to listen to my partner's problems.

Yes No [5] I interrupt my partner when s/he is speaking .

Yes No [6] I don't make it easy for my partner to express a feeling or statement when s/he is having difficulties in self-expression..

Yes No [7] I rarely share my personal interests with my partner.

Yes No [8] I often feel I am boring to my partner.

Yes No [9] I often find my partner boring.

Yes No [10] I find I get too serious when my partner and I discuss issues.

Yes No [11] I find it difficult to be close, affectionate and warm to my partner while we are having a deep discussion.

Yes No [12] I find it difficult to open up and discuss a problem with my partner without becoming overly emotional.

Yes No [13] I prefer to avoid discussing personal problems with my partner.

Yes No [14] I prefer to clam up and be silent when my partner has offended or upset me by something said or done.

Yes No [15] I find it difficult to be honest about my fears and weaknesses with my partner.

Yes No [16] My partner and/or I have personal habits that are bothersome when we are discussing issues.

Yes No [17] If my partner and I have a disagreement, it is hard to gain mutual understanding, forgiveness and closure on the discussion.

Yes No [18] My partner and I leave many things unsaid in order to avoid an argument.

Yes No [19] There are issues in our couple life which have never been fully resolved between us.

Yes No [20] I would rather change the subject than continue in any discussion which gets serious or "heavy."

**Interpretation:**

If you answered more than two of the above questions "Yes" as True for you, then you should spend an extra amount of time and energy in using this communications chapter. Ideally, you should be able to answer all questions "No" as not true in your communications with your partner.

Compare your answers with your partner. Then discuss each item to see if you can gain some further clarity about roadblocks to your effective communication with each other.

If you have a real problem with communicating with your partner you two might want to get further assistance to improve your communications, by going to "Tools for Communication": on this website at: <http://coping.us/toolsforcommunications.html> . When you are ready proceed on to the next exercises in this chapter to learn effective listening, responding and problem solving,

**In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise**

## 2-2 Effective Listening

**Activity One: Active Listening.** Effective Marital Listening is a combination of non-judgmental listening, accepting listening and active listening. Active listening is the tuning into the feelings of your partner and reflecting those feelings back. An effective marital communicator is able to not get caught up in the content of a partner's message in order to get to the feelings behind the message. In active listening you make an attempt to reflect back to your partner what feelings you hear being sent in the message. Sometimes you will be on target and your partner will let you know you are right. Other times, you may have perceived the wrong feelings. Don't worry; your partner will be able to clarify what are the real feelings. Sometimes however you may perceive the right feelings but your partner may deny them. You will need to work with your partner more closely when this occurs.

Below are some typical statements that spouses make in conversation. Read each one separately and try to listen carefully for the feelings being expressed. Then in the right hand column write in the feelings you heard in the statement.

Write in only feelings, not content. Some of the statements may contain more than one feeling. Write in all the main feelings you hear.

S/He Says:	S/He is Feeling
Example: I don't know what is wrong. I can't seem to figure it out. Maybe I should quit trying.	1. stumped 2. discouraged 3. frustrated
1. Wow, do I have to cook every day?	
2. I am sure things will work out OK. As a matter of fact, I will get started as soon as possible.	
3. I have worked hard for 25 years. I have even worked overtime for the last five years. Yet I never feel like I have done enough for you.	
4. You know what? It worked just as we planned. You really helped on that one.	
5. No question about it. You are right on the need for this work. I just hate to face the next six weeks around here.	
6. I feel like not coming home anymore. It just seems as if every time I get here, I have to face all this crap.	
7. Well, don't you think you would like to have the same thing done, if you were in my shoes? Wouldn't everyone feel that way?	
8. I enjoy coming home. You make me feel loved and wanted.	
9. As I look back on what I did I just can't believe it was	

me. I shouldn't have treated you that way.	
10. Boy, I wouldn't treat a dog the way you treated me. Who do you think you are anyway?	

Check your answers with the Answer Key at the bottom of this page before proceeding to the next activity.

**Activity Two: Accepting Listening.** There is an unlimited number of things you can say when your spouse tells you about a problem. Some of the things you say will encourage your spouse to continue because s/he knows you are listening. Other statements will discourage and limit the quantity and quality of self -disclosure of your spouse. Effective listening is accepting and non-judgmental listening.

One of the major barriers to listening is a tendency to filter out much of what you hear. The filter is your perception, attitudes, judgment, feelings, etc. Thus, when you respond to your spouse you add your own judgment or evaluation. In this way, you demonstrate that you see it from your viewpoint only rather than from hers or his.

Each example in this exercise begins with a statement by a spouse with a problem and is followed by possible responses from the other spouse who is the responder.

Mark an "L" in front of those responses that you think indicate the speaker is listening to the other with the problem. Hint: Some listening responses are "passive" and others are "active." Active responses clarify the message or seek out the feelings behind the message.

Once you have identified the listening go back over the responses given in this exercise and mark with a "J" for judgmental or "jumping to conclusions," for each response that seems to be judgmental rather than accepting. Hint: Where there is a judgment there will also be an assumption that is not there in the original statement.

