



---

## COMMUNICATION- EBOOKLET

*Hi there,*

*Thank you for ordering this Native Remedies eBooklet! eBooklets are modified from consultations with real people and cover some of the most frequently dealt with problems that are submitted to the Native Remedies site. The information contained in this eBooklet has helped many clients and I am confident that it will help you too!*

---

### Ten Steps to Better Communication

---

While there are many factors that are important to the success or failure of a marriage, the ability to communicate with each other stands out head and shoulders above the rest! I work extensively with couples, both online and offline. After more than 15 years of experience, I can safely say that, no matter what other problems exist, a marriage can stand or fall on the basis of how well the couple can communicate with each other.

I have counseled couples who have everything going for them. They have all the money they need and more. They have lovely children. They have beautiful homes, successful careers, supportive families – everything that they need! Yet because of poor communication skills, their marriage is failing. Conversely, I have counseled couples who are going through very hard times. This could be due to financial difficulties, illness, problems with children or even infidelity. Despite the difficulties that they experience, couples who can communicate clearly with each other have a much better chance of overcoming problems and staying together.

Poor communication causes conflict, misunderstanding, hurt and resentment. Effective communication can keep marriages together in even the most difficult of times. If I had to identify the most important element of a successful marriage, it would be the couple's ability to communicate with each other.

Communication is a very complex thing. If it were simple, I suppose it would be much easier to get it right! In order to do the subject full justice, one would need to go into much more depth than is possible in the space of one eBooklet. However, over the years, I have identified certain communication styles and problems that cause difficulties in relationships. What I will do in this eBooklet, is to talk about some of the most important mistakes that couples make and also look at some strategies to develop healthier communication patterns in a marriage. As I go through them, I am sure that you will recognize yourself in many of the examples that I use. Whether you are a young couple who wants to improve on a good relationship, or a couple in crisis who need some help, this eBooklet will provide you with some guidelines to work on to improve your communication skills.

Before I continue, let us first establish that it is impossible NOT to communicate. Even when two people are refusing to talk to each other, they are communicating something. Communication can exist in silence, body language and other observable behavior – not words alone.

Having established that, let us look at 10 steps you can take to develop healthier communication patterns in your relationship.

## 1. Spend Time Together

Why have I begun with such a simple rule? Surely everybody knows this? Well, sure they do – but do they practice it? In my experience the answer is No. The majority of people who consult me with marriage problems do not make regular time to be together and just talk. Life is busy. Children, careers, chores, recreation, friends and even TV often take precedence over the couple's time together. When they do 'go out', it is probably to a movie or to friends where it is impossible to talk properly with each other. They are forever 'meaning' to spend time together and never get around to it. Soon they lose the ability to communicate with each other and may even find it difficult to spend time in each other's company. Look around you in a restaurant. Some people say that you can identify the people who have been married for more than five years by the fact that they neither look at nor talk to each other. This may be a generalization, but it is often not far from the truth.

Without sufficient time together, it is not possible to learn to communicate well with each other. I have had couples who have consulted me with major problems, which have improved with the simple addition of more quality time together. It is an extremely important prerequisite for healthy communication! Don't just agree to this in principle – practice it as well! Practice it NOW and not some time in the future when it is more 'convenient'.

Because time is difficult to come by, you should make a deliberate effort to make time for each other. The best way to do this is to set aside a regular time at least once a week, or to make a definite day which is 'your' day or evening as a couple. You do not need to go out or spend money – you can stay at home and spend time together as well. Many people want to do this, but never seem to get it right. This brings me to my second step.

## 2. Prioritize your Time Together

As I said above, it is not enough to agree in principle. That is why regular quality time happens so infrequently between couples. Just like anything else, you have to prioritize time together. You have to see it as more important than the other things that take up your time or else it will not happen – especially if you have a busy schedule.

Why do most people get up every morning and go to work? Not because they love it, but because they have a routine of doing so, usually from Monday to Friday and at specified times. They are required to put in a certain amount of work and so they do. What would happen to the majority of us if our employers said that we could come to work 'when we had the time' and were prepared to pay us and promote us whether or not we did much work? How much time would we allocate to our work? What would we achieve?

Remember the old friend that you bumped into at the supermarket? The one who said that you should get together 'some time soon'? Have you heard from her? The chances are that you have not. What about the one who invited you for tea on Saturday afternoon at 3 pm? Now that would probably be an important date that you would want to keep!

If you expect the rewards of a good relationship, you MUST make regular time to spend together by prioritizing this as important in your life and by officially blocking off the time. If someone asks you to go out on a Friday night – and that is the night you usually spend with your partner, say 'I am busy that night'. Make your time together the most important thing you do and it will certainly pay off! I cannot over-stress the importance of regular time together. This is so important that I have even advised couples to discontinue counseling unless they are prepared to make time together.

I am often amazed at people who are surprised that they get on better with their friends than their partners without realizing that one of the reasons is that they spend more quality time with their friends!

