

REPAIR YOUR RELATIONSHIP GUIDE

A 4-STEP  
PROCESS  
TO INCREASE  
EFFECTIVE AND  
LOVING  
DIALOGUE

A black and white photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera on a paved path. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered shirt and dark pants, with his arm around the woman's shoulder. The woman is on the right, wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. They are walking towards a bright, hazy horizon. The background shows some trees and buildings in the distance.

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# Introduction

Many married couples who are stuck in unhappy or unsatisfying marriages WANT to improve their relationships. Still, they don't know where to start to begin fixing things so that they can be happy as couples again.

To make matters even worse, these couples who feel stuck, often also don't want to talk about stuff anymore. The reason is that they've reached a place in their relationships where they are kind of just over things.

Listen, I get that.

When a relationship no longer feels like rainbows and unicorns AND we feel stuck with no way out, the last thing we want to do is talk about things. In fact, sometimes when things start going sour, the last thing we want to do is BE around our spouse, let alone work something out!

So, as I said ... I get it!

BUT even though this might be a regular and familiar feeling for many unhappy couples, refusing to communicate or communicate *better* can be quite costly in the long run.

And I mean that in the fullest sense of the word.

Unless you can learn how to communicate effectively when your relationship is struggling, chances are you will end up paying the price.

It will cost you emotionally, energetically, relationally, and yes, even financially.

I personally know someone who has recently gone through a divorce because, after years of emotional disconnection and an inability to reconcile, the relationship came undone in the end.

And in practical terms, it cost them their family home, disruption in their kids' lives, almost \$300,000 out of the husband's pocket to help his ex-wife get set up, uncertainty about the present and future, stress, sleepless nights, and living out of a bags.



Now, no judgement about that, but I need YOU to understand that there's a cost to leaving things unresolved, unattended, and for too long.

Make no mistake, refusing to deal with specific issues or ignoring them, hoping they would come right on their own, can cost you a lot in the end.

But it doesn't have to be like that. Not if you get onto issues early enough.

I love using the expression of "pulling the weeds from your garden while they're still small." Once weeds have a chance to settle in and grow, they become hard to get rid of.

So, back to communication ...

The fact is that if you want to resolve things or find a resolution to the tension and pain a specific conflict has caused, it really is a good idea to talk to your spouse.

And when you approach that with the right intention, openness, and willingness to learn from them, rather than vent, many times, you will gain insight into why the conflict began in the first place. ALSO, you will discover what steps are necessary to heal the relationship (and yourself)!

## A 4-step process to effective and loving dialogue as a couple

But this absolutely CANNOT and WILL not happen when you sweep things under the rug or apply the good old "hope strategy" – doing nothing and hoping things will come right.

You need to be smarter and wiser about this, and I can show you how and where to start in the rest of this short guide.

Therefore, let me share with you a 4-step process to create more effective and loving dialogue with your spouse so that you can finally stop fighting and start moving forward in your relationship.

You must understand that what I'm about to share with you isn't magic or a quick fix. It will demand some discipline, restraint, and consistency on your part to make it useful.

But the process is sound and has the potential to help you move things forward rather than remain stuck on the same old stuff that never gets resolved.

Although this 4-step process requires some effort, understand that if you don't resolve things or reach a mutual understanding, these matters of conflict or disagreement will end up festering and turn to resentment. When that happens, it will poison your relationship.

All I ask of you is that you try this process so that you can communicate better as a couple and consequently become happier as a couple.

Again, this isn't rocket science and might even seem like common sense; however, common sense is rarely a common practice for many people. Just because you know what to do, doesn't mean you *do* it OR know *how* to do it effectively.

So, here's what you do now...

1. Go through the 4-step process below,
2. Discuss each step with your spouse and what that might look like for you,
3. Negotiate with and commit to each other how you will implement this moving forward for a certain period before reviewing (e.g. the next 30 days).

**The first step** to improving your dialogue as a couple and start rebuilding your relationship is to...

# Begin to Reopen Communication by Active Listening

Let me make something very clear right out of the gate...

You're probably not gonna start healing a broken relationship by talking your way out of bad communication habits and toxic behaviours.

Somebody once said that you cannot talk your way out of bad habits. I think that is very true for marriages as well. And one of the bad habits that a lot of couples have, especially with communication, is poor listening skills.



