

SOS Détresse

How to communicate

Even though we know how important it is to communicate honestly and openly in a couple, it is not always easy to do so.

It is not so self-evident to express our thoughts and feelings. We can only do it if we feel sure our partner is motivated to listen without judging. To find solutions and compromises in a couple it is essential that both can talk openly about their needs and desires. Talking of our most intimate concerns makes us vulnerable. We only feel like talking about ourselves if we are sure our trust will not be abused. For an authentic dialogue, a situation of trust must be established.

Good communication starts with a benevolent attitude towards the other, the will to respect and the effort to try and understand what they really mean.

A respectful attitude

« It does not really matter what we are talking about or how our discussion may develop, I keep my fundamental attitude, which “I am okay, and so are you”. I strive to behave respectfully all the time and expect the same treatment from your side.» (Eric Berne)

This means we try to accept and allow the other to be him/herself, not irritating them with our words. If we wish to communicate openly and honestly, we must not belittle our partner by upsetting them, hurting them or attacking them with reproaches. We should always respect their personal value and even strengthen it whenever possible. This is valid for ourselves too. We cannot communicate well if we belittle ourselves, if we calm the other or accuse ourselves of facts we are not responsible for. A respectful and positive attitude towards the other and ourselves creates a space where communication flows free of fear and both can express personal needs and desires, without fearing that the other might take advantage of it to play tricks on us.

Communication based on listening

We should always start from the principle that we do not know what our partner thinks and feels. To learn about this, they have to tell us. It is important to formulate precise questions. This also means all prejudices and interpretations must be left aside and we must see and listen what actually is, instead of seeing and listening to what may or should be. Our partner will feel much better understood.

Communicating in an open and authentic manner

Talk to each other in an open and authentic manner means to take our needs seriously and to take them into account in the relationship.

It is therefore important to:

- Allow ourselves to say what we want to instead of what we may feel obliged to
- Allow ourselves to feel what we feel rather than what we should feel
- Ask for what we need instead of waiting for permission to ask
- Take our needs seriously and risk conflict instead of avoiding it to preserve harmony

To be authentic and communicate for real, we should be well aware of ourselves, without hiding our desires and needs, daring to show them to our partner. This does not mean that we are not taking into consideration the other person's needs.

Where do I stand ? What do I want from my partner ?

At times we realise that in a quarrel or discussion with our partner, everything turns out quite differently than we had expected. We should then take some distance internally and ponder about which - potentially unconscious - intention we started the discussion.

What do I want from you ? Do I really want to be in contact with you to seek a solution together? Am I aiming at something in particular? Am I trying to convince you of something? Or blame you?

Under stress or in a quarrel, but also in absolutely routine situations, it is difficult to stay open to the point of view and needs of the other person. It can quickly come to us trying to influence the other. This is a very human attitude. If we hide our intentions, the distance between us and our partner grows wider. The other may feel manipulated, misunderstood or put under pressure. We then start to fight and a good understanding becomes less and less likely. It is obvious that two people living together for a long time do not necessarily share the same opinion. To open the path to a solution it is important to take a clear stand and stick to it. This does not mean defending my position rigidly and without regard to the other's position. On the contrary, both partners need to explain their point of view, listen and tolerate their respective positions.

It is not always easy to consider all these rules at once, in communication. Some training and sincere engagement from both parts are required. If we manage to communicate in this way, we can learn a lot from one another. We can start seeing the world with the eyes of our partner and we understand them better. The more we know them, the more we can adapt in critical situations, leave our emotional chaos and manage difficult moments. Our relationship will become more stable and more alive.

