

Active Listening/Conflict Resolution

Positive communication is key when trying to resolve conflicts in any relationship, (e.g. marital, family, friendship, professional, etc). However, most people tend to use negative forms of communication. One of the most prominent type is the demand-withdraw communication (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 249). The person with the issue makes an effort to engage the other usually by means of criticism, complaints, or some change in the other's behavior or even relationship (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 249). These scenarios can become more conflicting due to the other not responding, not wanting change, or engaging in another conflicting argument.

Some other conflicting communications are topic-related. There are some topics that couples have trouble with, or even avoid all together because they are more difficult to talk about (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 251). There are quite a few topic-related difficulties, the top five topics include: relationship doubts, disrespectful behavior, extramarital intimacy boundary issues, excessive or inappropriate display of anger, and sexual interaction (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 252).

While there are a lot more negative communication practices, it is more important to discuss what the positive strategies are and how to use them in real life. Multiple philosophers in life have developed their own strategies and we'll go over the most important ones to use. The first set were coined by Kevin Zimmerman developed by Harville Hendrix.

Zimmerman's process includes three stages: mirroring, validation, and empathy (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 253). In the mirroring stage, the receiver paraphrases what was heard with a following validation statement to convey that both participants are on the same page. The validation stage (which is the most difficult stage), allows the listener to acknowledge the other's point of view even if it is non-agreeable. The last stage; empathy, allows the listener to try and feel what the other is feeling and acknowledge those feelings with statements or questions.

In addition to these three steps, there are other attributes to use when in a conflicting discussion. These are being positive, brief, specific, expressional, acknowledgeable, responsible, and helpful. Ways to accomplish these are to use words and tone of voice that are respectful (Strong & Cohen, 2017, p. 253). We should also remember to remain focused and use specifics about behaviors or examples related to the discussion topic. We should tell the other how we feel about certain things and by expressing our emotions in a calm way. We also must be able to accept some responsibility even if we feel we didn't do anything wrong. Finally, and most importantly we must offer help which will allow our relationships to progress. If we do not offer assistance, change is unlikely to occur.

The discussion using these techniques was between my wife and myself. We have been married for only six months, however we have been together for about four years. The topic we discussed was about scheduling and organization. The conversation was rather very positive. The skills we found to be the easiest to use were using a respectful and calm voice, using specifics, and mirroring what the other was saying. We found using validation and acknowledgments a bit

difficult and I found using empathy awkward at first. My wife didn't have as much issue with using any of the techniques listed. Although using empathy and validation was a bit difficult and awkward for me, I feel like those were actually very vital to the conversation. I feel like I connected to my wife on a deeper level and I feel that using all the techniques together improved the communication between us drastically. After learning these techniques and using them in action, I've learned that although most couples don't communicate this way because it's a little awkward and difficult to do, it can improve communication between couples and their relationship.

References:

Strong, B, & Cohen, T. F. (2017). *The marriage and family experience: Intimate relationships in a changing society* (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.