In my opinion, if you want to start creating more loving and effective dialogue with your spouse, you must learn to listen effectively. Because sometimes we need to realise that shutting our mouths and opening our ears are the best strategy for the moment.

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This is especially true because you can also **ONLY** learn more about your spouse's feelings, beliefs, values, and expectations when you **practice active listening**. And healing a relationship comes down to knowing your spouse's inner world and tending to that.

Active listening can help that.

**Active listening is the first fundamental step** to learn, and eventually master if you want to have a chance of improving dialogue with your spouse and deal with your relationship challenges.

**Why do I say that?** In fact, why do most relationships experts say that?

Because if you look at many conflicts in relationships, they tend to begin when one of the parties wants to be heard but believes that the other partner isn't listening.

Differently put, **a lot of conflicts happens because one spouse doesn't feel heard** and consequently resorts to yelling, screaming, manipulation, begging, nagging, passive-aggressiveness, and so on.

But it all stems from **the same source** - not feeling heard and, therefore, understood.

So, if you want to instantly start improving communication with your spouse, **you need to create a space in which they feel heard**. And I don't just mean pretending like they're being listened to, but actually being heard.

In terms of communication problems, the biggest problem I have observed with many couples is **they often don't listen to understand but rather to respond reactively** to what is being said.

And that is **NEVER** a great strategy for improving dialogue with your spouse (or any other person for that matter).

**Active listening is essentially a discipline of FOCUS.**

Rather than thinking about whether you agree with your spouse or not, you must **learn to focus on THEIR words and meaning**.

Additionally, it also means giving your spouse lots of verbal and visual cues to let them know they are being heard and understood. Even empathised with.

As a spouse, when you can do that, **it will help your partner feel important**. It will boost their confidence and willingness to share even more because they think they are being listened to carefully.

It is also here that specific active listening techniques become very important to help your spouse feel that way.

Let me highlight **a few critical active listening techniques** you must get develop to improve your active listening skills.

Firstly, if you want to improve dialogue with your spouse you must...

### **Be attentive**

One of the most important things you can do to improve dialogue with your spouse when they are talking to you is to pay attention.

This is so simple to do yet, so many don't do it.

Giving somebody our attention goes a long way in communicating to them that what they are saying is important to us. Still, more importantly, it communicates THEY are important to us.

The opposite is obviously equally true.

Giving someone our attention when they communicate with us is more than just our ability to say back to them what they told us. It's essentially more about them feeling listened to and heard.