Many couples who have become estranged due to lack of time together, may find that when they do decide to work on it, they either end up arguing or they cannot find two words to say to each other. They then give it up as a 'bad job'. Many come to their next therapy session and tell me 'It didn't work'.

My answer is 'That is fine. You did it – now keep doing it!' The fact is that you cannot expect to suddenly start communicating by magic! If you haven't been out together for awhile, your expectations of the evening may be high and this could cause stress – which results in an argument. Small talk is easier between regular strangers than between couples. After all, you know most of the details of each other's histories (career, hobbies, children, etc) – so you cannot simply chatter away as you would with a stranger.

If your first attempt does not work out, congratulate each other on spending the evening together and decide a date for the next time. Spend time together regardless of how difficult the time is – so long as you are both committed to keep on trying, that is the most important thing.

### 3. Never use Intimidating Tactics

Do not bully your partner. Shouting, swearing, threatening or banging of doors is abusive behavior. So is throwing objects, breaking things in the environment and, of course, actual violence against the person's body. This kind of behavior is not acceptable under any circumstances whatsoever. Any behavior which would be defined as either rude, abusive or criminal if it were aimed at your neighbor, should be seen in an even worse light when it is aimed at your partner. Even if you are very angry and you have good reason to be, violence or verbal abuse is unacceptable. SAY "I am so angry I don't know how to express it". DON'T smash your fist into the table to communicate your anger.

### 4. Never Assume you Understand

Make this a rule and you will avoid lots of problems and misunderstandings. I have sat in sessions with couples who have started a fight before my eyes because one of them misunderstood the other. Very often couples even argue about the very same thing! If you find that this happens to you a lot, try to make it a rule to double check with each other. If your partner says "I will see you at the entrance to the mall at 3pm", confirm that you have understood her. Say 'Three o'clock at the FRONT entrance, right?'

Sometimes we interpret things or communicate things incorrectly and then it is even more important to double check that you understand, before becoming emotional and attaching your own meaning to something. If your partner says "Sometimes I long for the times when I was single" it is very easy to translate this into "I wish I had never married you", especially when you are feeling insecure. Once again, don't assume – rather double check. Say "Do you mean that you wish that you had never married me?" or just "What do you mean by that?" You will find that you avoid many arguments and misunderstandings if you do not always assume that you understand and confirm that you have heard and interpreted your partner correctly.

### 5. Have your Arguments One at a Time!

Don't store up your resentments, hurts and anger until they become too much to handle and then blast them all out in one go when the straw hits the proverbial camel's back! You will appear unreasonable and your partner will probably behave very defensively. If there is something that is bothering you, take responsibility for your feelings and deal with it! Speak to your partner and say how you feel, without accusing them. Say "I feel hurt when you criticize me in public. I don't want you to do it anymore." Don't say "You always pick on me. I know that you think I am stupid!" Above all, don't say nothing and allow your feelings to build up until you explode and then drag out all the past hurts and complaints! Deal with things one at a time and as soon as possible.

### 6. Do not 'piggy back' your arguments.

How often have you told your partner "I wish you would pick up your socks", only to be told "Well, what about you – you always leave the kitchen in a mess and expect me to clean it". This is a very destructive way of arguing and is often just a knee jerk reaction designed to protect and focus attention away from oneself. Make a point of not responding to this poor communication strategy

and never to be guilty of it yourself. If you wait for your partner to speak to you about something that bothers them and then jump on them with a complaint of your own, you will firstly discourage them from speaking to you about problems and secondly, you will be sure to cause an argument in which no one 'wins' and in which the issue at hand is never resolved.

When something bothers you, whether it is big or small, speak calmly to your partner about it. Do not wait for her to bring up a related issue and then 'jump on the bandwagon'. If your partner speaks about something on their mind, thank them for telling you about how they feel, and try to understand their point of view. This will improve the way that you handle the situation. If she says "I wish you wouldn't leave your socks all over the place", say "Thanks for telling me that it bugs you. I will try to remember to put them in the laundry basket in future." Is that so difficult? Don't add your own 'complaint' to the list. Take responsibility for voicing your own concerns when they arise, rather than 'piggy backing' them onto a concern of your partner's.

If you find your partner doing this, say "That is a different issue. You are welcome to talk to me about it when it arises again. For now, can we deal with what I have said?"

## 7. Work towards a 'Win Win' rather than a "Win Lose' situation.

If you and your partner differ on a fundamental or even a minor issue, it rarely works to argue about it until somebody 'loses'. In a situation like this there are no clear victors. Rather try to work towards a compromise which suits both of you.

For example, if one of you wants to go and see an action movie and the other wants to see a love story, don't fight until one of you 'gives in'. Try and find a solution together in which you both 'win'. This may be solved by agreeing that one can choose the movie this week, while the other chooses next week. Or, it may be some other solution (like flipping a coin) that works for both of you. The same solution could be applied to more difficult issues, like differences in religion.

