





topic 2

COMMUNICATION

Relationship Skills
for Marriage:
Practicing TLC

“... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.”

EPHESIANS 4:2-3

TOPIC 2 - COMMUNICATION

Relationship Skills for Marriage: Practicing TLC



Talk: 20 minutes

Activity: 10 minutes

Personal Takeaway/Couple
Reflection: 10 minutes

Total Time: 40 minutes



TOPIC 2

Introduce yourself, or yourselves as a couple:

- Name and parish
- Always Catholic or convert
- Number of years married
- If your marriage was convalidated
- If applicable, number of children
- Occupation
- Optional – 1-2 wedding and/or family photos (added to slides)

Introduce the topic on page 14:

- Communication | Relationship Skills for Marriage: Practicing TLC

Share the goals of this topic:

- To introduce communication skills and principles to help you grow in intimacy throughout marriage
- To understand how your communication as husband and wife can reflect the love and respect you have for one another as intended by God

Idea

If you are on schedule, ask the audience to give examples of “healthy” communication, and then “unhealthy” communication.



SCRIPTURE

Read the scripture verse, Ephesians 4:2-3: **“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”**

- These qualities of humility, patience, and gentleness are essential to a good relationship. These are fruits of the Holy Spirit, that when practiced, bring peace to your sacred union and help your marriage reflect God’s love.



GOOD COMMUNICATION REQUIRES

It's important to understand that good communication isn't necessarily automatic or instinctive; it needs to be developed.

Intention

- Being intentional in the way we speak and the way we listen is essential not only to a healthy and lasting marriage but other relationships too.
- Our families of origin and our temperaments play an important role in the way we absorbed and developed patterns for the good and bad.
- Our parents, or lack thereof, may or may not have modeled strong relationship skills for us as children.
- A healthy awareness of ourselves and our spouse can help us break destructive patterns and develop new and constructive ones.

Witness

Here, you have the option to share an example of how your own families of origin and temperaments impacted the way you learned to communicate and, if applicable, how that affected your marriage. Refer to *Preparing and Sharing Your Witness* on page 21.

Or, share the example of John and Amy, below.

John: "I grew up in a family where I witnessed very little communication by my parents. My father was a workaholic who was rarely home, and my mother did her best to juggle raising 6 kids while working full-time as a secretary. We were a loud, busy household. There was no time to mince words; we rarely wondered what one another was thinking because someone always let you know (loudly). I remember a lot of laughing but also a lot of yelling, and fistfights between my brothers and I when arguments escalated. When my mother was angry with my father, she'd withdraw and there would be days of tension and very few words between them. As a result, I didn't grow up with a lot of understanding about what healthy communication in a marriage and family looked like. In the early years of my own marriage, I would sometimes stew over small grievances and shut down, emotionally alienating my baffled wife. Other times, if we were in a disagreement, I found myself shouting uncontrollably to be heard - just like when I was growing up. Both were bad habits that I'd absorbed over time. I tend towards being a choleric - task-focused and goals-driven - and didn't realize for a long time that sometimes, I lost sight of the way I went about trying to achieve my goals. Back then, I didn't see that by communicating with her this way, I was hurting [Amy] the person I loved the most.

Amy: "My experience growing up was very different from John's. My parents were very intentional in their communication, having been active in Christian ministry for many years. As kids, we were taught to describe our feelings and share them respectfully with one another. The words "shut up" were positively forbidden in our home; sensitivity was key, and we were raised to express our frustration with one another through beginning conversations with the words: "I feel." As in, "I feel 'this way' when you 'say that.'" I'm a sanguine by nature and tend to be flexible and roll with most situations, naturally assuming the outcome will be good. I went into our marriage assuming that John would be able to overcome his tendency to overreact. During disagreements, he'd either ice me out, or shout uncontrollably. This was frustrating in the early years of our marriage. It chipped away at my trust in our relationship and eventually created problems between us. It wasn't until we made a couples retreat together a few years into our marriage that we recognized these unhealthy patterns and began working towards more intentional communication.

Effort

- Trying to learn and practice healthy communication takes effort and is important for the health and well-being of the marriage.
- Every person should try to be more sensitive, thoughtful, and aware of their patterns and that of their partner.