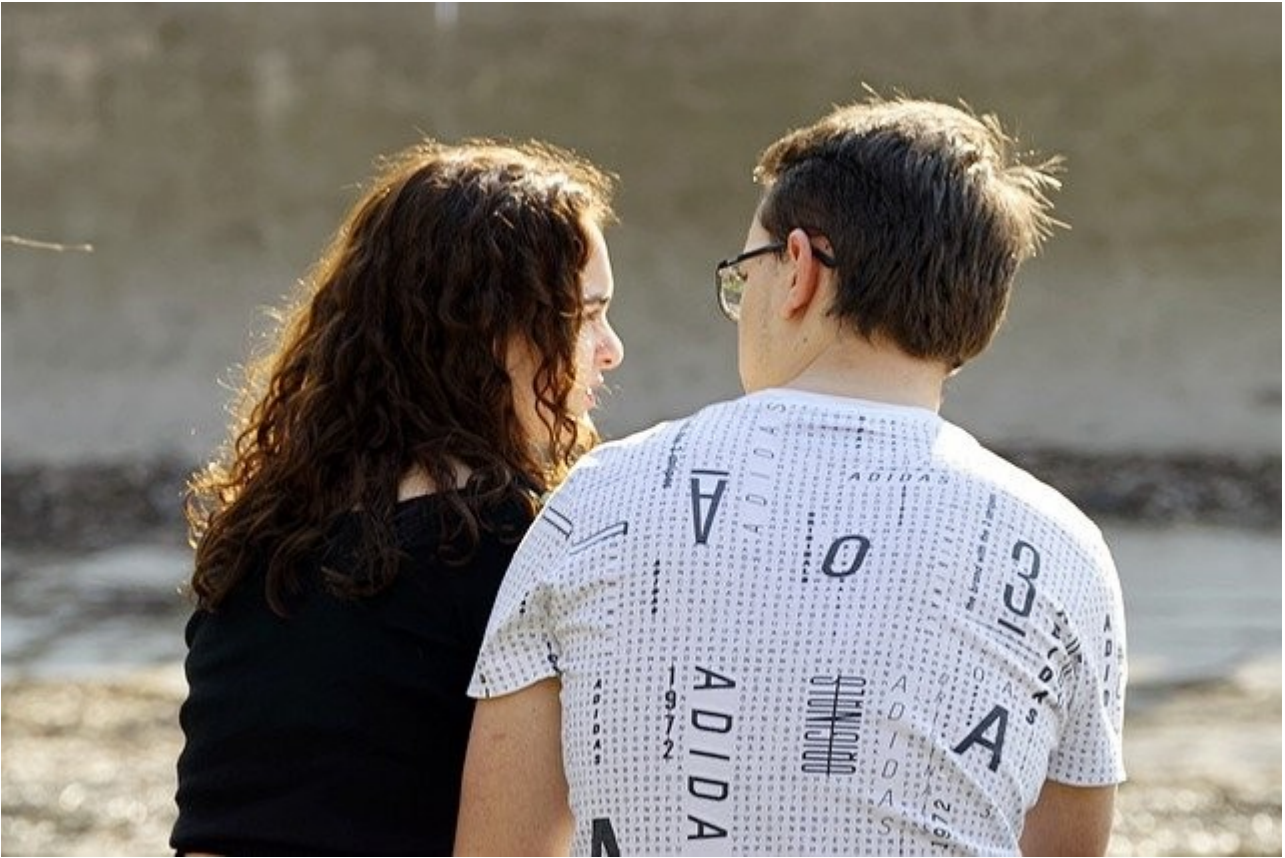
So many guys think that by being able to repeat precisely back to their wives what they just heard is a sign that they were listening. But they miss the point.

It's about knowing and feeling the other person is focused on us, is giving us their full attention, is interested in us, and is fully present. And just if you were wondering, scrolling down on your phone while listening to your spouse does not count as paying attention to them.



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So, an essential active listening technique you need to learn is paying attention to the person speaking with you.



It's crucial that you stay focused on what they're saying, without trying to anticipate what they're going to say next.

Stay in the moment.

Be interested in what they are saying.

Ask clarifying questions if you don't follow. Pay attention to their body language, tonality, and words.

### **Respect the speaker**

When it comes in a matter of respect in your marriage, there are two important points I want to highlight.

Firstly, respect your spouse.

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I've met and worked with many couples in coaching, where a lack of mutual respect has become their biggest problem.

Not a lack of skills, even though that is often an issue too, but treating each other with decency, common courtesy, and respect.

And it always fascinates me when a couple during a session treats me with respect but fails to recognise the lack of respect they're showing when engaging their spouse during that same session. What that shows is that the couple can show respect, they just seem to choose to refrain from respecting each other.

Now let me make something very clear at this point. You can learn all the relationship skills you want, but if you lack respect for each other as a couple, those skills won't make any difference in the long.

It comes back to the old saying that people forget what we said or did to them, but **they never forget how we made them feel.**

That's crucial to remember in your marriage.

Secondly, concerning respect and communication, simply respect your spouse enough to give them your full attention.

Even if you think you know what your spouse is trying to say, listen to what's indeed being said.

Pay attention to both their verbal and nonverbal clues. Body language, facial expressions, posture, and tonality can all provide a detailed picture of what's really going on.

And while you're at it, remember to...

### **Keep your attitude in check**

This comes back to showing respect.

If your attitude stinks when interacting with your spouse, again, no amount of communication skills can overcome that.

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I have met so many couples who know how to communicate well in general. Still, the attitude they display to their spouses simply sucks. And it hurts the relationship!

So, keep your attitude in check when you're actively listening. That means that you must strive to avoid confrontation or get angry, especially over little things. And especially when you don't have a full understanding of where your spouse is coming from.



Instead, spend your energy on understanding what they mean and how they feel, because that will actually help your dialogue.

Remember that in the context of having a healthy dialogue in marriage, you're not trying to win arguments; you're trying to understand your spouse. This is not a debate or court of law where you're trying to convince or impress judges or a jury.

