

How to get your Non-Communicator to Communicate

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For Relationship Solutions

Step 1: Stop talking at them.

Often times a non-communicator feels rejected, demeaned, or undervalued because their partner talks to them like a child. Instead of trying to make your point and forcing your opinions on them, try talking with them. Take turns in the dialogue and pause between sentences. This slows down the conversation and de-escalates the situation. Not only are you able to speak your peace, but your partner is also able to process everything without feeling overwhelmed.

Step 2: Limit your questions

Too many questions can make anyone feel like they are being interrogated. If you have ever watched a cop show, you know that when criminals get questioned and feel threatened, they lawyer up and shut down. In your case, your spouse can't ask for a lawyer. Instead they retreat to another room as a physical sign that they can't handle the rate of the conversation and are feeling threatened and overwhelmed. It is perfectly natural to feel this way. However, feeling overwhelmed by every conversation with you is a clear sign that something wrong in the way you communicate with your partner.

Instead of asking questions back to back, space them out. Practice rephrasing questions into statements. For example: "Where have you been?" can be rephrased to: "Tell me about your day." From experience, this one takes time to adjust to because it is easy to keep questioning someone rather than listening to them. Hang in there and be patient with the process.

Step 3: Acknowledge their feelings

There is nothing worse than having your feelings hurt or ignored by someone you love. I understand you want to protect your feelings, but somewhere in there you have to learn to be considerate of your partner's feelings. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect, even in the midst of an argument. You can acknowledge their feelings by listening to them and watching for body cues. Are they tearing up or turning red? Stop the conversation and point out what you see. "I see you are upset. Help me understand why." "I'm not sure why you are happy about this. Tell me more about ..."

Acknowledging feelings means you are staying in the present and are aware of how your partner is feeling. Even if you do not understand their feelings, you can still acknowledge them and ask for clarity. It is comparable to being recognized at work for all hard work you put into a project. You would not want your job to ignore you or have someone dismiss your feelings because they did not understand them. I did not think so. Ignoring feelings means you are ignoring that person and are showing just how much you really care about them.

Step 4: Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

I do not know anyone who likes a wishy washy person. Someone who flip flops topics, feelings, and thoughts is quite annoying. I would run from them too. A person who is strong and confident in their stance is much more attractive and attentive to the needs of others. I am not saying you need to be a bully or arrogant. You simply need to be consistent. Inconsistency is not good for any relationship. Stay in check of your thoughts and emotions so that you are able to convey the same message to your partner. In return they should do the same. You cannot be happy about them making dinner on Monday and then get angry that they made dinner on Wednesday. If you are unpredictable, they won't know how to respond, thus they begin to shut down.

Step 5: It is not what you say, but how you say it

This is an old saying that is still valid today. Your tone of voice and body language are just as important as the non-communicators. The louder you get, the more they shut down. The closer you get, the more threatened they feel. On the flip side, if you are ecstatic and overjoyed to the point of no return, your partner may not feel the same way and not know how to respond to you. Be mindful of how you are reacting to the non-communicators reactions. Eventually their retreating and your yelling evolves into a cycle that will only end when one of you stops feeding into the other.

Step 6: Don't bite the bait

A consistent non-communicator is someone that no matter the topic, will stop communicating. You could be discussing take-out menus or television shows. You could simply say "hey" and they immediately go into the other room. This type of behavior is now considered to be attention seeking behavior. They love the thrill of the chase and will do whatever they can to keep you chasing them. You following them into room after room, only makes matters worse. They are avoiding conversations and decisions, thus making you more upset and frustrated. The more frustrated you are the more attention you give them or the more likely you are to handle the situation yourself. There are no winners in this situation.

Instead of biting the bait, ignore them. You will be able to distinguish the consistent non-communicator from the true non-communicator by examining the last five times they did this. Refer back to the situation and look for clues (topic, point when they shut down, reaction to your reaction, end result). The next time they try this, ignore them. It may take a while, but eventually they will come to you and inquire about the situation.

Step 7: Be patient

Everything happens in due time. If you are impatient, you will more than likely cause the non-communicator to stop coming to you and talking to you at all. Every time you enter into a dialogue with them, remember to be patient with them. They have to learn new communication behaviors just like you. You are not making them change, they are changing on their own. If you find that you are getting aggravated, take a time-out and reflection on the situation. What part of the discussion or process is causing you to react or transform into a non-communicator? Are you willing to make a mends and work together? I sure hope so.

These steps are intended to be used as a guide to dealing with non-communicators and are not replacement for actual therapy. If you find that the problem persists even after these steps, seek help from a professional. It is okay to admit that you need help. No relationship is perfect.