

Module 1
Section 5

COMMUNICATION & INTIMACY

Both what and how you are communicating in your intimate relationships will either strengthen those relationships or tear them down.

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

Learn how attachment styles can effect relationships.

Discover how your relationship may be impacted by the way you communicate.

Recognize steps you can take to resolve conflicts.

Identify the principles that can help make your marriage or intimate relationship work.

COMMUNICATION & INTIMACY

I do?



Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to join these two people in marriage. Do you agree to take each other as a lawfully wedded spouse? Will you start fights every day and blame each other for your problems? Will you keep a list of faults? Will you bring up past arguments, criticize, and become defensive when confronted? Do you promise to expect your partner to make you happy and give them the silent treatment when you're angry - for as long as you both live?

Nobody enters a committed relationship expecting to be unhappy. At first, everything feels wonderful, but that feeling doesn't last forever.

Relationships are difficult and unless you have good role models and lots of practice with healthy communication and problem-solving, you will run into problems quickly. The good news is that you can learn new skills and work towards having the great relationship you imagined when you decided to be together.

Let's learn about a few areas to help us understand our close relationships better and improve communication, such as:

- how attachment styles affect relationships;
- communication styles and how they impact your level of intimacy;
- steps to take to resolve conflicts; and
- principles for making marriage or a committed relationship work.

Attachment Styles

Attachment styles are ways that people behave and think about relationships. They start when we are young and can affect how we feel about being close to others when we grow up. A psychologist named John Bowlby came up with the idea of attachment styles, and other people like Mary Ainsworth built on his work.

There are four main attachment styles:

1. **Secure Attachment:** People with a secure attachment style feel comfortable being close to others and having their own space in relationships. They trust their partners, can talk about their feelings and needs, and also listen to their partner's needs. Securely attached people usually think positively about themselves and their partners, and they know how to solve problems in a good way.

2. **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** People with this attachment style often worry that their partner won't be there for them and they might be left alone. They might always need to hear that their partner loves them and values them, and they might rely too much on their relationships to feel good about themselves. People with this style might act clingy or controlling, and they might feel insecure and not think highly of themselves.

3. **Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment:** People with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style usually care more about being independent and doing things on their own than being close to others emotionally. They might avoid or not think much about emotional closeness, and they might keep some distance in their relationships. People with this style might find it hard to show their feelings or ask for help, and they might not think that close relationships are important.

4. **Fearful-Avoidant (Disorganized)**

Attachment: This attachment style is a mix of anxious and avoidant behaviors. People with a fearful-avoidant attachment style want to be close to others, but they also worry about being rejected or hurt. They might go back and forth between wanting closeness and pushing their partners away, and they might feel confused and unsure in their relationships. People with this style might have a hard time trusting others and forming secure relationships because of past experiences of trauma or neglect.

These attachment styles can really affect how romantic relationships work. Partners who have similar attachment styles might have happier and more stable relationships, while partners with different attachment styles might have more conflicts, misunderstandings, and emotional problems. But it's important to know that attachment styles can change over time as people learn more about themselves, grow personally, and have supportive relationships. Therapy can also help with attachment issues and make relationships healthier.



Communication Styles

Communication styles are the different ways people talk and interact with each other. There are four main communication styles. Each style has its own traits and impacts on relationships.

Passive Communication

Characteristics: People who use passive communication tend to avoid saying what they want, like, or feel. They might put other people's needs before their own and keep their emotions and opinions hidden to avoid problems or arguments.

Effects on Relationships: In relationships, passive communication can cause misunderstandings, hard feelings, and unmet needs. Partners might feel frustrated because there isn't enough open communication, and they might struggle to solve problems or arguments. Over time, passive communication can make trust and closeness in the relationship weaker.

Aggressive Communication

Characteristics: People who use aggressive communication forcefully say what they want and think, even if it hurts others. They might use mean words, criticize, or threaten to control or scare their partners. Aggressive communication shows a lack of understanding and respect for other people's feelings.

Effects on Relationships: Aggressive communication can make relationships feel unfriendly and mean. Partners might feel small, ignored, or scared to say what they think. Aggressive behavior can make arguments worse and hurt both partners' emotions, causing hard feelings and trust to break down.

Passive-Aggressive Communication

Characteristics: People who use passive-aggressive communication express their feelings and frustrations indirectly. They might use sarcasm, tricks, or quietly resist instead of saying what they really mean. They might seem like they agree on the surface but secretly feel angry or upset.

Effects on Relationships: Passive-aggressive communication can make trust and closeness in relationships weaker. Partners might feel confused or frustrated because of mixed messages and quiet resistance. Over time, passive-aggressive behavior can make the foundation of the relationship weaker, causing hard feelings and emotional distance.

