

FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION: INTRODUCTION

- 1. CLICHES-** Typical, routine, oft repeated comments, questions and answers given out of habit with no real forethought or genuine intent. “How are you?” “Having a good day?” “Yes.”
- 2. FACTS-** Information/statistics about the weather, the office, friends, the news, personal activities, etc. Requires no in depth thinking or feeling.
- 3. OPINIONS-** Includes concerns, expectations, and personal goals, dreams, and desires. Due to differences of opinion that naturally arise between two people, especially between men and women, this is typically the level at which we run into the “wall of conflict.”
- 4. FEELINGS-** Having gone through the “wall of conflict” via applying the communication skills following, you both feel safe to share your deepest emotions.
- 5. NEEDS-** The deepest level of communication and intimacy where you feel completely safe to reveal your unique needs with each other. Truly, unless needs are known and met, a couple will remain “strangers.”

Level One: Hallway Talk - “Fine, how are you?” - Having a cliché conversation.

Level Two: Reporter Talk - “Just give me the facts.” Reporting facts about other people and events.

Level Three: Intellectual Talk - “Do you know what I think?” - Exchanging ideas and opinions.

Level Four: Emotional Talk - “Let me tell you how I feel.” - Sharing feelings and needs.

Level Five: Loving Genuine Truth Talk - “Let’s be honest.” - Risking complete emotional and personal truthfulness.

What Level of Communication Do You Seek?

Level One: Having a Clichéd Conversation

This is conversation at its most superficial level. For example, you ask, “Dear, have you seen my shoes?” She responds, “Look in the closet.” It’s an important level, and it takes up a large volume of our words each day. We use it to keep things running smoothly. But it has little affect on strengthening the relationship.

Level Two: Reporting facts about other people and events

Couples are great at this. We can spend hours discussing who did what, with whom, when and why. But when do you discuss your own relationship? Level two conversations keep you from talking about the things you need to talk about as a couple.

Level Three: Exchanging ideas and opinions

Most of us spend too much time at level two and too little time discussing our ideas and judgments. Interchanges don’t always have to be gut-wrenching. There is a place in marriage for an exchange of views – the right hand has to know what the left hand is doing. You must talk, for example, about roles in marriage. I kiddingly say my wife is the mechanic in our family. I’m not mechanical. Actually, this year I’ve committed to memorizing the names of the tools so when she needs something I’ll know which one to give her. She’s the one who fixes things and we talk about the best ways to proceed on any given project. But at some point in a healthy marriage we must talk about our feelings and emotions too.

Level Four: Sharing feelings and needs

This is the level we want to strive toward. At this level we are saying “I feel this way.” We are sending those “I” messages referred to earlier. Remember, *feelings will draw you together, judgments will drive you apart*. If you’re feeling distance in your marriage, it’s likely because there’s too much judgment flying around. Guess who’s great at spouting edicts and judgments? Men. They are the fixers by nature (but not necessarily with tools). Women come to them with a problem and they’re going to fix it. Most women, however, aren’t interested in husbands telling them how to solve the problem. They simply want their man to listen to validate the pain a problem is causing and to offer comfort in the midst of it all. They want their husbands to understand. When a man comes home from work, guess what his wife sees? She sees relief. He, of course, wants to sit down and read the paper. Will he choose to listen closely to her feelings and needs?

Level Five: Risking complete emotional and personal truthfulness

This level is the most difficult to reach, but it’s worth it. You’ve really got to be vulnerable and trusting. When you share some intimate thought or desire, you’re really saying to your mate, “I trust you.”

MATCHING EXERCISE

Complete the following matching exercise by jotting the letter of a statement in the blanks next to the five communication levels. (Hint: There is more than one statement for some of the types of communication.)

When you're finished matching, go back to each of the first four levels and change their matching statement(s) so that the communication level is moved up one notch (For example, "It's raining!" [level 2] might change to "I think it's supposed to rain more this year." [level 3]). Then form small groups to share your new statements.

Finally, discuss this question: How can we move our communication levels "up the scale" in everyday conversation with our spouses?

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| _____ 1. Clichéd conversation | a. "Right now, I'm really wishing my mom were still alive." |
| | b. "I heard that Bob, Carol, Ted, and Alice are going on a ski trip next month." |
| _____ 2. Reporting facts | c. "Say, what did you think about Smith's editorial in the Journal this morning?" |
| | d. "Nice weather, isn't it, Dear?" |
| | e. "Just watching the kid turn a double play brings tears to my eyes." |
| _____ 3. Exchanging ideas/opinions | f. "I'm not sure why, but I'm having trouble getting interested in sex these days." |
| | g. "Good morning, Sugar Dumplin! How ya doin'?" |
| _____ 4. Sharing feelings/needs | h. "The thing is, I know we all have to die. But the thought sure is scaring me." |
| _____ 5. Risking complete personal truthfulness | |