Let me share with you a powerful truth that can save you a lot of heartache in your marriage...  
**You can win every argument with your spouse but lose your marriage!**

I need you to think about that for a moment.

So, if you want to improve your ability to listen actively, you must...

### Avoid letting your personal preferences affect how you listen

It's so vital that you manage your emotions, and also try to keep your personal beliefs from clouding what your spouse is saying.

Remember that we all listen to someone else through a filter. This filter is typically our model of the world, which includes our focus, energy levels, expectations, beliefs, values, experiences, associations, history, and so on.

When we put all of that stuff on our spouse and interpret what they are saying through that, we can easily derive at the wrong meaning and completely misunderstand them.

I've talked about the aspects of mental encoding and decoding in communication on my website a few times. If you want to learn more about that, [here is a good article you can read](#).

This point, of course, leads onto the next one which is...

### Don't jump to conclusions

Regardless of what your spouse says, don't make assumptions or judgments about what they said. Find out all the facts and ask questions if you need to. But more importantly, try and understand what lies under the surface.

I always say that what is not being said is more important than what is being said. In marriage, we need to become attuned to each other to pick up the unspoken as much as the spoken. A mistake many of us make, however, is we tend to focus on words only. But words only make up for a small percentage of the overall meaning in communication.

Some psychologists argue that communication can be broken up into three parts. 55% of what your spouse is communicating to you is **body language**. 38% is their **tone**, or how they're saying something. Only 7% comes from the **words** they're using.

So 93% of what your spouse is communicating to you, has got nothing to do with the words they're using.

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Jumping to conclusions based on a whim or words only, therefore, isn't just shortsighted, it's also incredibly inaccurate. Usually, when our spouses communicate with us, they are doing so with far more than words only.



But on the point of jumping to conclusions specifically, just think of how many times you have stepped into that trap.

I don't know about you, but I have made a mistake many times of judging a book by its cover, only to discover later on that I was mistaken. It so easy to jump to conclusions, but they are frequently wrong.

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For example, if you see someone who's unshaven and poorly dressed you might deduce he has poor self-care habits. However, it may be that his wife had to be rushed to the hospital to deliver their baby, and he didn't have time to clean up first.

Making assumptions is typically unwise, but in the context of marriage it's looking for trouble.

Just because you think you know what your spouse means, because you know them very well, doesn't mean you actually know what they mean. So rather than assume, or jump the gun, or worse, impose your assumptions on them, use your energy to pay attention and listen actively instead.

And, during that process ...

### **If you don't understand what's being said, clarify by asking questions**

You will be surprised how much you learn and discover when, instead of continually interrupting or interpreting, you ask clarifying questions instead.

I challenge you to go and try this just in an everyday conversation with someone. Instead of interrupting or interpreting someone, refrain from doing that and ask questions instead and see what happens.

Be curious. Be interested. Have the mindset that you want to be interested rather than interesting. One is self-focused and the other is focused on the other person. And as people, we tend to enjoy it when people give us their full attention and are interested in us.

It's no different in our marriages.

Ask clarifying questions in an even tone of voice when your spouse pauses and gives you a chance to speak.

And it doesn't need to be complicated.

Simply paraphrasing what you've just heard (and observed), followed by a simple question like, "... is that what you mean", can improve your dialogue massively and almost instantly.

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But again, remember to **keep your attitude in check**. When you ask questions with a stinking attitude or one that signals defensiveness or suspicion, rather than curiosity or genuine care, it will probably backfire.

Furthermore, the only way that you can ask appropriate and useful questions, at the right time, is when you are fully present and not distracted.

So...

### Try not to become distracted or lose track of what's being said

You won't be able to listen actively to your spouse when you are distracted or not present.

I've said to couples many times before that part of managing recurring conflict comes down to *timing*.

What do I mean by that?



WHEN you choose to talk about certain things is just as important as THAT you talk about them.

But some couples have terrible timing.

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They tend to choose the worst times to want to work through difficult issues in their relationship. But you have to remember we are still humans and certain things influence our physical and psychological states. This, in turn, impacts our ability to be present and tap into our highest mental capabilities.

I had a counselling supervisor years ago who taught me a simple acronym that has been very helpful (personally and for my coaching clients).