Assertive Communication

Characteristics: People who use assertive communication openly and respectfully say what they think, feel, and need. They also respect other people's rights and boundaries. They

can confidently express themselves without being mean or avoiding problems.

Effects on Relationships: When people communicate assertively, it helps them be honest, respectful, and understanding in their relationships. They feel confident to express themselves honestly and listen to each other's thoughts and feelings. Assertive communication also helps solve conflicts in a healthy way and makes the bond between partners stronger. This leads to more closeness and trust.



The way we communicate is really important in relationships. If we communicate passively, aggressively, or in a passive-aggressive way, it can cause problems and make us feel distant from each other. But if we communicate assertively, it helps us have open conversations, respect each other, and be happy in our relationships.

Learning how to communicate assertively can help partners handle conflicts, build trust, and have deeper connections in their relationships.

Resolving Conflicts

Conflicts are normal in relationships. Learning how to resolve them in a positive way can make your bond with your partner even stronger. Open communication, understanding, and being willing to compromise are important for resolving conflicts successfully. Here are a few steps to help you resolve conflicts in relationships:

- Figure out the problem or issue that is causing the conflict. Take the time to understand each other's thoughts and concerns.
- Share your feelings and needs honestly and openly. "Own" your part in the problem and resist blaming or criticizing.
- Listen carefully to your partner's point of view without interrupting or getting defensive.
- Try to understand your partner's perspective and the emotions behind their reactions. Even if you disagree, acknowledge their feelings and experiences.
- Work together with your partner to come up with different solutions to the conflict. Be open-minded and think of compromises that meet both of your needs.

- Evaluate the possible solutions together. Think about how realistic and effective they are, and how they might affect your relationship. Choose the solution that works best for both of you.
- Put the chosen solution into action. Make a commitment to support each other and be patient as you make changes.
- Check in on the solution from time to time. See if it's working and make any necessary adjustments. Communication and feedback are important for making progress and dealing with new challenges.
- If conflicts continue or become too much to handle, consider getting help from a couples therapist or counselor. They can give you more advice and strategies for resolving conflicts and making your relationship stronger.

Principles for making a marriage work.

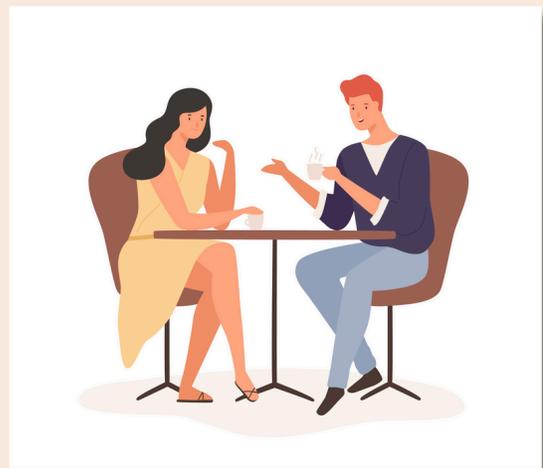
John Gottman and the Gottman Institute have studied marriage relationships for many years. They have discovered what qualities couples have that make a marriage more successful. The following is a summary of what they found.

First of all, it's important to **know each other well**. Take the time to learn about each other's lives, like important events and memories. Keep updating this

information as time goes on. Even though we may think we already know everything about each other, we each have new experiences every day. Our thoughts and views may change as we grow, and we may develop new interests.

Show love and admiration. It's important to like each other and have respect in a marriage. When you respect your spouse, you're less likely to get upset or annoyed when you disagree or notice flaws.

To show you care, you need to **be there for each other**. Every day, make an effort to be there for your partner when they want attention, affection, humor, or support. This helps build a strong emotional connection, romance, passion, and a healthy sex life. Think of it as building an emotional savings account.



Sometimes we get focused on our own interests and opinions and want to talk about that. We can have a hard time listening to our spouse, especially if what is important to them isn't as important to us, or if we don't like their ideas. **Learn to listen.** Research shows that women are more likely than men to listen to their partner's ideas. It's important to share power, compromise, and find solutions together.

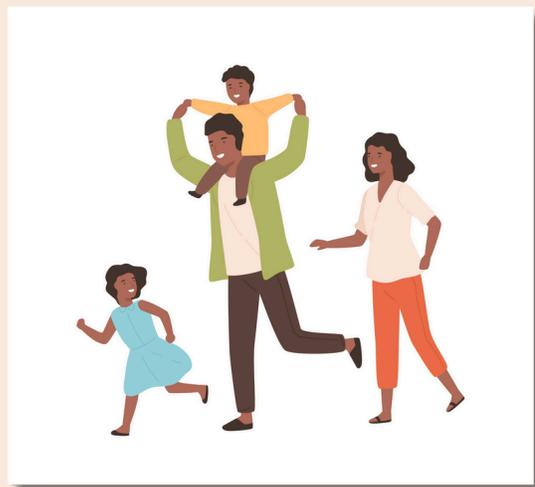
Solve problems together. There are two types of conflicts in a marriage: ones that can be solved and ones that can't. You don't have to solve every problem to have a happy marriage. Remember, no one is always right in an argument. It's easier to cope if you respect each other's point of view.