Statement	Responses	L or J
1. Darling, you are so "high strung" and "nervous" that I hate to leave you home alone with the baby. I am afraid that he will irritate you and if you spank him you won't know when to stop.	a. Sounds as though you are very worried about us both. b. You should never leave me alone, then. c. Why are you going away for then? d. Tell me more. e. Well, there is not much you can do but hope for the best. f What alternatives do you see? g. It will be your fault if the baby is injured. h. I must be sick to hurt a little baby. i. I am sorry to hear that. j. What can I do about it?	a. b. c. d. e. f. g. h. i. j.
Our son just	a. I can see that you are concerned about him.	a.

<p>doesn't do like the others. He is three years old and he doesn't say a word. He never tries to do anything for himself. Three year olds should feed themselves and be out of diapers.</p>	<p>b. You probably don't pay enough attention to him.  c. You seem to think there is something wrong with him because he is not doing the things you expect a three-year old to do.  d. What do you think we should do?  e. Don't worry. Einstein was considered "slow" by his parents and teachers.  f. Do you think he is retarded?  g. Should we ask our doctor about him?  h. You think that's slow? My kid sister was in diapers until 7 years of age.</p>	<p>b.  c.  d.  e.  f.  g.  h.</p>
<p>3. How will I ever get all this work done when two people in my office are out with the flu?</p>	<p>a. That is nothing! My office has three vacancies.  b. You will have to work harder, I guess.  c. What will happen if you don't?  d. Can you get someone to help you?  e. I don't know. You have a real problem.  f. It seems like lots of people get the flu in the winter.  g. What are you going to do?  h. Complaining won't get the job done,  i. Are there any things you can put off until later?</p>	<p>a.  b.  c.  d.  e.  f.  g.  h.  i.</p>
<p>4. I hate it when mother comes to visit. All she does is criticize the way I take care of the children.</p>	<p>a. I know just what you mean, when your mother comes she ...  b. What does she find wrong with the children?  c. You should try to see it from her viewpoint.  d. She really aggravates you.  e. How does she put you down?  f. Urnrrmrrmn  g. Take a vacation, why don't you leave the kids with mother.  h. She criticizes everything, it seems.  i. Really? How does she do that?  j. Don't be so critical of mom, she is not getting any younger.</p>	<p>a.  b.  c.  d.  e.  f.  g.  h.  i.  j.</p>
<p>5. That is a really stupid policy! They don't lend money unless we prove that we have enough money so that we don't really need a loan. If I were drowning, they would not throw me a life</p>	<p>a. I guess it doesn't make much sense to you.  b. Well, we are not drowning.  c. We should have managed our af fairs better.  d. Just forget it, don't let it bother you.  e. Their rules seem harsh to you.  f. Why don't we try to borrow some money from your parents?  g. It makes you angry to be turned down for a loan.  h. Don't get snotty with them or you will never get a loan in this town.  i. I wish they could be more help to us.  j. Let's look at some possible alternatives.</p>	<p>a.  b.  c.  d.  e.  f.  g.  h.  i.  j.</p>

preserver unless I proved I could swim to shore!!!		
----------------------------------------------------------	--	--

Check your answers with the Answer Key at the bottom of this page before proceeding to the next activity.

**Activity Three: Putting Listening into Practice.** Here is a chance to try out your listening skills. Use a card or a piece of paper the width of your computer screen. Place it so that it covers up the first response of the speaker. First read the other's message, then formulate your own feedback or "listening" response. Then slide the card down so that you can read the response of the speaker and compare with your own response. Continue this procedure throughout this activity.

Other: Why is it that every time I come home I find more chores for me to take care of?

Speaker: You feel hassled?

Other: Sure! Who wants to have two or three major chores waiting for you every day?

Speaker: You are pretty unhappy with your housework?

Other: I certainly am. After all, I work hard on the job and every day I come home I find more work for me to take care of.

Speaker: Somehow you feel that it is hard to accept even when you work hard on the job that you still have to deal with work at home.

Other: It seems as if I am getting nowhere. It seems as if I'll never catch up. I have always got so much work to do.

Speaker: Feels like a real setback, does it?

Other: Of course it does, Sometimes I just feel like I 'm not getting anywhere at all.

Speaker: You are feeling kind of discouraged.

Other: I sure am. You know I work hard every day. I work long hard hours and here I am with more work to do.

Speaker: Feels like you are not accomplishing anything by working so hard.

Other: You can say that again! Here I was thinking that working hard would bring its own reward. But there is more work waiting for me at home.

Speaker: You are so discouraged because you don't get rewarded for your efforts.

Other: Well, yes I am. What do you think is the matter?

Speaker: Well, is it that you work hard and don't delegate some of this work to your staff members at work or to the kids at home?

Other: You're right, I don't.

Speaker: I see that, Perhaps I could show you some ways in which you could delegate out the bulk of the work to others. Why don't we take a look at some ideas that I have concerning delegation and the importance of it.

Other: Thanks, Maybe you are going to help me get on the right track. I love you!