She said that whenever we are in specific states, we need to HALT and first meet the particular need of that state before doing anything else.

### **HALT stands for,**

H = hunger

A = anger

L = loneliness/feeling down

T = tiredness

So, as an example, if you're hungry, eat first, then sit down to talk.

Think about this for a moment.

Have you ever tried talking to your spouse about something that happened during the day or the previous night, right after they walked in the door after a long day of work?

They're probably tired and hungry and need to unwind for a moment.

But you're so eager to get the issue off your chest that you completely ignore that physical need.

Tell me, if you've ever experienced this, how did that go for you?

I'm guessing, probably not that good.



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When you or your spouse have individual physiological or psychological needs that need to be met first, like hunger, you need to take care of that.

Because it will be tough to remain undistracted and listen to your spouse when you haven't eaten in a while.

The point I'm making here is that to listen actively and effectively, you must be wise with your timing. Because the right timing will help you remain focused and present rather than become distracted.



But it's also a mental discipline.

Sometimes you just need to force yourself to focus and in the same breath, do whatever you can to help with that. So, scrolling on your phone while your spouse is talking to you, for example, will only cause more distraction and not encourage a healthy dialogue.

Also, being distracted while they're sharing something important with you, communicates little care or affection for them.

And to make sure that they know you DO care and ARE paying attention to them, it's helpful to...

### Give appropriate nonverbal clues

When you're actively listening to someone, your body language will show whether you're paying attention or not.

What does that mean?

Well, it goes back to what we talked about earlier about the percentage breakdown of communication, remember? **55% body language, 38% tone, 7% words.**

When you and your spouse are in dialogue, active listening demands that you give them non-verbal cues or signs that you're paying attention and hearing them. What you're doing is using 93% of how we communicate as humans to indicate to your spouse that you're genuinely paying attention to them.

This will include things like looking into their eyes while they're talking, reaching out and touching their arm or shoulder when appropriate, nodding your head, and so on.

These **little subtle cues go a long way in improving the quality of communication.** They will also most likely make your spouse more inclined to open up even further because they feel they are being received.

Can you now also see why TIMING are so important.

You cannot rush these things when you're in a rush or distracted (for whatever reason). If, in fact, you know you cannot give them your full attention right now, you must communicate that to your spouse and make another time to get back to this.

You can simply negotiate to talk about this important thing at a more convenient, more appropriate time.

Now, of course, one can easily abuse this and use it as a way to never talk about anything. And some couples do. But that's not what I mean here.

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This is not about avoiding difficult conversations, but instead being wise in choosing the most appropriate time in which you can have these conversations most effectively.

Leading on from this point, another way to signal to your spouse that you are interested, care about them, and have heard what they've said, is to...

### **Repeat back what you heard**

When you do this, it let your spouse know that you're really listening.

Also, when you say what you understood, it gives them a chance to clarify any miscommunications or misunderstandings.

So, to summarise, these are a couple of simple skills you can learn and adopt that will hugely improve your active listening ability.

### **In summary, they are:**

- be attentive
- respect the speaker
- keep your attitude in check
- avoid letting your personal preferences affect how you listen
- don't jump to conclusions
- if you don't understand what's being said, clarify by asking questions
- try not to become distracted or lose track of what's being said
- give appropriate non-verbal clues
- repeat back what you heard

Listen, active listening, in essence, is about making your spouse feel heard and important.

Just imagine how you feel when somebody you care about gives you all their attention and consideration. I bet it makes you feel good as well.

So, learning how to listen actively is a small price to pay to create long-lasting positive results in your connection as a couple and in your relationship as a whole.

It won't cost you anything - just a little bit of effort. And perhaps a slight attitude adjustment.

This brings us to step 2 ...

## Set Some Ground Rules

I don't know if you've ever been part of a mediation or a mentoring process, but part of the initial set up is to **establish specific ground rules**. The purpose of these ground rules is to ensure that everyone involved understands what goes and what doesn't. Often when we discuss potentially loaded topics, emotions can take a process hostage very quickly, and that is never helpful. So, we use ground rules to manage that.

Establishing ground rules from the outset gives those involved clarity, certainty, and safety to express themselves openly and honestly without any fear of retribution, rejection or judgement.

