

Communication Tips

Below are some suggestions for how to improve your communication about difficult topics such as giving constructive feedback about sex.

1. Choose an appropriate time for broaching the subject

- a. It may be helpful to set a time aside in advance, so your partner does not feel caught off guard.
- b. Choose a time when both partners feel they have enough energy (i.e., not too tired) and are relaxed enough to engage in the conversation.

2. Use “I” statements

- a. “I” statements allow you to express to someone your need for them to change their reactions or behaviours, without blaming them or putting them down.
- b. Speaking from the “I” and stating one’s feelings is more likely to create a positive atmosphere for communication and problem-solving and is less likely to be met with defensiveness.
- c. **How to do it:** There are 4 parts to an “I” statement. Not all parts need to be used (you may wish to postpone stating what you want to happen/change to allow a discussion of possible options). Also, you don’t need to say the message in this order.
 1. “I feel . . .” (state the feeling)
 2. “When you . . .” (state the other person’s behaviour)
 3. “Because . . .” (state the effect on you)
 4. “I need . . .” (state what you want to happen)
 - a. For example:
 - i. I feel disappointed
 - ii. When you turn away from me in bed
 - iii. Because it makes me feel like you aren’t attracted to me
 - iv. I need us to cuddle in bed, even if it doesn’t lead to sex

3. Try to be an active listener

- a. Encourage your partner’s efforts at communicating by conveying your interest (verbal & nonverbal).
- b. Clarify what your partner is saying by asking questions.
- c. Reflect your partner’s feelings back to check that you understand. If you misunderstood, gently let your partner know you did not understand, and allow your partner to gently restate what they meant to say.
- d. Validate your partner’s feelings, efforts, and actions. Show respect for your partner’s intentions.
- e. Restate and summarize the basic ideas, facts, and feelings expressed by your partner to show that you understood what they said and to establish a basis for further discussion – this should be done thoughtfully and with the intention to continue the conversation.