**Activity Four: Effective Listening Exercise.** In this activity you and your spouse will be practicing effective listening on one another. There are ten topics in this activity with which the two of you will practice.

**Step One:** One partner takes the turn as speaker, the other takes the turn as listener. For 5 minutes the speaker speaks on one of the ten topics. The listener uses effective listening and makes appropriate listening comments back to the speaker.

**Step Two:** After the 5 minute role play is completed the speaker then spends 2 minutes in giving feedback to the listening partner on how well s/he was as an effective listener. Use the Tips on Effective Listening (below) to help you give feedback to your partner.

**Step Three:** After the first practice and feedback session, the partners alternate roles as speaker and listener until they have each role-played speaker and listener to all ten topics. Use the Tips on Effective Listening as a tool to make improvements in your listening and feedback behaviors.

### **Ten Practice Listening Topics**

1. How I feel about our marriage.
2. How I feel about the day we vowed to become husband and wife.
3. How I feel about all the good things I saw in you when I decided to marry you.
4. How I feel about our future together.
5. How I feel about our decision to spend the time together to make our Marriage Work-Out.
6. How I feel about my current attitude towards you.



7. How I feel about my ability to deal with the problems which we are currently facing in our relationship.

8. How I feel about your ability to listen to my deepest concerns and feelings.

9. How I feel about the way we show our love to one another.

10. How I feel when I consider that you may die before I do.

Be sure that each of you takes a turn being both a speaker and listener on each topic. Use the following Tips on Effective Listening to enhance your feedback to your partner.

### **Tips for Effective Listening**

1. To listen well you have to be alert, awake and fully attending to your partner.
2. Don't overdo listening. There are times when your spouse wants to listen to you. S/he may want your opinion, knowledge and reactions. Also, don't play psychotherapist.
3. Some problems don't call for listening. e.g., "Have you seen my umbrella lately?" "Do you have any suggestions about dinner tonight?"
4. Effective listening should signal genuine acceptance of your spouse. It is not effective when used to try to change behavior: "You seem to feel that you don't want to cooperate and be a part of my team."
5. Avoid hidden agendas. Effective listening is a tool to help your spouse solve her/his problem, not to manipulate her/him into complying with your solution.
6. All techniques can feel artificial and strange at first. When your spouse needs effective listening the most, s/he won't care much how you do it.
7. The following are the types of roadblock responses that discourage and cut off communication - that make your spouse not want to talk with you.

Warning	Interrogating	Ordering	Teaching
Judging	Diverting	Directing	Praising
Threatening	Moralizing	Buttering up	Lecturing
Demanding	Reassuring	Analyzing	Advising
Giving Solutions	Interpreting	Probing	Preaching
Criticizing	Scolding	Distracting	Blaming
Ridiculing	Sympthizing	Withdrawing	Name-calling

8. Here are some "door-openers" or general leads to use in effective listening.

A. Phrases that are useful, when you trust that your perceptions are accurate and your spouse is receptive to your communications:

You feel...

From your point of view...

It seems to you...

In your experience...

From where you stand ...

As you see it...

You think ...

You believe...

What I hear you saying...

You're.... (Identify the feeling: e.g., angry, sad, overjoyed etc.)

I'm picking up that you...

I really hear you saying that...

Where you're coming from...

You figure...

You mean ...

B. Phrases that are useful when you are having some difficulty perceiving clearly, or it seems that your spouse might not be receptive to your communications:

Could it be that ...	Maybe you feel ...
I wonder if ...	Is it conceivable that ...
I'm not sure if I'm with you, but ...	Maybe I'm out to lunch, but ...
Would you buy this idea...?	Do you feel a little ...
What I guess I'm hearing is ...	Maybe this is a long shot, but...
Correct me if I'm wrong, but ...	I'm not sure if I'm with you; do you mean...
Is it possible that ...	I'm not certain I understand; you're feeling ...
Does it sound reasonable that you ...	It seems that you...
Could this be what's going on, you ...?	As I hear it, you...
From where I stand you ...	...is that the way it is?
This is what I think I hear you saying ...	...is that what you mean?
You appear to be feeling ...	...is that the way you feel?
It appears you ...	Let me see if I understand; you...
Perhaps you're feeling ...	Let me see if I'm with you; you... I get the
I somehow sense that maybe you feel	impression that...
Is there any chance that you ...?	I guess that you're...

9. Use statements which acknowledge that you are interested in what your spouse is saying.

10. Be yourself and natural. Look into your partner's eyes. Let your body communicate a willingness to hear what your partner is saying.

