

Communication: Assertiveness & Active Listening Skills

"It takes two to speak the truth...one to speak and another to hear."

--Henry David Thoreau

Assertiveness:

Assertiveness is the ability to ask for what you want and need, and express your true feelings.

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to be assertive. Rather than assuming their partner can read their minds, they ask clearly and directly for what they want.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using "I" statements. They avoid statements beginning with "you." In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. When each person knows what the other person wants and feels -- when each knows they have been heard and understood -- intimacy is increased. Assertiveness also helps people to feel good about themselves and increases the likelihood that they will achieve their personal goals.

Examples of Assertive Statements:

- *"I enjoy spending time with you, but I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this."*
- *"I feel upset and insecure when you bounce a check. I want to make sure you understand how I feel when this happens."*

Active Listening:

Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and restating what you hear until the speaker is satisfied..

Good communication depends on you carefully listening to another person. The active listening process lets the speaker know whether or not the message sent was clearly understood by restating both the content and feelings communicated. Active listeners avoid judgment and criticism, and instead listen curiously with the hope of understanding their partner. Instead of thinking about what they will say next, the active listener tunes into what is being said, while remembering they'll have their turn to be the speaker soon enough.

Examples of Active Listening:

- *"I heard you say that you enjoy the time we spend together but that you need more time to be with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this."*
- *"It sounds like the check I bounced leaves you feeling insecure, and you want me to understand how upsetting this is to you."*

Communication Exercise: Creating and Sharing a Wish List

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things that you would like your partner to do more often. Next, you will be asked to take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your **assertiveness skills**. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your **Active Listening skills**.

- **Assertiveness** means your ability to express feelings and ask for what you want.
- **Active listening** is the ability to listen accurately and repeat back to the speaker the message you have heard.

Make a Wish List of three things that you want your partner to do more often.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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

- **In what ways are you good at being assertive? Where could you improve?**
 - **In what ways do you effectively use active listening skills? How could you improve?**
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Communication Tips that will Increase Your Intimacy:

1. Look for the good in your partner and give him/her a compliment.
2. Praise your partner as much as possible.
3. Take time to listen to each other.
4. Listen to understand -- not to judge.
5. Use active listening, which involves summarizing your partner's comments before you share your reactions or feelings.
6. Be assertive. Share your feelings by using "I" statements (i.e. I feel... or I think...).
7. When issues arise, avoid blaming each other and seek solutions.
8. If problems persist, use the Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict.
9. If problems still continue, seek counseling before they become more serious. Doing so will make it easier to find solutions.
10. Give your relationship the same priority and attention you gave it when you were first dating.