

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Good communication involves expressing your feelings openly and directly as well as encouraging your partner to express his feelings. Following are a number of myths that block effective communication. Recognizing these myths may help you and your partner improve your communication.

- MYTH 1: COUPLES OUGHT TO KNOW WHAT THE OTHER THINKS, FEELS, OR WANTS.** Your partner does not have a crystal ball. You need to let him/her know directly.
- MYTH 2: COUPLES OUGHT TO AGREE WITH EACH OTHER AFTER THEY HAVE DISCUSSED AN ISSUE.** Two human beings of the opposite sex with different life experiences are not likely to see eye to eye on every issue. Sometimes you may agree to disagree. A statement like, "I guess we see it differently" can be helpful on occasion.
- MYTH 3: DISCUSSING YOUR PROBLEMS MEANS YOU MUST NOW SOLVE THEM.** Some problems don't have a solution but require understanding. For example, your wife may just want you to understand how upset she feels. Your husband may want you to be willing to listen to his explanation of what happened.
- MYTH 4: SHARING FEELINGS MEANS YOUR PARTNER MUST ACT TO DO SOMETHING.** Your partner can acknowledge that he/she hears you but still exercise his/her right to say "no" to your request. He/she might propose a compromise or want to think about the issue further.
- MYTH 5: REJECTION OF MY VIEWS MEANS A REJECTION OF ME.** This is an example of the thinking distortion called "personalization". If your spouse disagrees with your opinion, he/she is seeing things in his/her own way. He/she may disagree with your point of view on an issue. This doesn't mean he's/she's rejecting you as a total person.
- MYTH 6: DOING WHAT YOUR PARTNER WANTS DOESN'T COUNT IF YOU HAD TO BE TOLD TO DO IT.** Effective communicators exist. Mind readers don't. The easiest way to get your needs met is to ask directly for what you want.
- MYTH 7: IN TRUE LOVE PARTNERS CAN SENSE THE OTHER'S NEEDS.** This is another example of expecting your partner to be a mind reader. It may also reflect an implicit "should statement," another cognitive distortion. Perhaps you believe that if your partner really cared about you he/she **should** intuitively know what you need. Few people are naturally that intuitive. When you state your needs directly, you eliminate the possibility of misunderstanding.
- MYTH 8: LOVE MEANS NEVER HAVING TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY.** This may be a pithy line of dialogue in a movie, but it isn't an example of effective communication. Apologizing when you've made a mistake indicates that you are taking responsibility for your actions. It also shows your partner that you care about his/her feelings. Apologizing is essential when a spouse has been unfaithful.