### **Answer Key**

#### **Activity One - Active Listening**

1. Surprised, shocked, discouraged, upset
2. Confident, optimistic, excited, encouraged
3. Disappointed, angry, hurt, depressed
4. Grateful, happy, ready to go on
5. Anxious, reluctant, acquiescing, honest
6. Depressed, angry, discouraged, disappointed
7. Unsupported, confused
8. Loved, warm, welcomed, accepted
9. Regret, sorrow, penitent, despair
10. Angry, disappointed, upset, dismayed

1.	2	3	4	5
a. L	a. L	a. J	a. J	a. L
b. J	b. J	b. J	b. L open	b. J
c. J	c. L	c. L	c. J	c. J
d. L	d. L open	d. L closed	d. L	d. J
e. J	e. J	e. J	e. L open	e. L
f. L	f. L closed	f. L	f. L	f. J
g. J	g. L closed	g. L	g. J	g. L
h. J	h. J	h. J	h. L	h. J
i. J		i. J	i. L	i. J
j. L			j. J	j. L

Now that you have completed the listening activities, you are ready to proceed with practicing how to respond in a helpful way with your spouse.

**In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise**

### **3-3 Effective Responses**

The following seven responses are used most frequently by effective communicating partners when they respond to their spouses. Research suggests that some of the responses tend to be perceived by the receiver as more empathic, caring, warm and person-centered. Consequently, these responses are suggested as having a higher probability than others in creating a healthy marital relationship. The suggested, repertoire of response leads are listed below from the most to the least facilitating. It should be remembered, however, that at the proper time and place, all of these responses could be, effective.

#### **1. Understanding**

This is the response that research indicates as the most enabling in the sense of being most likely to create a climate where honest and frank communication can occur. It is a feeling orientated response which conveys sensitivity to what is going on with your spouse. It conveys to your spouse that you understand or are "reading" how s/he is feeling. This is the best response to diminish strong negative feelings that become a barrier to communication. It is empathy - accurately tuning in to what your partner is feeling at the time. It implies listening beyond the words to the feelings and then reflecting back the feelings.

#### **Examples:**

- It sounds like you are feeling discouraged and wonder what is the use.
- You seem to be offended and angry.
- You sound like you're excited over your new assignment.
- You seem pleased that you were selected.

By focusing on your spouse's feelings you are recognizing her/him as an individual, a person worthy of your concern. This type of response will usually reduce hostile feelings in a normal person because it doesn't make assumptions nor take responsibility for the feelings expressed. It can also be used with your spouse when s/he is over-emotional, crying, fearful, etc., to get beyond those feelings and reactions to whatever you wish to accomplish. Understanding or empathy can repair a damaged relationship.

#### **2. Clarification**

This type of response indicates your intent to understand correctly what your spouse is saying or to identify the most significant ideas and feelings that are emerging from what is being said. It indicates that what s/he is saying is important and that you are checking it out with her/him to ensure correct understanding. This can be done in several ways: echoing the last few words your spouse has spoken; summarizing the points that seem

most relevant or paraphrasing what has-been said. A response of this nature can profitably be followed by a period of silence to give your spouse a chance for drawing thoughts together, or to correct your impression. This response reinforces your desire to see the situation from your spouse's viewpoint.

**Examples:**

- I gather that you were able to manage your expenses when you were living alone with your mom
- You seem to be saying that you were happier in California and that you would like to go back there.
- Let's see, what you want to do is find a more challenging job.
- If I hear you correctly, you are saying that you believe you could devise a better way of doing this.

This response is useful in reducing hostility. It not only encourages your spouse to explain more fully, but also serves to focus the discussion. Especially when followed by silence on your part, it gives your spouse a chance to draw her/his thoughts together and to take responsibility for coming up with her/his own ideas. Another use is to purposefully delay a response to give you time to think of what will be most useful.

**3. Questioning**

This response seeks to elicit additional information. It implies that your spouse should or might profitably develop a point further. Open questions focus on your spouse's general situation, thoughts, reactions and feelings and tend to promote further open communication. Closed questions focus on specific facts or aspects of your spouse's situation and generally evoke brief answers of "yes" or "no."

**Examples:**

Do you get along well with your boss? (closed)

What can you tell me about your boss? (open)

You don't like the new house, do you? (closed)

What do you dislike about the new house? (open)

Is this the part that is confusing you? (closed)

What is it that's confusing you? (open)

Open questions are recommended for starting the process of exploring a broad topic. Closed questions can be interspersed to get at specific facts or can be used to cut off long explanations that are not relevant. In either case: listening to the answer, both what is said and what is left unsaid, is vital to the questioning process.

**Note:** Caution is needed with questions beginning with "why." They pressure your spouse for an explanation in a way likely to cause resentment. "Why" questions can often express disapproval and are perceived as a cut-down or criticism.

#### **4. Information Giving**

This response is one of giving facts in an objective manner without judgment or evaluation. It leaves your spouse receiving the facts free to accept or reject them. It allows your spouse to take responsibility for using the information. This response is useful in giving both positive and negative feedback (confrontation). Your spouse relates to only what, has actually occurred and the effect this has had. Words such as: "always," "never," "should," "ought," are not a part of this response because one must avoid dogmatism in using this response.

#### **Examples:**

- One procedure that seems to work with insurance adjusters is to call every day and bother them until they give priority to your claim.
- People who have lost someone they love may feel a great deal of anger,
- Children need lots of warm tender loving, touching and caring so as to believe in themselves as being good people.
- I was really pleased and surprised when I came home and found you had cleaned the house so nicely.

