

Poor Communication

The way couples communicate with each other can lead to both increased stress and tension.

Some examples of poor communication are when:

- One partner has a demanding communication style that leads the other partner to refuse to communicate in response.
- One partner tries to manipulate the other with negative emotions, such as anger and sadness.
- One Partner personally criticizes his/her partner, such as calling him/her 'lazy', rather than focusing on behaviors.

Ways to enhance communication:

- Remove all distractions, such as television or radio noise, and arrange a time to talk that suits you both.
- Avoid interrupting your partner. Summarize back what you have heard for accuracy before replying.
- Avoid labeling. Focus on behaviors that are problematic, not your partner as an individual.
- Talk about the positive aspects of the relationship, as well as the problems.

Poor Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills are vital to working out relationship difficulties when they arise.

Some common barriers to problem solving are:

- Not identifying the true cause of the problem. For example, assuming your partner's recent disinterest means he/she is losing feelings for you, when the actual reason is work stress.
- Choosing a solution before considering all options.
- Trying to solve the problem without your partner's input.

Ways to enhance problem solving skills:

- Separate big problems into smaller ones and deal with each individually in order of importance.
- Consider many possible options and strategies before choosing a solution.
- Work with your partner as a partner. Both of you need to have a sense of shared ownership in the process and the outcomes.

Inadequate Partner Support

Both partners need to give and receive adequate support for a relationship to survive and flourish.

Some common problems with partner support are:

- Having unrealistic expectations and demands.
- Relying on your partner to meet all of your support needs likely places too much pressure on them.
- Not effectively communicating your needs can result in arguments.

Ways to enhance partner support:

- Identify and be realistic about the support you need.
- Realize that your partner will not be able to meet all of your needs. Some of these needs will have to be met outside the relationship.
- Communicate your expectations clearly. Check if he/she can fulfill your expectations / understands your expectations for support.

Lack of Quality Time Together

Spending time together is not “quality” when you are tired and distracted, and end up arguing or failing to enjoy each other’s company.

Quality time together involves:

- Jointly planning to spend quality time together. When planning, focus on positive things, unless you agree to do otherwise.
- Identifying shared interests that you can enjoy together and try to think of new ones that you can try.

Personal Differences in the Relationship

All couples will have differences in their relationships. The way you deal with these differences can either enhance or add stress to the relationship.

Ways to deal with personal differences:

- People in successful relationships do not try to force the other to be exactly like them; they work to accept difference even when this difference is profound.
- Do not demand that a partner change to meet all your expectations. Work to accept the differences that you see between your ideal and the reality.
- Try to see things from the other's point of view. This doesn't mean that you must agree with one another, but rather that you can expect yourself and your partner to understand and respect your differences, your points of view and your separate needs.

Golden rules for arguing constructively

DO:

- Know why you are arguing before you start
- Devote some time to resolving the problem
- Sit down and make eye contact
- Speak personally about what you feel
- Acknowledge when the other person makes a valid point
- Agree to differ if you cannot agree
- Stick to the matter at hand
- Cease arguing and separate if there is any likelihood of violence

DON'T:

- Behave aggressively or disrespectfully
- Argue deliberately to hurt the other person's feelings
- Generalize problems to entire relationship
- Bring up old unresolved disputes
- Walk away without deciding when discussion will be resumed (unless violence threatens)
- Bring other peoples' opinions into the argument
- Argue about something for more than an hour, late at night or after drinking alcohol