Essentially, **when you set ground rules as a couple, you make it safe for the other person to open up to you**, and for you to also share your perspective open.



Now, some couples do this automatically by sticking to specific unspoken ground rules, but not all couples do. Some couples need to establish these beforehand because they might have picked up inappropriate or unhelpful communication habits over time. Some of these habits will have to be unlearned, and ground rules are a good place to start.

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One way you could do this as a couple is to **set a time limit** for each person to speak, and the other person to listen. Usually, 5 to 10 minutes is a reasonable time frame.

Then, the listener should summarise what they've heard (meaning more than details), so that the speaker knows they were listening and understood the correct meaning. This is also a good time to use some of the active listening skills of step 1, especially asking for clarification. Again, not with an attitude of defensiveness but rather some curiosity.

After this, you can swap places and allow the other party to share their thoughts in the same manner.

Another way to set ground rules is to decide on and **commit to individual ethics**. An example of this could be to agree that neither spouse is allowed to resort to criticism, personal attacks, slanting, degrading language, swearing, and so on. Especially when a conversation gets heated or when you're discussing specific challenging issues.

Yet another example of ground rules could be around **timeouts**. You can agree that when a conversation starts losing its way due to escalating emotions, somebody can use a cue phrase, word, or gesture to indicate a timeout.

I'm sure you're starting to get the gist of it.

Creating ground rules is **about creating a space in which we can speak our truth and be heard** by the other. However, it ensures that there is a safety net in place to keep us safe and the conversational track.

This, of course, demands a massive amount of focus, concentration, discipline, commitment, and some sense of openness to want to hear the other person's heart. It can be potent if done right.

However, at this point, I can almost hear some man reading this go, *"this is too airy-fairy or fluff"*, and that's fine.

I just need you to understand that you have the key to unlock your wife's heart if you're willing to put your ego aside for a second and step up. Step up as the leader and warrior you can be as a man, for your family.

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You can intimately connect with your wife more than ever before when you use your masculine presence as a gift rather than a weapon, as a safety net rather than an obstruction.

And it starts by cultivating a space in which she is embraced and heard. I don't care how you do it, you can use my strategies or not, but that you MUST find a way, is undeniable.



But this is equally true for every wife reading is.

Your husband craves your patient and uplifting support, even when they struggle to open up to you. Realise that when a man closes off or goes inside, and it feels like he's shutting you out, he is not. He is merely working through things the way that most men do. The only way we know how to do it. We try and figure things out by ourselves first.

The best you can do in those moments is to be there. Simply be present. Supportive. Affectionate. Not pushy or needy or nagging.

He will come to you when you have created an equally safe space in which he can emerge when he is ready.

Again, it all starts with creating a space in which you can open up to each other about your feelings, and be received in equal measure. This is not to be abused but utilised for a more outstanding quality of connection and intimacy in your marriage.

Create a space to hear and be heard.

This brings us to step 3 ...

## Emphasise the Positive

While active listening and creating a space to be heard are potent in improving dialogue with your spouse, it's essential to realise the impact of emotions. They will most likely play a huge role in many of your difficult conversations.

It is, therefore, important to always keep the intention focused on emphasising the positive about your spouse and the situation.

Even though it might feel like an unnatural thing to do, especially during difficult conversations, you must avoid placing blame and making demands. Doing that is the fastest way to making your spouse reactive and defensive, which rarely lead to compromise or conflict resolution.

When we are angry, upset, depressed, sad, frustrated, and so on, our ability to think rationally and clearly and come up with solutions greatly diminish. That doesn't mean that these emotions don't have a place and aren't necessary, of course not. They're natural human emotions. Some just don't have a good track record with solving issues.

So, it's important to keep focusing on and emphasising the positive. Again, I'm not encouraging you to be in denial or overlook anything. Instead, I'm appealing to a certain attitude and intent you must bring into every dialogue or conversation with your spouse.

For our expectations tend to have a significant influence on the outcome of things.

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When we expect something to fail right out of the gate, even before anything has happened or we've done something, we increase the likelihood of that thing failing.

But the opposite is equally true.

If we expect something to succeed, we significantly increase the chances of that happening. Not necessarily guarantee it, but we do increase our chances.



Moreover, our expectations of others tend to influence their behaviour. It's called the Pygmalion effect in Psychology.

