

Love Notes



7

SECRET
ESSENTIALS

A MARRIAGE COMMUNICATION GUIDE
WITH CHRISTA HARDIN, LLP, CLC



1 COMMUNICATE POSITIVELY

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As this week's freebie, I'm sharing seven incredible tips for communicating effectively in your marriage. Why? Whenever I do surveys or meet with couples, this is the number one reason for marital stress. I go into depth about each tip on the following pages. I also have a fridge freebie short format on my website at www.reflectionsc.com/resources

When you think of something you don't like in your marriage, don't let it make you forget all of the things you do. Spend waaaaay more time (as in five to ten times as much) talking about what you do like about your spouse and marriage versus talking (and thinking) about what you don't. Why? Because there's no time for that! You (or your kids, ahem, as I clearly know) don't have time to be constantly negative and it's not good for your health either.

Also, when you do need to talk about something you don't like in your marriage, make sure you begin and end the conversations with things you do like. I remind couples of this

"sandwich method" in my Release program so that they can help their mate to feel loved and accepted before and after naming their frustration.

This way, no one feels abandoned (at worst) or hurt and defensive (at best) since the most critical information (inside of the sandwiched compliments) can now be digested properly. Think about it for a moment. If someone is making a big deal (even for a minute) out of how much they love you before and after they let you know their issue with you, it's not as easy to fall apart or to be on the defense. Keep your cool and save yourself or your spouse a conniption fit. You get a much better day with less teen-like angst, too! Speaking of keeping your days good...read on.



2

SAVE IT FOR LATER

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You want every day to be awesome right? Well then you need to consider this seriously: Most of the time is not an ideal time to just go at it when you have a communication difficulty.

Life is busy and throwing in a huge fit in the midst of it doesn't make it any more awesome or classy most of the time. Timing is everything. If you're both super tired because it's midnight and you're half delirious from working and taking care of the kids all day, it's not an ideal time to bring up the issue du jour. If you're both about to start your workday, you got it, also not ideal. If you're both out and about in a public setting and it's a super emotional topic, not ideal.

As unromantic as this sounds, an ideal setting for having an argument takes planning, even for me. And I really LOVE spontaneity and creativity most of the time.

I don't even set alarms exactly on the dot because it's too boring (weird quirk, right?) But during an argument, I want no feathers or frills, just results and plans so I can happily move on to whatever else will bring me joy. Like not arguing. :)

You also need to skip arguing altogether when either of you are super exhausted, busy or sick. And if you or your spouse always pleads unavailability, then you just need to give some advance notice, like this, "I realize you are busy [or sick] lately so would you rather talk at 5 or at 9 tomorrow?" Try to be firm but accommodating for someone who is genuinely burnt out or rarely home. Don't hold it in forever, because communication is important. Just be patient.



3 DON'T VILLIANIZE

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I learned awhile ago that viewing your spouse as an opponent, enemy or villain (my personal fave) really doesn't cut it in marriage. You aren't the hero either, if you get where I'm going.

You are two people with super unique childhood stories, personalities, tendencies, and lives. And as much as you think you know your spouse better than they know themselves, you totally don't.

It's also best if you remember that God, who is perfect, and who, by the way, totally has your back, is their ultimate judge (and yours also). So while you may have an inkling of how your spouse should love you better, you really have no clue how hard or easy it's been for them or how hard or easy you are to live with.

Instead, accept your differences of opinion and make compromises for those times you are in complete disagreement.

This can look like "OK, this time it's your way and next time it's mine" or "halfies" or giving in when an issue is less of a biggie for you than for them. Whatever works in each circumstance for you guys is fine so long as you are both leaning in.

Who goes first? The ideal is letting the other person go first on the compromising (read 1st Cor 13 if you're in doubt here) so long as your entire being is not stifled in the process such as in abusive situations. If you are abusing your spouse, you are better off reaching out to an individual counselor, not a marriage expert, by the way (and please stop abusing! You are so much better than doing that to get your way!). If you are being abused, check out the amazing Leslie Vernick's site and/or visit our center for help. You deserve much better!



4 HEAL OLD WOUNDS

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Although you're going to give everything to God, it's also important to acknowledge the hard times in life to one another. Sometimes couples forget that stubborn, angry or sad feelings that just won't go away have their root in an earlier issue.

And for those of you who have had tons of trauma or PTSD, it's unfair to judge and to expect yourself or your spouse to know how to be healthy from the get-go. If you married someone else with trauma, you have to remember to be patient and encourage them to heal.

And there is good news! In the cases of those who grew up with trauma, healthy behaviors can be taught, encouraged, rehearsed, and yes, taken up and lived out successfully by the intentional. **Change is possible.** And in these situations, there is often a need for ongoing maintenance therapy or relationship coaching for a season or as ongoing marital maintenance.