An information giving response is also useful for setting limits. This is done by stating the facts about what must or must not be done. The reasons for the limits and its implication can also be given factually. Responding to your spouse's feelings with an information response increases the chances that s/he will respect and follow the limits you are suggesting.

#### **5. Reassurance**

This response attempts to reduce anxiety or other intense feeling, to express confidence and to pacify. It is like a pat on the back to keep your spouse going but it implies that s/he need not or should not have certain feelings or thoughts by dismissing them as normal and common. This response does not foster a relationship because it tends to discount the person's feelings and problems. Most adages and cliches fall in to this category.

#### **Examples:**

- Don't worry. Other people have done it so will you.

- Things may look bad now but I am sure it will be OK in the end.
- You are not really fat, I like the way you look.
- Tomorrow is another day. Everyone feels disappointed sometimes.

This response is less useful and can be profitably reworded into an understanding, clarifying or information giving response. It is more effective when used as an expression of sympathy in conjunction with other responses: instead of "You will manage" substitute "You have handled this situation before" (information giving) and "I have confidence in you" (reassurance).

## **6. Analytical**

The intent of this response is to analyze, explain or interpret your spouse's behavior. It goes beyond what ever s/he has said to try to explain or connect ideas and events. Unlike clarification, this response adds something from your own thoughts, feelings, values, etc. It implies that you are wise to what is going on and know more than your spouse. Under most circumstances this response produces resentment in your spouse. In order to avoid abrasiveness it is best to take responsibility for the response when using it with your spouse.

### **Examples:**

- The reason you are having so much trouble with me is that I remind you of your father whom you hate.
- You often come home late because you really don't feel comfortable with me.
- You see her as an authority figure and that is why you can't relate to her.
- Your loneliness is because you are afraid to risk getting involved with people.

This type of response is more appropriate for therapists where there is an ongoing counseling relationship where the patient needs to become aware of certain behaviors or reaction patterns. Even then it works better to use an information giving type response. Interpretation is a poor response to use - in confronting your spouse with behavior which you disapprove, or find bothersome

## **7. Advice-Giving**

This response is usually not productive. It implies that you are in a position to know the reasons for your spouse's problems and what s/he ought, must, or should do about it. You are thus judging the goodness, appropriateness, effectiveness or rightness of your spouse's actions. Your spouse is being measured by your personal value system and is found somehow lacking. Essentially this is a process of blaming your spouse for her/his own problems.

**Examples:**

- Don't you think you should see a doctor if you are too sickly to work.
- If I were you, I'd write to him and ask him to send you something for the kids.
- Instead of arguing, you should try to see the other person's viewpoint.
- You really shouldn't say things like that.

Telling your spouse what to do takes the responsibility for decisions and problem solving away from her/him. Advice often arouses resistance and resentment even when there is outward compliance. Even when advice is asked for, dependency is fostered. Advice can be easily reworded to an information giving response or a question.

Now that you have read about these seven effective communications responses, proceed to exercise 2-4 to practice these responses. Or you may wish before proceeding with the exercises to first visit: **Improving Responding Communications Skills** at: <http://www.coping.us/toolsforcommunications/improverespondingskills.html>



## 2-4 Practicing Effective Responses

**Activity One:** Try to put yourself in the place of the spouse making each of the following statements. Then decide which response given would be most helpful. It may be that none of the responses given would be effective. Identify what type of response each is on the space provided in the type response column. There are seven types of effective responses:

1. Understanding
2. Clarification
3. Questioning
4. Information Giving
5. Reassurance
6. Analytical
7. Advice Giving

And then rank the responses from 1-3 as to how helpful they are. Use:

1. most helpful
2. somewhat helpful
3. least helpful

1. I feel so stupid. I locked my keys in the car again.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. You should keep an extra key hidden under the car in a magnetic box.		
b. I did that once and I was embarrassed.		
c. You seem so upset and bewildered.		

2. How long do we have to live in this town before you get a promotion and we can move?

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. You seem to be frustrated living here.		
b. There are two people ahead of me on the promotion list and it will be about a year or more.		
c. Don't worry. They will get around to me sooner or later.		

3. I have tried and tried and I still can't seem to please my boss.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response

a. No matter what you do, it isn't enough?		
b. That must be really frustrating		
c. I know just how you feel.		

4. I just don't know how we are going to eat in the meantime.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. Don't worry, the Lord will find a way.		
b. It seems frightening to you to be in this financial crisis.		
c. If we had saved some money for a rainy day we wouldn't be in this predicament.		

5. If I could get another job, I'd walk right out of there this minute.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. How do you think you could make it a better place to work?		
b. Everyone feels like that sometimes.		
c. Sounds like you are really fed up with working there.		

6. I don't know what to do with Johnny. Now that he is 15, he won't listen to me anymore.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. His behaviors seem to really bother you.		
b. He's been having troubles with the kids in school.		
c. Why don't you give him a good slap across the mouth next time.		

7. Twenty five people applied for that job and I was the one that got it.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. Wow, I bet you are really proud.		
b. You should not gloat like that.		
c. Hard work and lots of enthusiasm really pay off.		

