



Effective Communication Skills for Couples



“Medically Ready Force...Ready Medical Force”

DHA Vision



“A joint, integrated, premier system of health, supporting those who serve in the defense of our country.”



Slide Deck Content Updated: 14 JUL 2017

“Medically Ready Force...Ready Medical Force”

Learning Objectives



- Discuss effective communication skills for couples
- Distinguish between passive, aggressive and assertive communication
- Identify blocks to and effective strategies for active listening
- Identify thinking patterns that block communication
- Explain how to effectively communicate emotions
- Identify effective strategies for assertive communication
- Describe a negotiation strategy

Effective Communication Skills for Couples Modules



- Introduction to Communication
- Active Listening
- Challenging Cognitive Distortions that Block Communication
- Effectively Communicating Emotions
- Communicating Assertively
- Negotiation in Communication



Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Introduction to Communication



Introduction to Communication: Verbal Communication



- Refers to spoken words
 - “Yes” or “No”
 - “Let’s go out to eat”
- At times “what is stated” is not “what is meant”
- “Let’s go out to eat”



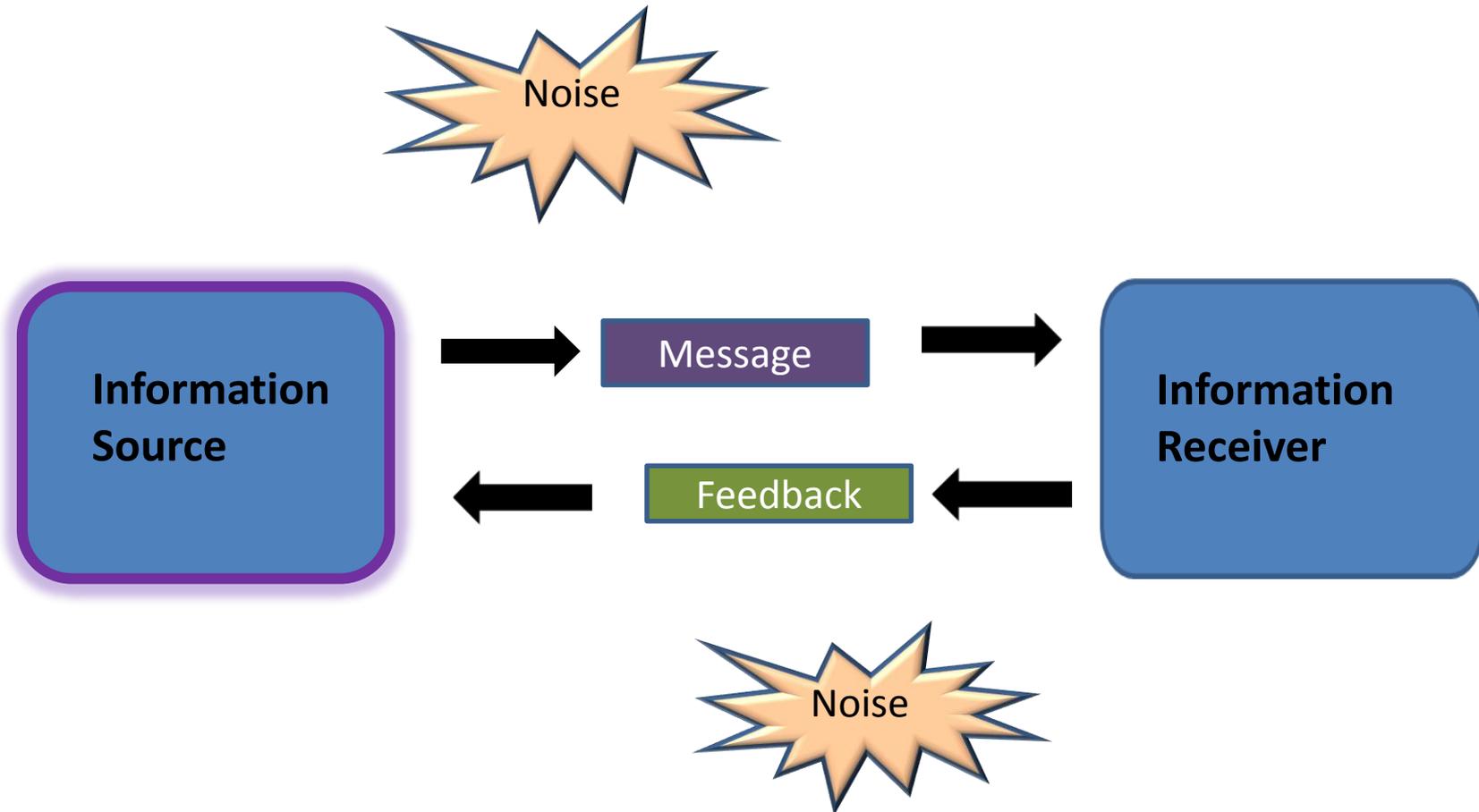
Introduction to Communication: Non-Verbal Communication