And so what? Not only is going for help biblical (Proverbs 11:14) and awesome in that way, but in sessions I've had over the years, we have a lot of fun, too. Most of the sessions I have with people have both tears and lots of laughs involved. Because in the midst of the raw pain they share with me, there is connection and also thriving, laughing, fun and awesome growth.

If you continue to play out an old trauma cycle, just don't forget that the work needs to be done. You can't cover up a wound with a band aid or it will fester.

Many of you are fortunate enough to not have come into marriage with deep childhood wounds. In this case, your coaching needs are more maintenance-based for addressing lesser trauma and issues that have occurred after the marriage has begun.



5 GET SELF-CARE

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Our hearts will never be satisfied if we don't look to God to meet the biggest needs we have. So, if you are relying on your spouse to meet all of your needs, that never worked even in the Garden of Eden so there's no way it can work for you. NO way. And while I'm on the topic of making sure you don't get all of your needs met through your spouse, make sure to aim to get physical, emotional and spiritual self care **every single day**. I have an entire program dedicated to it if you are weak in this area. It's that important.

If you have been ignoring your own self-care regularly, you are totally set up for disaster. Especially if you're high maintenance. I am not as high maintenance as I used to be before kids but I definitely love getting refreshed daily!

In essence, we were create to maintain balance so that we can refresh others out of an excess or overflow versus trying to love out of a deficit. We were created to thrive on balance in relationships, to be good students of and stewards of our own bodies and to have a healthy spirituality. For more deets on this, check out my Overflowing Life program at www.ReflectionsCC.com.



6 LET IT GO

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When you have tried to compromise, to love your spouse unconditionally, to share your needs, wants and desires clearly and humbly, and still you don't see major changes, don't immediately run out for a divorce. Sometimes it really is that a divorce is called for in a seriously crazy situation. But since my RELATE program is only six weeks in length, it gives you time to see if added tools and accountability will help your spouse. Isn't your marriage, the one you have put some much time, energy, prayer and so much of yourself into worth that? Besides, if you have a strong relationship with God, He has a way of romancing His children so that they have more than enough.

God also says our true treasures await in heaven (Matthew 5:12), something most people have forgotten. The "me" society we live in says that if we don't get everything we want now, we better leave because it's out there somewhere. So letting it go here definitely doesn't refer to your marriage. It refers to letting it all out to God. When you are worried, sad, lonely, hurt, or just plain mad, tell God everything about it till it doesn't hurt as badly. Even though He already knows, when you give your heart to Him, He is touched. You chose Him. You trusted Him like He was your Father.

So to do this, carve out time during your own angsty moments. Take prayer walks, belt out sappy songs, journal your heart out to God or become a poetry aficionado. Whatever you do, don't hold back on God or hold onto resentment and unforgiveness toward your spouse. By holding onto the distress you feel in your relationship, you end up suffering even worse than the one you intend to hurt.

The phrase Know thyself (Socrates) is a famous concept that I love and believe in with all my heart. I literally LOVE being student of what works and what doesn't with my personality and relationships because it's so practical and leads to a great life. But I also believe that knowing God is WAY more valuable. Even if I think I know it all and that I have everyone's best interest at heart, He has a view that is both panoramic and timeless. And take courage, He ALWAYS makes a way where there is no way for those that love Him!



7 BE SMART

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I know marriage is hard but you have to keep your head in the game at all times. I've known countless individuals over the years who go through court battles over physical altercations and embarrassing legal cases. It's never pretty. Cheaters get caught pretty much every time.

Taking nudes and sending them is pretty much the same thing and the same sequence of self-defeat, except slightly more embarrassing. And it goes without saying that if you are going to hit your spouse or threaten them, just about the whole world will eventually find out.

Just be smart. Spouses who get upset and yell and cry and have their own Notebook Movie-worthy moments don't usually need a court or restraining order, they don't need a divorce, and they don't need to spend tens of thousands of dollars on attorney's fees. They just need good tools to heal.

If you are struggling to the point where you want to cheat, abuse or do anything else crazy that could lose you your freedom, your kids, your very heart, and your livelihood, get help NOW! If you're the victim, your spouse may actually heal if you set boundaries and get support. Minimally, you get healthy.



BONUS: HAVE FUN TOGETHER!

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Having fun is so important in marriage! So however you spend your other one hundred or so waking hours a week, please save a few hours a week for you and your spouse to just enjoy (about 10 hours is my magic number)! Biblically, that's your right as a spouse.

Remember this awesome verse? "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun." (Ecc 9:9) That's for you! God loves you and knows it isn't all about the hard work although as you can read, that's totally part of the package too.

You were made for this married life and you've got it! My team and I are here to help wherever you need, too!
