

Marital communication (and any two-way communication) is a process. What I have found in counseling couples is that it's not that couples don't communicate, but they don't listen. It is not enough to tell people to communicate when they don't know how to listen. Miscommunication can occur at any or at all parts of the process. Two key elements in effective communication are **content** and **process**. Content is the actual words used to convey a message. Process is how a message is said and how it should be understood in five parts:

1. A message from one person or group
2. Is sent in verbal or written form
3. To another person or group
4. Who receives the message
5. And understands its meaning in a certain way

Broken and troubled communication occurs because of distractions and misunderstandings anywhere along the transmission of a message. For example,

- the message as constructed may not exactly represent the intention of the sender.
- The way it is sent may be poor or incomplete.
- The receiver may not be listening well.
- The understanding of the received message may be affected by the history, emotions, gender, and values filters of the hearer.

SUGGESTIONS

There are ways to improve the quality of one's communication with their spouse. Genuineness, empathy and respect on the part of both the speaker and the listener are vital to improving communication between husband and wife. Here are some suggestions for effective conversation:

1. **Spend More Time Talking.** Studies have shown that many couples spend an average of only four minutes a day in meaningful conversations.
2. **Don't Allow Anything to Interfere with Your Communication.**
 - If you are overloaded with responsibilities, examine your commitments and determine what your priorities should be.
 - Make time to communicate. Instead of filling your time with phone calls, television, shopping trips, sports, friends and other activities, spend time talking with your spouse.
 - Don't allow anger or bitterness to keep you from communicating. If you shut out your partner, you are doing yourself and your marriage a great disservice.
 - Do not use text messages to replace conversations that should take place in person. Also do not use all caps letters to express your anger or prove a point. Calm down, step back and assess yourself.

3. **Be Careful with Nonverbal Communication.**

- Couples are constantly sending messages in person or via text, positive or negative, even when no words are being said. You must work effectively to control your negative communication.

For example, a man comes home from work and says nothing. He may be thinking that he is communicating respect in that he is not bothering his wife. His wife may perceive him as being cold. Another example is the shrug of the shoulders of a wife may be her way of saying, "I'm not sure," but her husband may interpret it as, "I'm not very impressed by you," or "These things are not important to me."

- Married couples must make every attempt to keep their intentions and their language clear.

4. **End Poor Communication Strategies** such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling (which is when one of the spouses shuts down and decides that he or she will no longer participate in the conversation).

Communication is a skill, and it is also a gift to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath. Couples need to remember that listening to their spouse is just as important as having their spouse listen to them.