Practice

- Like anything important, mastering healthy communication requires our practice.
- Good communication becomes stronger and more natural as these skills are put to work.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN 3 BASIC STEPS

- Effective **T**alking
- Effective **L**istening
- Effective **C**hecking

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN 3 BASIC STEPS

Effective communication requires three basic steps known as **TLC**, which stands for the following:

- **T**alking
- **L**istening
- **C**hecking

Most of us believe good communication is about expressing ourselves well, but our ability to listen and understand is just as, or even more, important.

Developing these skills helps you become a stronger couple as you learn to take turns with TLC; one person talks while the other listens, and then the person listening checks to make sure they understand correctly.

- For example: Wife talks, husband listens, husband checks.
- Then you switch: Husband talks, wife listens, wife checks.

Fact

TLC is also the acronym for "tender loving care."

EFFECTIVE TALKING

- Make a complaint, not a criticism.
- Begin with an underlying positive.
- Avoid generalizations.
- Stick to the topic.
- Use "I" statements.



EFFECTIVE TALKING

Effective talking begins with choosing our words wisely. We're ineffective communicators if we're careless, indifferent, or insensitive in the way we express ourselves. Here are five principles of effective talking:

Make a complaint, not a criticism.

- "The laundry is really piling up. Can you help me?"

Begin with an underlying positive.

- "I love that you want to get our home better organized. Can we break up this task list over a few weekends, so that it's not so overwhelming for me?"

Avoid generalizations.

- "You always..." or "You never..."

Stick to the topic.

- "Your stuff is all over the place, and you're late! Why did you wear that shirt? You know I hate that shirt!"

Use 'I' statements.

- "I feel ignored when you make plans for us without checking with me first."

Try the 1-2-3 formula when expressing your feelings.

- I feel 1, when 2, because of 3.
 - Example: "I know that you care about me deeply, but I feel hurt when you check your phone because you aren't listening to me when I'm talking to you."
- This method focuses on your feelings and experience and
 - avoids finger-pointing at your spouse;
 - doesn't assume why he/she is acting a certain way;
 - sticks to the topic at hand;
 - and affirms the other.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Be empathetic.
- Saying "I understand" doesn't mean you agree.



EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Effective listening means that we are open to hearing what our spouse has to say.

We listen to understand, not to respond.

- When someone is speaking to us, we sometimes mentally prepare our response, or focus on where the other is wrong.
- Preparing a reply when another is telling us their perspective puts us into offensive/reactive mode.
- We want to be actively listening to our spouse so that we can get to the heart of what they are saying.

Be empathetic.

- Try to see things from the other's perspective as he or she is speaking.
- Bear in mind that our families of origin, past relationships, and life experiences can have an impact on the way you and your partner may experience certain situations.

Understanding is not agreement.

- We do not have to agree with our spouse's perspective, but express that we heard and understood them.

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

EFFECTIVE CHECKING

- Articulate understanding.
- The listener asks the talker if he or she understood correctly.
- Be open to correction.
- The talker clarifies to help the listener "get it."

EFFECTIVE CHECKING

Effective checking begins with the person listening.

Articulate understanding.

- Demonstrate that you understand by restating your spouse's concern.

The listener asks the talker if he or she understood correctly.

- "I want to be sure I'm understanding your frustration. Are you upset that we're having friends here for dinner, or are you looking for some help right now?"

Be open to correction.

- Being open to correction is important to fully understand where your spouse is coming from.

The talker clarifies to help the listener "get it."

- "No, I'm not upset that they're coming. I'm upset that it's 4:00 and I have all this cooking and cleaning going on, and you're doing your own thing. I really need some help right now!"

Effective checking says to your spouse, "You're important to me and what you have to say matters."

ROLE PLAY - TLC!

ROLE PLAY – TLC

Presenters: *Role play a 2-3-minute marital argument demonstrating bad communication; no TLC. After the role play, ask the audience for examples of unhealthy communication and how TLC was utilized if at all.*

- Bring in drama, humor, your own unique style to a no-holds-barred couple's conflict to illustrate the concept that without TLC, a disagreement can quickly escalate! Here are a couple of sample conflict ideas:
 - The wife decides she now wants to use the money they've been saving for a car for their vacation instead.
 - Wife has multiple home projects in mind for this Saturday; her husband wants to go to a football game and meet up with his old friends instead.