8 The baby cries all the time. I mean all the time. Sometimes I feel like hitting him.

Response	Type of	Rank of
----------	---------	---------

	Response	Response
a. Make sure he is comfortable, then shut the door so you can't hear him.		
b. The baby's constant crying really gets on your nerves.		
c. What can we do about it?		

9. I was late again because of that stupid old car.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. When can we get rid of that old wreck?		
b. How frustrating.		
c. There is a garage on 13 <sup>th</sup> Street that specializes in old cars.		

10. He seems so distant lately. Sometimes I wonder if he still loves us.

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. You seem so concerned about this.		
b. In what way does he seem distant?		
c. Don't worry, it is just a stage teenagers go through.		

11. My brother, his wife, and all the kids are arriving at 8:00 pm tonight. TONIGHT!

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. That really seems to annoy you.		
b. When were you expecting them?		
c. This is the second time they have taken advantage of our hospitality like that.		

12. How am I ever going to get all this work done before the party starts?

Response	Type of Response	Rank of Response
a. Next time you should start on it earlier and set priorities for what is important.		
b. you seem so bewildered by all of the arrangements.		
c. What would you like me to do?		

Be sure to check the Answer Key at the end of Chapter 2 before proceeding to the next activity.

**Activity Two:** In this activity you and your spouse will be practicing effective responding with one another. There are Ten Role Play Topics in this activity for you two to practice with.

**Step 1:** One partner takes the turn as the speaker who has the concern, the other takes the turn as the responder. For 5 minutes the speaker shares the concern from one of the ten role play situations. The responder uses effective responses with the speaker to evoke a helpful closure to the concern.

**Step 2:** After the 5 minute role play is completed, the speaker then spends 2 minutes in giving feedback to the responder on how well s/he was as an effective responder. Use the Tips on Communicating with Your Spouse to help you give feedback to your spouse. These tips are at the end of this unit.

**Step 3:** After the first role play and feedback session, the partners alternate roles as speaker and responder until they have each role played speaker and responder to all ten role play topics. Use the “Tips on Communicating with Your Spouse” as a tool to make improvements in your responding and feedback behaviors.

### **Ten Responding Role Play Topics**

1. You are very concerned about your inability to control your smoking (or drinking or drug use or eating or spending or gambling) behaviors.
2. You are very concerned because you feel you are being unfairly judged by your partner.
3. You are very concerned because you do not sense a full commitment from your spouse to your marriage.
4. You are very concerned because you feel like you are in a dead-end career.
5. You are very concerned because you are finding it increasingly difficult to control your temper at home and/or work.
6. You are very concerned about the way you and your partner solve problems.
7. You are very concerned about how much time and energy is required to make your Marriage Work Out.
8. You are very concerned about your partner's health.
9. You are very concerned about the behaviors of your children both at home and at school.

10. You are very concerned about your sense of loneliness and abandonment after you have a fight with your spouse.

- Be sure that each of you take a turn being both a speaker and a responder on each topic.
- To assist you to give productive feedback to your spouse in this activity, read over the following Tips on Communicating with Your Spouse before you begin this role playing activity.

NOTE: For further assistance for improving your responding skills, use **Improving Responding Communications Skills** on this website at:

<http://www.coping.us/toolsforcommunications/improverespondingskills.html>

### **Tips on Communicating with Your Spouse**

#### **Listening Response Tips:**

1. Listen carefully so that you will be able to respond with understanding and comprehension. Careful listening will require a conscious effort on your part. You must hear verbal conversation as well as perceive non-verbal messages.
2. Be mentally and physically prepared to listen. Put other thoughts out of your mind. Don't try to think of answers in advance, your attention will be diverted from listening if you do.
3. You can't know what your spouse is thinking if YOU do all the talking. So, don't talk too much. LISTEN!
4. If possible, think about the topic in advance. Then be prepared to listen so that you can hear what is being said.
5. Listen with empathy. See the situation from your spouse's point of view.
6. Be courteous: don't interrupt.
7. Avoid putting your spouse into a box or category by making assumptions about how you expect her/him to act. This will bias your listening and responding.
8. Listen to how something is said. Be alert for what is not said.
9. Make certain your spouse gets an opportunity to talk. Avoid dominating the conversation.

#### **Responding Tips:**

1. Answer your spouse in a way which focuses attention on the feelings about the issues and concerns: clarify inconsistencies and gather facts quickly and unobtrusively.
2. Let your spouse know that you are listening and following what is being said. Give an occasional "Yes, I see," or "uh- hum. "

3. To gain more information, probe with open-ended statements, such as "Tell me more about that ....," "Let 's talk about that" or "I am wondering about ....." . Responding in this manner is more effective than specific who, what, when; where and how questions.
4. When you need to make sure you understand what is being said, ask for clarification. Say, "I am having trouble understanding what you are saying... is it that..." or "Could you go over that again, please?"
5. Use understandable words. Don't be pedantic.
6. Don't preach, blame or be demanding.
7. Try to avoid straying from the topic.
8. Show understanding, empathy, and sincerity in your responses. Your spouse will be more trllstirtg and more comfortable in discussing additional information.
9. Don't talk excessively from your own point of view.
10. Give responses appropriate for issues being discussed.
11. Avoid responses that put you on the defensive. "I am sorry, I really didn't mean that," is not a good approach.
12. Don't feel that silence needs to be filled with talk. Be comfortable. Don't be maneuvered into doing all the talking.
- 13, Try to remain neutral and non-judgmental in your response to actions, comments, or conditions which you find difficult at first to accept.