## 8. Choose your Time Carefully When you Need to Talk about Difficult Things

Try not to deal with big issues when you feel emotional or when you are tired.

For example, when your husband comes home at three o' clock in the morning, it is very difficult not to become upset and start shouting at him. This can only result in a huge argument where both of you say things which you later regret. Rather wait until the morning and then speak to him about how you feel. Ask him to explain himself and if you are not happy with his explanation, tell him so. Clearly define your limits in the situation as well as what you are and are not prepared to accept. Then let it go and move on. If he continues to do the same thing and disregards your feelings, then you have to decide what you are going to do about this. Are you prepared to accept it? Can you continue in the marriage if he refuses to change? Once you have made your decision, communicate it to him and take the necessary action.

Timing is always important – even for seemingly minor things. Think of the wife who begins confronting and questioning her husband the moment he opens the door. "Did you get the car

washed?", "Why are you so late?", "Just wait until I tell you what the kids got up to today", or even "The dog ate your favorite T-shirt". Instead of launching right into these issues, spend some time greeting your partner and touching base in a warm and friendly way. Give him or her some space to adjust to being at home again. Later on you can communicate 'bad news', bring up the issues that have been bugging you or ask the questions that you need to ask. Even half an hour to 'chill out' can make all the difference.

## 9. Don't use 'Stonewalling', 'Cold War' or 'Passive Aggressive' Tactics to Try and Communicate your Displeasure

We are all guilty of this sometimes and these can be very destructive communication patterns.

If your partner does something that you don't like, you may 'freeze up' and refuse to talk to or look at them for days. I have counseled couples who have been in this mode for months or even years. Learn to speak about your feelings and take responsibility for working through them with your partner. Remember, silences can become longer and longer until you eventually lose touch with each other permanently. This is very difficult to reverse after it has reached a certain point.

Don't be 'passive aggressive'. This is a very common and unhealthy way of communicating where the person deliberately and stubbornly refuses to co-operate as a way of communicating anger or resentment. A very simple example is the three-year-old child who walks as slowly as possible to the bathroom because she does not want to go and have a bath. An 'adult' version of this would be a partner who withholds money from the budget because she is angry or who runs up the credit card as a way of 'punishing' her partner. Some people withhold sex, money or affection in order to communicate their angry or resentful feelings. Passive aggressive behavior is infuriating and childish! Take responsibility for your feelings and speak about them. Set clear limits and make your own decisions about how to respond in a mature way to your partner's behavior.

## 10. Be Aware of Repeating Unhealthy Communication Patterns that you Learned from your Parents

Many people are shocked to realize that their marriages resemble the marriages of their parents. It is very true that we learn how to be husbands or wives by watching the way our parents treat each other. This can later become part of our subconscious approach to our partners when we are adults – even when we don't believe in it intellectually. Examine the way that you communicate with your partner. Do you bully? Do you nag? Do you submit too easily? Do you behave like your mother or your father? Be brutally honest with yourself. If you find that you have been repeating patterns of communication that your parents used, make a conscious decision to change. At first it will be difficult, but if you stick to it, it will only become easier.

## 11. OK - I know I said Ten Steps, but Here is One More for Luck!

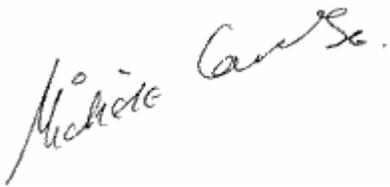
Try and remember to emphasize the positive more than the negative. It is easy to fall into the trap of focusing on negative things and forgetting to communicate positive feelings to your partner. Remember to praise and encourage each other and to regularly tell your partner what you like about him or her. We all need to feel admired and appreciated, and when you communicate

positive things to your partner, you create warm and loving feelings between the two of you. So tell your wife that she looks pretty in the red dress or tell your husband how handsome he looks with his new haircut. Speak about the things that you admire about each other as often as possible – it will make a big difference to how you feel towards each other!

---

*For help with this issue or any other problem, visit a Licensed Counselor. Also, have a look at the many other useful eBooklets available on the Native Remedies website, as well as the helpful reading lists in the Online Library at [www.feelgoodcounseling.com/reference\\_library.htm](http://www.feelgoodcounseling.com/reference_library.htm).*

*Good luck and be well!*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michele Carelse". The signature is written in black ink and is slanted slightly to the right.

*Michele Carelse*

---

*Michele Carelse is a Registered Clinical Psychologist and Licensed Counselor with more than 12 years experience. She runs her own private practice, as well as an online counseling and information service.*

*Michele has also developed Native Remedies - a range of natural herbal and homeopathic remedies for adults and children, specifically aimed at promoting emotional, psychological and cognitive health.*

*For more information on Native Remedies health products, go to [www.nativeremedies.com](http://www.nativeremedies.com).*

---