
**Workbook
Assignment**

Warning: Difficulties Ahead ✕

Overview

Changes in communication are one of the first signs of trouble in a relationship. Couples who have dated for awhile have established communication patterns within their relationship. This lesson introduces four problem areas that have been determined to indicate problems in communication between couples.

Objectives

- ◆ Participants will be able to identify four types of problem communication patterns.
- ◆ Participants will analyze the effects of communication problems in a relationship.
- ◆ Participants will discuss ways to handle problems in communication within a dating relationship.

Vocabulary

criticism
defensiveness

contempt
stonewalling

Key Concepts

Write
on board!

- Communication is the cornerstone of healthy relationships.
- Positive communication patterns build up a relationship; negative patterns tear it down.
- Negative communication patterns indicate problems in the relationship.
- Negative communication patterns can be recognized and changed.

**Preparation for
Lesson**

Instructor will need:

- Worksheet *Warning: Difficulties Ahead*
- Overhead **Destructive Patterns**

Teaching the Lesson

Have the participants form a circle around the room. You are going to give them instructions and they are to move according to the directions.

When the participants are in place, read the following statements:

1. Take one step forward if you have been criticized in the past week. (Students step forward.)
2. Take one step to the left if someone has called you a name in the past two days.
3. Take one step forward if you have said something critical to another person this week.
4. Take one step to the left if you felt that someone looked down on you in the past three days.
5. Take one step back if you put someone down in the past three days.
6. Take one step to the left if someone ignored you this week.
7. Take one step forward if you gave in to an argument even though you believed that you were right.
8. Take one step to the left if you have to win an argument at all costs.
9. Take one step back if you don't like to talk about feelings with other people.
10. Take one step to the right if a relationship you had broke up because the two of you had trouble communicating.

- Most participants will be moved from their original position. Tell them to note how many times their lives are affected by the way people communicate with each other.

- Using the overhead **Destructive Patterns**, point out that there are four communication behaviors that indicate when a relationship is experiencing trouble. One or both of the partners may demonstrate the communication styles.

- Assign the worksheet *Warning: Difficulties Ahead*. This exercise can be completed in sections for discussion or as a whole with discussion at the end.

LECTURE NOTES:

Couples who have been together for awhile develop patterns of communication and interaction with each other that becomes part of the relationship. It is easy for the

partners to become accustomed to the behaviors without ever evaluating ... patterns are positive or negative. This is especially true in the area of communication. Individuals in healthy caring relationships develop communication patterns that show respect for one another even when they disagree from time to time.

Couples at all stages of relationship may experience difficulties in communication, but those who are committed to working out the problems usually recognize the issues and eliminate them. For some couples, however, the difficulties in their patterns persist because they are either unaware of them or they do not know what to do about them.

In the early stages of a relationship there is enthusiasm to spend time sharing ideas and talking together about all kinds of things. Two people develop a harmony together that sets the tone of the relationship. One of the first signs that a relationship is in trouble is a *change* in the way two people talk to each other. Even couples who have been together for a short time can recognize that negative differences in their communication patterns are an indication that feelings within the relationship are not the same.

According to John Gottman, criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling are “the four horses of the Apocalypse.” By that he means these communication patterns are early signs that a relationship is experiencing difficulties. Each of the patterns is a form of disrespect and shows a lack of caring for the feelings of the partner.

Criticism – It is easy to create hurt feelings in a relationship when one or both partners are overly critical of each other’s actions or personal qualities. Criticism often leads to conflict, when one partner is finding fault and the other partner is defending the action. It is especially painful when the criticism is petty, unnecessary, or in public view.

Contempt – This is one form of dishonoring another person by giving that individual a lower status. Putting someone else down in a condescending manner is a superficial attempt to demonstrate superiority over the person.

Defensiveness – Some people are threatened by the prospect of being wrong. They are very quick to get angry when anyone questions their reasons for doing something. They have to win an argument at all costs.

Stonewalling – This is a way of stopping effective communication with another person by ignoring or skillfully avoiding their attempts at conversation. This may appear to be the silent treatment or an unwillingness to share openly with a partner.

Couples who experience any or all of these communication patterns should take note. Difficulties in communication are an indication of deeper core issues within the relationship. If the problems are not addressed, the relationship will be limited or may not survive.

WARNING: DIFFICULTIES AHEAD

Dating couples must learn how to work together if the relationship is going to last. All relationships experience periods of adjustment as the partners get to know each other better. During the adjustment period, some relationships will end, but others will survive. Couples who stay together develop patterns of communication and interaction that become established and predictable.

Becoming used to behavior patterns within the relationship is not a guarantee that the behaviors are positive or healthy. A strong indicator for the condition of a relationship is found in the way people talk to one another. Relationships that consistently experience destructive patterns of communication are in trouble, and the partners should seriously think about why they are remaining together.

The following patterns are known to be warning signs for relationships that are in trouble.

Always Wrong:

1. Why would it be damaging to a relationship if one or both of the partners were overly critical of the other's behaviors? _____

2. Does it make a difference if the criticism is in front of other people or not?

3. How does it make you feel to be criticized for something you have done?

4. Are there ways to tell someone what you are thinking without hurting his/her feelings? _____

5. Have you met or dated anyone who was always critical of other people's behaviors? What did you think of that person? _____

Resisting Attack:

1. What behaviors are typical of a defensive attitude? _____

2. What happens to communication when a person's temper begins to rise?

3. Should someone be able to explain his/her actions to another person without becoming upset or angry? _____

4. How is communication between two people helped when they can share ideas without fearing the other person's reactions? _____

Contempt:

1. Why is being respected as a person such an important part of dating?

2. What does contempt for another person really say about your feelings toward him/her? _____

3. What can you do if your dating partner treats you as if you are less important than he/she is? _____

4. Should you continue dating someone who consistently puts you down?

Don't want to talk about it:

1. Why is it unfair if one partner in a relationship refuses to talk about something that is important to the other partner? _____

2. How does it feel to have someone purposely exclude you from his/her thoughts or activities? _____

3. Why is it difficult to deal with a person who avoids answering honest questions or doesn't take an issue seriously? _____

4. Besides ignoring the issue, how could someone better handle a situation that makes him/her uncomfortable? _____



Think About It:

Check to be sure that someone you are dating does not repeatedly demonstrate the behaviors listed below. Understand that no one is going to be perfect, and people do have the capacity to learn new behaviors if they are willing to work on them.

Does your date:

1. Promise to do something and then not following through.
2. Solve a problem by running away, using drugs or ignoring the issue.
3. Make you or the relationship a low priority.
4. Lie to you about what he/she is doing or feeling.
5. Go out with you just to have someone around.
6. Expect you to do everything he/she wants to do.
7. Demand that you only spend time together and with no one else.
8. Feel that it is your fault if he/she is not happy.
9. Threaten to cause, or is causing you personal injury.
10. Not have the ability to control anger responses or behaviors.