### **Non-Verbal Communication Tips:**

1. Make yourself comfortable with your spouse.
2. Be relaxed and attentive. To gain confidence hold your spouse's hands.
3. Maintain frequent eye contact. Avoid staring, glaring, or looking away,
4. Give non-verbal cues that you are attending to your spouse while s/he is speaking such as a simple nod, approving glance and open body posture.
5. Keep gestures smooth and unobtrusive. Don't let them compete for attention with your words. Avoid letting your gestures reveal emotional frustration.
6. Your rate of speech should be average or a bit slower. Avoid sounding impatient or hesitant.
7. Control the tone of your voice. Avoid sounding cold and harsh.
8. Maintain a clearly audible voice - neither very loud nor very soft.
9. Smile when appropriate, and look pleasant and genuine.
- 10, Stay alert through long conversations. Closing eyes and yawning usually blocks communication.

**In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise**

## **Answer Key**

### **Activity One: Practicing Responding**

1.     a. Advice - giving     3  
       b. Reassurance     2  
       c. Understanding    1
  
2.     a. Understanding     1  
       b. Information     2  
       c. Reassurance     3
  
3.     a. Clarification     2  
       b. Understanding    1  
       c. Reassurance     3
  
4.     a. Reassurance     2  
       b. Understanding    1  
       c. Analytical       3
  
5.     a. Question (open)   2  
       b. Reassurance     3  
       c. Understanding    1
  
6.     a. Understanding     1  
       b. Information     2  
       c. Advice           3
  
7.     a. Understanding     1  
       b. Advice           3  
       c. Clarification     2
  
8.     a. Advice            3  
       b. Understanding    1  
       c. Question (open)   2
  
9.     a. Question (open)   2  
       b. Understanding    1  
       c. Information       3
  
10.    a. Understanding     1

- b. Question (open) 2
- c. Reassurance 3
- 11. a. Understanding 1
- b. Questions (open) 2
- c. Information 3
- 12. a. Advice - giving 3
- b. Understanding 1
- c. Question (closed) 2

Now that you have practiced listening and responding you two are ready for the next exercise on problem solving in communications.



## **2-5 Effective Problem Solving**

### **1. Steps to Effective Problem Solving for any Individual:**

Here is a quick eight step method to help one's spouse solve problems.

**STEP 1:** Help your spouse think of her/his problem in words which refer to her/himself. Help your spouse to answer your question: "How is this a problem to you?"

**STEP 2:** Help your spouse to refer to how s/he feels and reacts in the problem situation. Focus on her/his feelings and reactions to the problem.

**STEP 3:** Help your spouse to own her/his feelings about the problem.

**STEP 4:** Help your spouse to explore how her/his thinking, feeling or doing contributes to the problem. Help your spouse to answer: "What is it that I am doing or not doing which is my contribution to the problem?"

**STEP 5:** Help your spouse to identify and generate a list of some specific changes in her/his behaviors which may be needed to solve the problem. Help your spouse to make a brainstormed list of specific things s/he can do about the problem.

**STEP 6:** Help your spouse to do some reality testing of the specific behavioral changes identified on the list. Help your spouse to answer the question: "Of the generated list of behavioral changes which am I most willing to try and able to do?"

**STEP 7:** Help your spouse commit to trying those changes s/he is most willing to try and most capable of doing.

**STEP 8:** Help your spouse review the solutions which have been identified and then assist her/him in following through with actions which put the solutions into practice.

In this activity you and your spouse will practice communication skills in problem solving situations. In your role playing a situation where only one spouse has a problem use the eight step process identified above. Use the problem solving outline below for problem solving when the problem exists between the two partners.

### **2. A Couples Problem Solving Outline:**

#### **STEP 1. Problem Recognition by. Couple:**

A. Acknowledge the problem facing you both.

B. Each partner accepts personal responsibility for her/his part in the problem.

C. Establish priorities

1. Choose problem areas under your joint control.
2. Give priority to pressing problems (crisis situations).
3. To begin, choose a problem which is less difficult than the others.
4. Choose a problem that, if corrected, will bring about general improvement.

### **STEP 2. Problem Definition by Couple:**

Make a "How to...." Statement so that the problem appears solvable:

1. The goal should be stated in positive terms, rather than negative, so that the problem will "appear solvable rather than impossible.
2. The statement should name a specific goal, rather than a general, vague idea.
3. The statement should deal with tangible, unmet wants, needs or goals.

### **STEP 3. Alternatives Generation Between the Couple**

A. Jointly explore your personal helping and hindering factors.

1. List all resources, helping factors and advantages helping you either reach your GOAL or resolve your problem.
2. List all hindering factors, disadvantages and limiting factors keeping you both from your goal.
3. Underline the factors in each list that seem the most important right now.