The Pygmalion effect refers to past studies where teacher expectancies of student performance became self-fulfilling prophecies. Students performed better or worse than other students based on the way their teacher expected them to perform.

This same effect is evident in other everyday situations as well. Our expectations of others can influence their behaviour and actions.

So, be cautious about the energy, attitude, and expectations you bring into any dialogue with your spouse because it does have a bearing on the outcome.



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Emphasising the positive in this context is also about letting your spouse know how their actions affect you without attacking them or making accusations. You can explain to them what they can do to make it easier for you to communicate with them. But also ask what you can do to make it easier for them to share with you.

Focusing on and emphasising the positive in your marriage is essentially about creating a safe space in which you can be heard, express yourselves, and move forward.

So, it's needless to say, but I will anyway, that yelling at each other has no place in this 4-step process for improved dialogue.

In fact, I would encourage you to avoid yelling matches outright.

Because when we yell at each other, we are no longer listening. We are trying to force our view on the other, and that will NEVER make you feel good, closer to each other, more connected, more loved, heard, or understood. It will most likely leave you feeling exactly the opposite.

Therefore, if you feel frustrated and tempted to yell (there is a real possibility for this), then take time out and agree to discuss the situation again later when you've calmed down.

It blows my mind how few couples utilise this strategy of time out.

Some see it as letting the other off the hook or running away.

But that's not what it is at all. Or at least, that is not what it's supposed to be.

Using timeout as part of your communication strategy is based on the understanding that as people, we experience what some psychologists call "*emotional overwhelm*" or "*flooding*."

It's essentially when emotions take over to such a degree that we can no longer think rationally and clearly, and we behave purely reactively.

Furthermore, some relationship experts suggest that a timeout of about only 15 minutes to cool down, gather your thoughts, and recollect yourself, could be sufficient and beneficial for improving communication. That's unless you use the time out to gather more ammunition to hurt your spouse with even more. That will defeat the purpose of the time out and create worse results.

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So, in light of this, rather than making demands or giving ultimatums, let your partner know how you feel and what you want by making a respectful request. And do that with the full understanding that they have the freedom to comply or deny the request.

If there isn't any room for them to respond differently or disagree with you, one of two things will keep on happening: (1) they will get defensive or (2) they will stop sharing honestly with you.

In both instances, you lose in the long run.

A better approach is to ALWAYS take ownership of your part in misunderstandings. Even when, in your mind, it is 90% them and 10% you. Still take ownership for your 10%. Let them take ownership of their 90%.

This can be extremely difficult for many people, for various reasons, but you must learn to do this.

You cannot control someone else.

You will NEVER control your spouse. Even when you think you can or do.

Suppose you want to resolve things, move your relationship forward, and lay a foundation for a healthy relationship. In that case, you must learn to focus on your own contributions to your current situation. No matter how small you believe, they are.

Read that again.

In marriage, it takes two to tango. And no matter how thin you slice it, there are ALWAYS two sides to a story.

Determine how the choices YOU have made may have led up to the current conflict or situation and take ownership of that. And if you don't know what they are, spending time listening actively far more than reacting to what your spouse is saying will give you all the clues you need to figure it out.

Again, leave your ego at the door that will try to convince you it's all (mostly) their fault and not yours. Holding onto that idea WILL hurt you in the end.

This brings us to step 4 in this process...

## Learn to Respond Rather Than React

One of the most essential skills that you need to develop as a couple is the ability to manage your emotions when it matters most.

Psychologists call this skill *emotion self-regulation*.

It's your ability to self-regulate your emotional state so that you can reason, problem-solve effectively, and behave maturely.



So many couples struggle to have useful and constructive dialogues because they struggle to prevent their emotions from taking over when working through disagreements or difficult issues.

Consequently, couples end up in a situation where their communication becomes a matter of listening to react rather than to respond from fully understanding the other person.

The problem with reaction rather than understanding first before responding, is the fact that you're most likely to miss what the underlying issue for your spouse is. This typically leads to defensive reactions which completely miss the point and escalate the situation.

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You don't want that.

Now, many people will argue at this point that emotion self-regulation is difficult and perhaps even impossible to do, especially when the situation is loaded.

In some sense, they are correct, but in another, completely wrong.

