



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS INITIATIVE

Toolkit for Couples

Tip Sheet #1: Ten Tips for Relationship-Building Communication

1. **Understand your and your partner's communication styles.** When you and your partner are sensitive to each other's communication styles, you are both more likely to get your messages across to each other in ways you can understand.
2. **Aim for understanding.** Try to understand each other's viewpoints, and avoid jumping to conclusions about what the other person is saying.
3. **Listen actively.** Active listening involves making an effort to listen to your partner, focusing on their message rather than planning what you will say next, and waiting patiently for your partner to finish.
4. **Be willing to compromise.** Work toward a win-win solution that involves a mutually agreeable decision. In relationships, when one person feels like they've "lost," the relationship loses as well.
5. **Avoid hurtful language.** Choose your words carefully to help ensure that you use language that doesn't carry any attacks on your partner.
6. **Speak assertively with "I Statements."** In using I statements, we speak about our personal experiences, feelings, and responses. When communicating about your feelings and reactions, clearly describe your feelings and the behaviors that are associated with your response.
7. **Show concern and respect for your partner's feelings.** Let your partner know that their feelings and thoughts are important to you. You can invite them to share with you, and then be sure to listen actively to them.
8. **Manage intense emotions appropriately.** A temptation often exists to lash out at one's partner when the anger is really directed at someone else. Be extra cautious to avoid hurtful words or actions when you're upset or angry.
9. **Notice nonverbal clues.** Pay attention to the messages your partner is sending to you via their nonverbal communication. This can unlock clues to your partner's inner experiences and add to your understanding of each other.
10. **Validate your partner's feelings.** Validation goes a long way in fostering a strong connection between partners. When you send the message to your partner that, "You're normal for feeling that way, and I understand," your partner feels heard and understood.