B. Jointly generate alternative solutions

1. In brainstorming alternatives following these rules:
  - All ideas should be heard.
  - Deem no idea too wild to be expressed.
  - Quantity is wanted and every idea coming into any partner's mind should be expressed.
  - Combination and improvement of ideas is highly desirable.
  - Criticism or negative discussion regarding any ideas is absolutely and positively forbidden.
2. Maximize the helping and minimize the hindering factors.
3. Adapt solution from a similar problem solved in the past.

### **STEP 4 Evaluation and Decision Making by Couple**

A. Jointly analyze alternative solutions

1. Predict the possible OUTCOMES of each alternative .
2. Determine the PROBABILITY of each outcome occurring.
3. Consider the DESIRABILITY of each outcome (pros and cons).
  - Does the solution overcome the hindering factors?
  - Does the solution make use of the helping factors?

- Does the solution create new problems or new advantages? If so, can the problems be corrected or the advantages used?

4. Rank the alternatives in order of preference.

B. Jointly make your decision based on:

- Your couple ranking of alternatives.
- Your joint couple values.
- 3, The practicality of the solution and probability of success for you both.
- The ability to move gradually and systematically toward your joint goal.

NOTE: Before proceeding to the role-playing you may want to review the **A Communications Model of Problem Solving** on this website at:

<http://www.coping.us/toolsforcommunications/problemsolvingcommunicationsmodel.html>

### **Problem Solving Role Play Activity**

Now that you have the steps to problem solving, proceed to practice them. First read each role play situation. You two are to assume your own roles in each role play (i.e., male = husband; female = wife). Spend a minimum of ten minutes on each role play. Record your couples' agreed, upon solution for each role play situation when you complete the role play. Remember that these are only "role plays." Also, don't forget the listening and responding skills you have practiced earlier.

### **Ten Role Play Situations for Effective Problem Solving**

1. The husband is the primary wage earner in the relationship. The wife, a trained professional woman; has been home for the last five years taking care of the couple's two young children. The husband announces to the wife that since he has not gotten more than a 3% raise in each of the last three years that there is a need for more money coming into the household in order for them to keep their heads above water and to meet their needs, bills, etc.

2. The wife is finding that she wants her husband to spend more time at home. It seems that he has a new job which requires him to spend lots of evening hours out on the road and at the office.

3. The husband complains that he and his wife have lost that zest or zing which they once had in their early days. The wife agrees that things are certainly different from when they dated:

4. The husband wants his wife to make a "renewed" commitment to the marriage by going through an anniversary renewal of marriage vows ceremony. The wife seems put off by such a request and says "I am here, aren't I. That is commitment isn't it?"

5. The wife finds some foreign long red hair strands on her husband's suit lapel when she is hanging it up in the closet. The husband walks in on her and begins complaining about how obsessive she is when it comes to things - why does she always have to hang his clothes up - he can do it himself.

6. The husband and wife had a blow-up last night when they were visiting a neighbor's. They have not spoken since. The issue was the same old thing: wife nagging about her husband's drinking.

7. The wife announces to her husband that she desires to go back to graduate school to get a doctorate in her field.-The husband at the same time announces his intention to quit his job and open his own business.

8. The husband has a sore spot when it comes to smoking. He is allergic or at least physically affected by smoking. The wife is a chain smoker who finds it difficult to quit.

9. The wife cringes and complains whenever her husband drives the car on trips because he speeds. The husband cannot relax when his wife drives because she is so cautious that he is sure they will get into an accident.

10. The wife resents being made to put time in on the nightly Marriage Work-Out sessions she and her husband agreed to. The husband finds that he is getting behind in his paper work because of the time he has been putting in on the Marriage Work-Out sessions with his wife.

Once you have completed these Role Plays and recognize you still need to work more on problem solving then review the **A Communications Model of Problem Solving** on this website at:

<http://www.coping.us/toolsforcommunications/problemsolvingcommunicationsmodel.html>

## **2-6 Follow Up Work-Out Plans for Improved Marital Communications**

As a result of our exercises, discussions, and efforts in this section of our Marriage Work-Out, we have come up with this action plan to continue to follow-up the health enhancing we have just completed.

### **1. Communications Needs**

The following are needs which we still have to address.to fully achieve full health in the Communications aspect of our marital relationship:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### **2. Strategic Steps Towards Growth in Communications**

The following are specific steps we will take to address our needs to improve our Communications functioning:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7,
- 8•
- 9.
- 10.

### **3. Personal Responsibility Taking**

The following are the things I will specifically do to ensure that we as a couple continue to grow in Communications.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6;
- 7,
- 8.

- 9.
- 10.

#### **4. Evaluation of Action Plan for our Communications**

We will know we have achieved our goal in the Communications area of our relationship by the following measurable changes:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

We agree to the above Marriage Work-Out plans in Communications.

---

**My signature**

---

**My partner's signature**

---

**Date**

---

**Date**