On the one hand, it is difficult to regulate your emotional state when you've allowed it to go too far and get out of hand. In other words, get away from you.

On the other hand, however, it is much easier to do when you plan your response beforehand based on the intent you bring into a conversation. It also becomes way easier when you become practised at not just reacting but responding maturely and effectively.

But it requires the intention to do so, backed up by discipline to practice it regularly until you get good at it.

I always say to people that a simple way to get better at responding rather than reacting is to shift your focus from defensiveness or to preserve your ego, to being more curious and open.

What do I mean?

In marriage, it means letting go of the need to be right all the time or feel like your worth is being attacked. I'm not talking about abusive relationships, of course. Instead, it's about becoming far more interested in what's going on for your spouse (at that moment).

When your spouse behaves a certain way or reacts quickly to something, rather than getting offended, take a step back and ask yourself: *"What is actually going on here?"*

*"What is causing this behaviour or reaction, that might have nothing to do with me?"*

*"What is he/she perhaps feeling under the surface that's coming out as anger or frustration (or whatever)?"*

When you take on the role of a detective (not an interrogator) and become curious about what's going on for your spouse, you might actually discover things that could serve your relationship rather than hurt it.

## A 4-step process to effective and loving dialogue as a couple

When I realise my wife's reactions the past few days are the result of "fear about the future" rather than me being annoying, I can step into the role of comfort, supporter, encourager, safe haven, and so on rather than attacker or critic. Doing that will prevent me from feeling hurt and reacting to her behaviour like a spoiled child.

It will also create a different feeling within our relationship which will start moving us forward as a couple, instead of keeping us stuck in perpetual cycles of stupid conflicts.

Conflicts that, by the way, never tend to be resolved anyway. We just end up feeling crappier about ourselves, our spouses, and our marriage.



## Conclusion

While most of us spend a good part of our day talking with others, *true communication takes time and practice to master*. And there's no place more important where you need effective communication than in your marriage.

## A 4-step process to effective and loving dialogue as a couple

One of the challenges with having been with someone for a long time is **the illusion of 'complete' knowledge** of the other.

What I mean by this is that we often start thinking that because we've been with our spouse for a long time, we know all there is to know about them.

And this sometimes spills over into our communication, when we start deducing meaning behind their words or actions, assuming we know it all before we actually do.

But your spouse is an intricate and complicated human being.

You might know how they take their coffee, but that doesn't mean you know 100% what they're feeling 100% of the time or when they're going through something.

Therefore, rather than adopt the mindset of believing that you've got your spouse figured out, have an attitude of openness and constant curiosity.

Yes, you might know your spouse exceptionally well. Still, it doesn't mean that you should stop caring, being interested, curious, or intrigued by them.

And listen, even if you do know what they mean when they say or do something, continually approaching them with an attitude of openness, loving care, and genuine interest, will always tell them they are important to you far more than when you don't do these things.

That's what's important.

Remember what I said earlier, it's about how you make them *feel*, whether you like that or not.

So, if you want to start healing your relationship, or an aspect of your relationship, begin to improve dialogue with your spouse by following the simple 4-step process we looked at in this short guide.

Try it on for size.

Learn and implement the various tactics within this 4-step process.

Begin to reopen communication by active listening, set some ground rules, emphasise the positive, and learn to respond rather than react

## A 4-step process to effective and loving dialogue as a couple

These tips can help you to develop more effective and loving dialogue skills to strengthen your relationships with your spouse in the long run.

Lastly, if you found this guide helpful, but would like to work on your specific situation and challenges, then [please go to this link](#) and book a free clarity session call with me.

No pressure. No obligations.

Let's jump on a call and get a new set of eyes and ears on your situation, so you can potentially discover new ideas and strategies to improve your marriage moving forward.



# Do you need more help?

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Many married couples stuck in unhappy relationships want to improve things but often have no idea where to start to begin fixing or improving things!

So, when they reach out to me, I typically share with them a simple and practical model for fixing their marital problems so that they can be happy again.

Because, honestly, it sucks being unhappy!

Once they start getting more clarity about their situation and a possible, hopeful way forward, they often feel a sense of relief and even excitement.

That is what I want for you also!

You can book a FREE clarity session call with me by [clicking this link](#). That will take you to another page where you need to fill out a form to help me determine whether we are a good fit to talk.