



## SIX STEPS TO GREAT COMMUNICATION

You're bound to disagree with your partner at some stage or another. The key is to communicate in a way that deepens your love. Read our tips on how to get started.

You're bound to disagree with your significant other from time to time, whether it's about chores, finances or even what movie to see. Fortunately, you can be angry without worrying that you're on the road to breaking up. The key is to communicate in a way that deepens your love and connection, says Patricia Gibberman, a licensed clinical social worker in Fairfax, Va. How you speak to your partner - especially during arguments - says a lot about the strength of your marriage. In his studies, Dr John Gottman, a marriage expert with a doctorate in psychology, found that those who talk respectfully and with love are happier and stay wed longer than those who attack each other's character or treat each other with contempt.

"Happily married couples behave like good friends, because they handle their conflicts in gentle and positive ways," says Gibberman, a certified Gottman-method couple's therapist, who teaches clients to communicate more effectively.

Try this six-step plan to help you tune up your couple talk, thus staying closer than ever:

### 1 Become an active listener

"Many people don't listen to what their partners are saying during a disagreement, because they're too busy thinking about how to rebut them," says Gibberman. Before you begin, agree to take turns: One of you gets to speak while the other listens without interrupting. After each of you has spoken, show that you understand the other's feelings: "It makes sense to me that you think we're not saving enough money, and that you're upset by this. Let's find a solution together."

### 2 Complain without blame

Want your guy to stop leaving the TV remote between the couch cushions? Ask nicely, using "I" statements: "I get frustrated having to search for the remote, so I'd like you to

put it back in the end table drawer when you're done." Avoid critical "you" statements, like this one: "You always leave things all over the place!" This sounds like an attack.

### 3 Own up to your part

Take responsibility for your contribution to the problem, as hard as it may be: "I should have talked to you about the price of the couch before buying it. Let's figure out ways we can cut back until it is paid off." Denying it ("I didn't spend too much") or counter-attacking ("Well, you spent a fortune on the flat-screen TV") will just lead to hurt feelings and flaring tempers.

### 4 Forget the past

When you're in the middle of a disagreement, stay on topic. Dredging up old conflicts ("This is just like the time you ...") could overwhelm and upset your partner - not to mention put him or her on the defensive. Plus, adds Gibberman, skipping from one subject to another makes it difficult to reach a resolution.

### 5 Take a time-out

"When a discussion isn't going well, many couples tend to keep barreling through, which makes things worse, not better," says Gibberman. The next time one of you gets emotional mid-conflict, put the discussion on hold - whether it's for 15 minutes or five days - until you're calm and thinking clearly.

### 6 Show gratitude

Look for opportunities to acknowledge the things your significant other does right, instead of focusing on his or her flaws. Saying things like "Those lamb chops were delicious - thanks for making dinner tonight" will go a long way towards strengthening the friendship in your marriage, which in turn will make it easier to manage conflicts.

Source: *Health24*