Here are some ways to help you resolve conflicts:

- Start the conversation gently.
- Learn to apologize and accept apologies.
- Comfort and support each other.
- Find a compromise.
- Be understanding of each other's faults.

Instead of avoiding, **deal with difficult problems.** The goal is not always to solve the problem, but to have a conversation about it. Understand why you're stuck and unable to find a solution. It could be because your dreams and wishes aren't being heard or respected. Talk about these hidden dreams.

Create a meaningful life together. Build a strong bond by creating traditions, symbols, and rituals that are special to both of you. Understand your roles and goals as a family.



By using these ideas in their relationship, couples can build a closer bond, trust each other more, and become stronger together. It's important to remember that these ideas need constant work and practice, but they can help create a strong and happy marriage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Think about the different attachment styles mentioned in the text. Which one do you think describes you the best? Why?

3

How do you communicate with others? Do you tend to be more passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive? Why?

5

Think about a time when you had to compromise with someone. How did it make you feel? How did it help solve the problem?

7

What are some traditions or symbols that are important to your family? Why are they meaningful to you?

2

Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt worried or scared about being close to someone? How did it make you feel?

4

What are some ways you can practice assertive communication in your everyday life? How do you think it will improve your relationships?

6

Describe a situation where you had to listen to someone without interrupting or getting defensive. How did it make you feel?

8

Describe a time when you felt connected to someone important in your life. What made you feel that way?

PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR JUST MORE TO CONSIDER

1

Just Listen Activity

- Each person writes a topic on an index card (try to make sure the topics are interesting but not too controversial). Pair off and hand each other your card.
- One partner speaks for three minutes on how he or she feels about the topic on the card.
- The other partner stays quiet while the first partner talks, just listening instead of speaking.
- After the three minutes is up, the listener has one minute to recap what the speaker said (not agree, disagree, or debate, just recap).
- Each pair switches roles and the exercise is repeated so both partners get a chance to speak and to listen.

After each participant has played both roles, discuss how easy or challenging it was to listen, speak, and summarize.

2

Stack the Deck

- Each person takes a card from the deck and keeps it secret.
- The goal is to not talk (use only non-verbal communication) and find others with the same suit (hearts, clubs, diamonds, and spades).
- Once everyone is gathered with their suit, the next goal is to arrange themselves from highest card (king) to lowest card (ace), again without talking.

3

Practice Using "I statements"

One partner thinks of something they'd like changed. Express that using "I statements", then switch roles. The 1st person states, "I feel ____ when you ___ because _____. I would like for you to _____."

The other partner is then asked to respond to that statement with another "I statement."

The other partner answers, "You sound ____ because _____. Next time, I will _____ and I _____."

RESOURCES

John Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver (2015), *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert*, Harmony; Revised ed. edition.

David H. Olson, Ph.D., Amy Olson-Sigg, & Peter J. Larson, Ph.D. (2011), *The Couple Checkup: Find Your Relationship Strengths*, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<https://positivepsychology.com/attachment-theory/>

<https://status.net/articles/understanding-your-communication-style-4-types-with-examples/>

Christ Centered Corner

Extra encouragement from a Christian perspective.

In the Bible in Ecclesiastes 4:10, it talks about two being better than one, because if either of them fall down, the other is there to lift them up. Sometimes we "fall down" in other ways, such as not being our best toward each other. If your spouse (or even a close friend) talks or acts in a way that doesn't represent who they really are, instead of getting angry or offended, try to find out what went wrong. See if you can encourage them and lift them up. (Matthew 7:12, Galatians 5:13, I Peter 4:8)

God says He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus died for us so we can be forever secure in our relationship with the Father. This is the ultimate attachment. Even if we suffer from poor attachments since childhood, He can heal and restore us as we find that rest and security in Him. Everyone needs at least one person in their life who they can form a secure attachment with (where they can feel safe and confident). Those who are truly a disciple of Christ can become that person for others while pointing them to God where they will find everlasting security. (John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Phillipians 2:3).

While we are on Earth, none of us will be perfect. We all fall short of representing Jesus and many Christians are poor ambassadors. We are all at differing stages of transformation and need to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How we communicate is an important area. James 1:19 says, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Proverbs 15:1 tells us that "a soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion", speaks the wisdom in Proverbs 18:2 (and we all know people like that!).

Marriage is a picture of that intimacy God wants to have with us - Christ and His Bride (His Church). By being devoted to each other, loving and honoring each other, we can experience true closeness and emotional intimacy. (Romans 12:10)