

COMMUNICATION: Assertiveness ^{and} Active Listening

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Assertiveness: *The skill of expressing your needs and what is important to you in a safe and respectful way. Not Demanding!*

Active Listening: *Choosing to care about the persons needs and restating their request in order to know them. Not Defensive!*

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to feel safe and secure to “assert” their desires and feelings. Presumption brings strife, so presuming our spouse knows what is important to us or how we feel will often lead to feelings of isolation or anger. It will lead to a greater experience of oneness when we have the wisdom and skill to share how we feel and ask clearly and directly what we are requesting.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using “I” statements. They avoid “you” statements. In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. They use polite phrases such as “please” and “thank you.” They share how they feel and communicate clearly, directly and gently.

In order to give the communication, the best chance of being heard, it is often wise to make sure your communication is at a good time when your partner is in a good frame of mind to give them the best chance to respond with understanding and faith. Before you share something from your heart or a desire/wish, consider asking your partner the following question:

“Is this a good time to share my heart with you?”

If your partner needs some time to unplug from a task or activity, set another time in the very near future to share your thought. It is important to make eye contact whenever possible in this process.

EXAMPLES OF ASSERTIVE STATEMENTS:

“It would help meet my relational need for attention if we could find some time after dinner to take a walk or other quiet activity before we engaged in our evening activities.”

“It would help me to feel respected and appreciated if we could spend some time talking over financial decisions before we commit to any expenses that are not currently in our budget.”

Good communication depends first on maintaining care and connection. There are two parts to effective Active Listening first, choosing to care that the speaker's needs are important to you. Second, to carefully listen to another person and seek to know and understand. Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. It is important to acknowledge the content AND the feelings of the speaker. The active listening process lets the sender know whether or not the message sent was clearly understood because the listener restates what they heard.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVE LISTENING:

“I heard you say that it would help meet your relational need for attention if we could find some time after dinner to take a walk or other quiet activity before we engaged in our evening activities. Is that right?”

“If I understand what you said, you would feel more respected and appreciated if we talked over financial decisions before we commit to spending for things not in our budget. Did I hear your heart?”

COMMUNICATION: *Sharing from the heart*

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. PSALM 19:14*

Exercise | Creating a Wish List

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like to see more of or less of in your relationship. Next, you will take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

Assertiveness: The skill of expressing your needs and what is important to you in a safe and respectful way. It is an act of vulnerability, not a demand.

Active Listening: Choosing to care about the persons needs and restating their request in order to know them. Not defensive!

While sharing your Wish List with your partner, practice your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be practicing your Active Listening skills.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like more of or less of, AND what Relational Need it would meet or how it how it would make you feel:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other.
A great resource for important things to share is your relational needs sheet.

SPEAKER'S JOB:

1. Speak for yourself:
"I would feel," "I wish..." etc.
2. Communicate what need would be met or how you would feel if your desires were acted on.

LISTENER'S JOB:

1. Stop and affirm that you care that your partners need would be met.
2. Repeat and/or summarize what you have heard, restating the wish and how your partner would feel if the desires were acted on.
3. Ask your partner if you understood them correctly.

After completing the Wish List exercise, discuss the following questions:

1. Did the speaker feel heard and understood?
2. Was the listener able to care without becoming defensive?