

How You Say It

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My husband and I don't have a very good marriage. the first few months after our wedding we had a lot of fun and got along quite well. Since then, things have gone south. We seem to disagree with each other in every conversation, and since the children arrived—we have two boys—it has just added to the stress in our marriage, and our lack of peaceful conversations with each other. if things don't get better between us soon, i may not be able to stay in this marriage much longer. Please help! We can't talk to each other anymore.

Michelle—Addison, Texas

Effective communication is essential to the survival of every marriage. If we were to look at marriage as a living organism, good communication would be like healthy blood running through every cell in the system to remain viable. And if marriage were a car engine, good communication would be like oil with enough viscosity to keep the parts well lubricated in order to function well. One of the greatest challenges in married life—once the honeymoon is over—is for couples to engage in frequent conversation that is calm, civil, constructive, affirming, peaceful, and understanding. It is a delusion to believe getting along well before marriage means you will continue to do so after marriage. It is amazing how much stress, tension, and trouble a few dishes that need washing, bills that need paying, floors that need sweeping, and babies that need feeding can bring to an otherwise wonderful and blissful marriage.

Good communication is not a skill we often bring to marriage. Most of us came up in families in which voices were raised— sometimes more than just a little—when people disagreed with each other. This unfortunate legacy must be

discarded to survive the rigors of real life in marriage.

There are two elements that are particularly important to having good communication in marriage, or any other meaningful relationship: making it clear and making it safe.*

Quite frequently lack of clarity causes miscommunication in marriage. Many of the most heated arguments take place because a husband or wife failed to understand what his or her spouse meant to say, making things very unclear and leaving spouses very angry at each other.

Having a great marriage means that both husband and wife should be able to express their feelings, beliefs, concerns, and preferences clearly without damaging the relationship in the process. For this to happen, each spouse must feel safe to share what is on his or her mind, which can be accomplished only in an environment in which each spouse is careful about not hurting the feelings of the other.

To accomplish these two important concepts that are essential to great communication, there should be an agreement to: 1. Listen first and talk second. 2. Resist the urge to defend yourself. 3. Paraphrase what your spouse is saying to make sure you understand each other and are on the same page. 4. Share the process so you both have an opportunity to listen and speak to each other. 5. Pray for patience, a willing heart to resolve your differences to satisfaction, and a desire to give honor and glory to God in the process. The Bible states in Proverbs 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Determine that every time you speak to your spouse it will be like giving him a gift of gold and silver, so your conversation with each other will find new joy and peace, and be a blessing to your children and their children.