

Time to Talk – the power of communicating well in a relationship

It's important to make time to talk to your partner about how your relationship is going.

Ask yourselves these questions, then check your answers with your partner:

- How well do you think your partner understands you - how you think, how you feel, what's important to you? Do you tell him/her?
- How well can the two of you discuss a difficult issue?
- How often do you argue? If you have many arguments that you don't resolve, there may be communication problems. Lots of arguments over trivial issues may be a sign of a power struggle. If you never have any arguments, is it because you are avoiding important issues out of a fear of arguments?
- What interests do you have in common? What do you do together for fun and relaxation? How often do you do something enjoyable as a couple?
- How do you feel about your sexual relationship? Does sex usually leave you both feeling satisfied and good? Are you having any sexual problems?

How can I encourage my partner to talk more openly?

Each of us must first accept responsibility for our own feelings. We must start by being honest. This is at the heart of good communication.

Remember, the only thing we have total control over is our own thoughts, our own attitudes, our own actions.

To encourage more open communication:

- set aside time for both of you to talk
- talk about what is happening and how it affects you
- try to tell your partner exactly what you are feeling and thinking, even if it might upset him/her
- don't forget, change can be painful and scary - let your partner know that you understand this.
- listen to your partner - put aside your own thoughts for the time being
- try to understand his/her intentions, needs and wants
- state what you want.
- negotiate.

What should we talk about?

Sometimes it is difficult to know where to start talking about your relationship. Here is a list of important relationship issues to help you begin:

- Who is going to do what around the house?
- How is your income going to be shared?
- How much time are you going to spend together and how much time are you going to spend doing things separately?
- What do you expect from each other when it comes to loyalty, trust, sexual faithfulness?
- What do you both like or dislike about your sexual relationship?
- If there is a problem with jobs, whose career will take priority - how will this be compensated for over time?
- What is the role of family and friends in your lives?

What makes a good listener?

A good listener is someone who:

- Keeps comfortable eye contact.
- Leans towards the other person and makes appropriate gestures to indicate interest and concern.
- Has an 'open' position - fairly relaxed posture, with arms and legs uncrossed.
- Faces the other - does not sit or stand sideways.
- Sits or stands on the same level to avoid looking up to or down on the speaker.
- Avoids distracting gestures, such as fidgeting with a pen, glancing at papers, tapping feet or fingers.
- Realises that physical barriers, such as noise or interruptions are likely to make effective communication difficult.
- Is genuine when attention and interest are shown.

Why should I be the one to make the effort?

For a relationship to be good, both partners must want to make it work and show good will. Don't wait for your partner to make the effort! You may be pleasantly surprised by how much difference taking the first small step can make!