

## Relationships: Talking about thoughts and feelings

These guidelines are designed to help you improve communication in your relationship, especially if you find it difficult to be honest about how you're feeling because you're anxious about the impact on the other person.

It's important that you agree with the other person when you're going to practice this, at a time that's convenient for both of you. It'll probably be uncomfortable, but doing it at a time when you're (relatively) relaxed and not pressured by time or other demands will give you the best opportunity for a helpful discussion.

### *Rules for both:*

- Speaker has the floor.
- Share the floor. Once the Speaker has made a point, and the Listener has paraphrased it correctly, switch roles.
- Focus on having a good conversation rather than solving a particular problem. If either of you start to feel flooded or overwhelmed, pause the conversation, take a few deep breaths and tell the other that you BOTH need to take a step back and try again.

### *Rules for the Speaker:*

- **Speak for yourself.** This rule is paramount! Discuss your thoughts, feelings and concerns, rather than your perception of the Listener's view / motives.
- **Describe specifics.** Provide clear and concrete descriptions of behaviours or situations.
- **Express positives.** Clearly express your thoughts and feelings about the positive aspects of a situation or your partner's behaviour, even if things seem mostly negative.
- **Assert negatives.** Without being aggressive / attacking, say directly what you dislike or want to see change.
- **Self-disclose feelings.** Share your thoughts and feelings with your partner even if it feels difficult.
- **Don't go on and on.** Share the floor or else you give your partner no reason to share it with you.
- **Stop and let the Listener paraphrase back.** If the Listener's paraphrase does not reflect what you're trying to say, rephrase using different words and allow the Listener to paraphrase again. Miscommunication takes two people.

## ***Rules for the Listener:***

- **Attend.** Focus your attention on your partner when they are speaking. This includes having eye contact, facing your partner and removing distractions.
- **Encourage.** Say things like “Oh”, “Go on” or “I see” so the Speaker knows you’re interested in what they are saying.
- **Hear your partner out.** Let your partner finish speaking, consider what they have said, and avoid immediately disagreeing / defending yourself – put your own opinion on hold until later.
- **Paraphrase what you hear.** Paraphrasing ensures that you are correctly hearing what your partner says. Ask the Speaker to clarify if you don’t understand what they are saying, rather than making an assumption about the meaning.