

## Basic Communication

Communication is something that most of us naturally engage in multiple times a day. Usually when someone starts talking about “good communication” or “communication skills,” that person is referring to communicating under some kind of stress. This hand out covers some of the basic tools that you can use to optimize understanding when there is some kind of tension or strain happening at the same time.

The first basic guideline is to make sure that all parties involved are available for the communication. Shouting out to your partner “also, I’ve been meaning to tell you I am unhappy with our sex life” as they are getting ready for a stressful meeting is not likely to get you the results you want. Setting up a time to talk about serious subjects is a good way to establish mutual attention for the business at hand.

When you are ready to meet, employ the 3, 2, 1 Protocol; see handout on the 3, 2, 1 Protocol. Spoiler alert: Number One is to remember why it matters that you are trying to communicate: it usually has something to do with a shared project, an intention to be present, a desire to love each other as best as you can. As you continue to work on this shared space, keep Number One (this idea that you are working on the same team) in the forefront. If your situation does not warrant considering you are on the same team, see the handout on The Four Gates.

The following two points are overlapping points that you will encounter in the 3, 2, 1 Protocol. Point 1: Once you start working on the issue at hand, it’s a good idea to take turns. If one person is actively thinking what they are going to say next, they cannot listen effectively. Listening is work: it asks that you put your needs, thoughts, agenda, and wants aside so you can be there for the other person. This is two brains thinking about one person. Point 2: take turns. Intentionally switch when it’s time for the other person to receive attention. Then the first person takes active role of listener. Some people like to use a timer (keep it short at first, no longer than 15 minutes, and 5 minutes can go a long way).

*If there is not at least one person present, with their pre-frontal cortex engaged, lending the qualities of intelligence, curiosity, flexibility, openness and love to the interaction, things are not likely to go well, and if very well may get worse. Sit quietly not saying anything while you both notice the discomfort, and/or take a break an re-group until at least one person can be present.*

If there is conflict, and you are remembering Number One (you are on the same team), and you are taking turns, and at least one of you is present, there’s a pretty good chance you can make progress. Remember: In medium to high conflict situations, seek first to understand: after both parties understand the problem, then (and only then) see solutions. Start all meetings by taking several nice long, deep breaths together. This helps the sympathetic nervous system calm down, and activates the parasympathetic nervous system. This helps bring the pre-frontal cortex online for everyone.

Here are tips to use as the listener:

As stated above, the listener is lending their brain to the perceptions, difficulties, needs, and expression of the speaker. If at all possible, provide engaged eye contact and back channel cues that are verbal or sub verbal cues that urge the speaker to continue (e.g.: yes, uh huh, mmmm, I see...). If you, as the listener, get overwhelmed because things are moving too fast, you can ask for a pause. This can include setting the issue aside for an agreed upon period of time: I recommend at least 15 minutes, but shorter than 4 hours if that is possible. It’s also ok to take notes; but don’t let this get out of hand: your primary

job is to *understand* what the other person is saying. Take note: you are not necessarily *agreeing* with them.

In addition to non-verbal or sub-verbal back channeling, reflective listening can include paraphrasing and perception checking. Once the speaker is ready to stop sharing (this can be an agreed upon amount of time or just occur naturally). We are still focused on the person who was speaking. Paraphrasing is when the listener lets the speaker know they heard that person by putting it in their own words what they heard the person say; this works best if you don't use the exact words the person used, that can sound like parroting. Perception check is when you have an idea that wasn't exactly stated, but you can surmise it to be true (e.g.: I'm guessing that part of the reason you felt upset is because you wanted to be included, and my behavior indicated to you that you were not welcome). It is wise for the listener to ask "did I get that right?" and "did I miss anything?" and/or "is there anything you want to add?"

Switching turns should be done with great intention. The listener can say "May I have a turn now?" or the speaker can say "I'd like to hear from you now" or "I'm ready to listen now." It's important to consciously switch roles: a person that is sharing cannot be actively listening. Make sure there is someone listening if there is someone sharing!

Additional tips: If activation occurs, reference the handout on Tips to Integration. **Breathe!** Bi lateral stimulation may help emotional regulation. Other things that might help are splashing cold water on one's face, engaging in brief and intense aerobic exercise, turning the focus back to Number One ('we are on the same team'), taking a break, or asking a third party to join the conversation. If you don't have a third person that is suitable, sometimes an empty chair, or a chair with a teddy bear, doll or other representative of a third person might help. If you can find anything funny, that helps.

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