Using the same conflict scenario introduce healthy and constructive talking, listening, and checking elements to the role play.

- Go carefully and intentionally through the disagreement switching roles as talker/listener so that the couples can clearly identify TLC skills being used.
- After the role play, ask the couples what was different.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Listen willingly and express yourself effectively.
2. Be curious rather than judgmental.
3. Be thoughtfully responsive rather than emotionally reactive.
4. Be aware that your interpretation doesn't necessarily reflect your spouse's intent.

7 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When you are communicating, consider the following principles that can be very effective.

1. Listen willingly and express yourself effectively.

- Ask yourself if you are really interested in hearing what your spouse has to say, and if not, think about why.
- Use TLC.

2. Be curious rather than judgmental.

- Being curious will help you listen to genuinely understand, rather than merely forming a quick judgment.

3. Be thoughtfully responsive rather than emotionally reactive.

- Try not to take things personally or see everything as an attack.

4. Be aware that your interpretation doesn't necessarily reflect your spouse's intent.

- Because we all bring certain interpretive filters into relationships, sometimes what we hear is not what was meant and vice versa.
- If you're not sure what your spouse's intent is, use the principle of "checking" to gain clarity.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION *cont.*

5. Be aware of interactive patterns in your relationship.
6. Be sensitive about your timing, tone, and body language.
7. Persevere.

Bonus - Always try to see Christ in your spouse and let them see Christ in you!

7 PRINCIPLES CONT.

5. Be aware of interactive patterns in your relationship.

- Be aware of recurring patterns that can keep you going in a vicious circle, keeping the problem from ever being resolved.
- If you don't try something different, you won't get a new result.

6. Be sensitive about your timing, tone, and body language.

- Deal with issues at appropriate times and places and stick to the topic at hand.
- Be careful of your tone – use one that is not sarcastic or hurtful. Remember the old saying, “You catch more flies with honey than vinegar.”
- What does your body language say? Are your arms folded tight? Are you turning away as your spouse is trying to talk to you, signaling you are guarded or not open to what the person has to say?

7. Persevere!

- Keep the lines of communication open and don't quit on one another. Be patient and if you need help, seek it out.

Bonus: Always try to see Christ in your spouse and let them see Christ in you! It's hard to stay mad for long if you try to see Christ in your spouse and vice versa.

Why does all this matter? Because you want to guard, protect, and preserve the sanctity of your lifelong marriage.

REMEMBER

- Start small and build skills.
- Use TLC until it becomes second nature.
- Practice and perseverance strengthen intimacy.



REMEMBER

Start small and build skills.

- If communication isn't your strong suit, don't lose heart. We can all stretch ourselves and learn new ways to overcome our tendencies.

Use TLC until it becomes second nature.

- The more we use these talking, listening and checking skills, the more natural and instinctive it will become for us, particularly in conflict.

Practice and perseverance strengthen intimacy.

And as St. Paul reminds us, communicate “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3).

Instruct couples to review the *Decision-Making* resource on pages 20-21 for help with the bigger choices they will face.



ACTIVITY - PAGE 19
Practice TLC!

PRACTICE TLC ACTIVITY

Instruct the couples to turn to page 19 and take the next 10 minutes for the *Practice TLC* activity.

Explain the activity:

- Choose an issue (one is provided if needed) to talk about using the skills just covered in the presentation.
- One person begins as the talker and the other listens and checks in. Then you will switch roles.



TAKEAWAY + REFLECTION

TAKEAWAY + REFLECTION

Instruct the couples to turn to page 19 and take the next 10 minutes to record their answers separately and then discuss together.

The Personal Takeaway is one thing that stood out or one action you want to take after reviewing this topic.

The Couple Reflection asks: What topics do you communicate well with one another; what topics do you struggle with; how will you work as a couple to overcome the difficult topics?

"IT IS THE LORD WHO GOES BEFORE YOU; HE WILL BE WITH YOU AND WILL NEVER FAIL YOU OR FORSAKE YOU. SO DO NOT FEAR OR BE DISMAYED."

DEUTERONOMY 31:8