- Refers to unspoken communication
 - Eye contact
 - Facial expressions
 - Body movements
 - Gestures
 - Tone of voice and volume



Introduction to Communication: Model of Communication



Introduction to Communication: Styles of Communication



- Passive Communication style



- Aggressive Communication style



- Assertive Communication style



Introduction to Communication: Passive Communication



- Don't say what you want, feel or need or apologize for what you want, feel or need
- Others' needs are more important than your own
- The *rights of others are more important* than your rights



Introduction to Communication: Aggressive Communication



- Express your feelings and wants as if other views are unreasonable
- Dismiss or minimize needs or wants of others
- ***Your rights are more important*** than others' rights
 - I will win, even if others lose



Introduction to Communication: Assertive Communication



- Expression of needs, wants and feelings directly
- Allows other to hold other viewpoints
- ***You*** and ***others*** have ***equal rights***
 - No one has to win



Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Active Listening



Active Listening: Blocks to Listening



■ Rehearsing

- Not listening to your partner because you are mentally rehearsing what you are going to say in response to their statement
- Sue and Steve are discussing who should take Sam to the baseball game after school. As Sue explains her argument, Steve is thinking of reasons why he can't take Sam to the game, so he can clearly state his case. He is so focused on his counterargument that he doesn't hear Sue's concerns.

Active Listening: Blocks to Listening



■ Filtering

- Selectively listening to your partner, hearing what you want to hear and ignoring what you don't want to hear or what you disagree with
- Bill and Barb are discussing their plans for the long weekend. When Bill says he wants to spend one of the days with his buddies, Barb doesn't seem to hear him. On Saturday morning, Barb is surprised when Bill kisses her goodbye and announces that he will be back in time for dinner.

Active Listening: Blocks to Listening



■ Judging

- Listening to a conversation only to gain more evidence of your pre-determined conclusion
- Sam was convinced that Matt was the unit 'idiot'. Although Sam would sometimes talk to Matt, he was really just adding the content of each conversation to the list of reasons why Matt was a burden to the unit.



Active Listening: Blocks to Listening



■ Sparring

- ❑ Using every argument as an excuse to rant about why you are right or things should be done your way
- ❑ No matter what Joyce brings up – the children, money or family- Ted starts ranting about his ideas regardless of how Joyce tries to explain.



Active Listening: Defined



- Dr. Carl Rogers
 - Specific communication skill requiring listener to provide free and undivided attention to speaker
- Listening is the most important communication skill
- Active listening has many benefits
 - Greater understanding of your partner
 - Enhanced enjoyment of the relationship
 - Understand your partner's thoughts and actions

Active Listening: Whole Messages



■ Observations

- Statements of fact, neutral, no judgments

■ Thoughts

- Beliefs, opinions, theories

■ Feelings

- Emotional state

■ Needs

- Statement of need



Active Listening: Communication Guidelines



■ Win-Win Approach

- The goal is to compromise
- Each person should give something



Active Listening: Communication Guidelines



DO

- Use open body language
- Describe your feelings
- Use “I” statements
- Focus on the current issue
- Use whole messages
- Be clear and specific

DON'T

- Label
- Blame
- Threaten
- Attack
- Focus on the past
- Assume

Active Listening: Communication Guidelines



- Be Mindful
 - Pay attention to him/her, focus on your shared experience
- Start on a positive note
 - Open the conversation with a compliment or appreciation
- Use helpful complaints
 - State your needs without attacking
- Take a break if you feel overwhelmed
- Approach the conflict through self-disclosure and connection, don't avoid difficult conversations

Active Listening: Four Marriage Killers



- Criticism
 - Criticizing your partner rather than critiquing a behavior (“Why are you so ...?”)
- Contempt
 - Attacking your partner’s sense of self (insults, hostile humor or mockery)
- Defensiveness
 - Seeing self as the victim, warding off attack (It’s not my fault... or yes, but...)
- Stonewalling
 - Withdrawal from relationship to avoid conflict (silent treatment or leaving the conversation prematurely)

Four Marriage Killers – The Antidotes



■ Criticism

- Critique specific behaviors (not your partner), start with a compliment
- “I appreciate it when you get the kids ready for bed. Next time, would you please read them a bedtime story first?”

■ Contempt

- Be respectful, show appreciation
- “Thank you for making an extra effort to help around the house this week.”

Four Marriage Killers – The Antidotes



■ Defensiveness

- Acknowledge your share of the responsibility
- “I will also work on communicating my feelings before I feel overwhelmed.”

■ Stonewalling

- When you are feeling too emotional, take a break to calm down and resume the conversation later
- “I’m feeling a little overwhelmed, can we come back to this in a half hour or so?”

Active Listening: Constructive Confrontation



- “I feel...” (sad, afraid, impatient, hurt)
- “Because I...” (explain why)
- “What I want is...” (be very specific)

- “When you watch TV all night, I feel hurt. Because I want to talk to you and spend time together. What I want is more time together to just talk.”

Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Challenging Cognitive Distortions that Block Communication



Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Types of Cognitive Distortions



■ Mind Reading

- Making assumptions about what the other person is thinking
- “You don’t even care what I want.”

■ Personalization

- Insulting the entire character rather than a specific behavior
- “You are so selfish!”



Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Techniques



■ Mind Reading

- Don't assume, ask
- "What were your intentions when you _____?"

■ Personalization

- Provide specific feedback on the behavior, don't insult your partner
- "Why didn't you call me when you were running late?"

Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Types of Cognitive Distortions

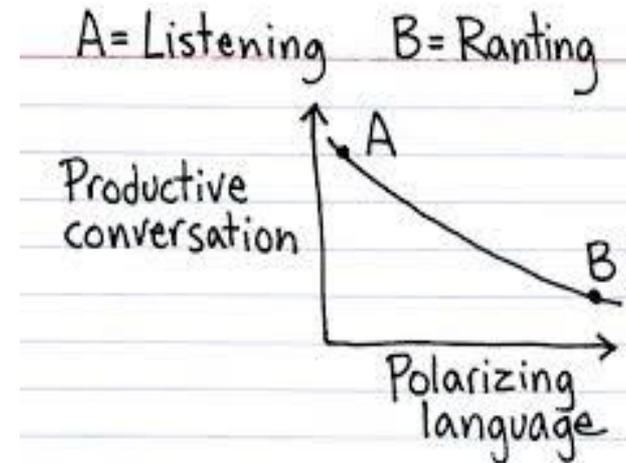


■ Distracting

- Bringing up other unrelated issues, especially past issues
- “Well, that’s nothing, remember when...”

■ Polarized Language

- Use of terms like always, never, all or none
- “You never listen!”



Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Techniques



■ Distracting

- Focus on one issue at a time and be specific, focus on behaviors
- “Let’s focus on the dishes first before discussing the car”

■ Polarized Language

- Use terms such as: sometimes, often, mostly, at times or rarely
- “Sometimes it seems that you are not listening to me”

Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Types of Cognitive Distortions



■ Fractured Logic

- Creating a large unsubstantiated conclusion based on one small fact or event
- “He’s been coming home late from work, he must be having an affair. “

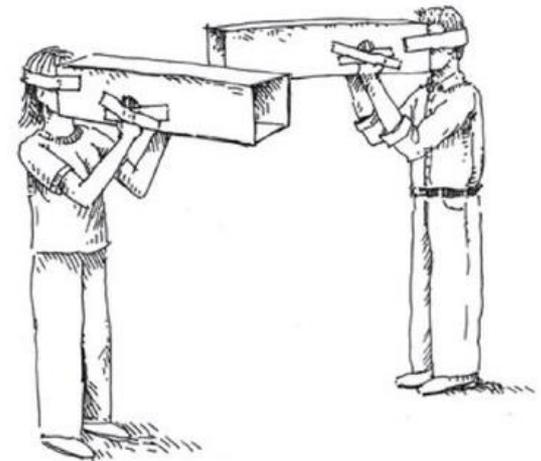
■ Tunnel Vision

- Filtering out all of the good aspects of your partner’s behavior and focusing only on the negative aspects
- “She’s always at work” (forgetting all of the weekend trips and the week of leave she took to help with the move)

Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Techniques



- Fractured Logic
 - What would I tell a friend in this situation?
- Tunnel Vision –
 - Are you ignoring important information?



Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Assumptions

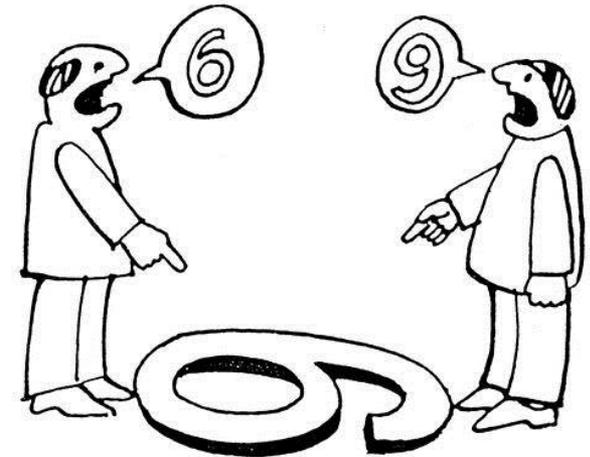


■ Are you assuming the worst?

Do you believe your partner did _____ to intentionally hurt you?

■ Try positive assumptions rather than negative

- The assumption of commitment
- The assumption of goodwill and intent
- The assumption of understanding



Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Expectations



- Was there an unmet expectation?
 - Expectations of others
 - Social etiquette
 - Affirmation and intimacy
 - Equity and fairness
 - Intrusion or annoyance

Challenging Cognitive Distortions: Evidence



- What is the evidence for your thinking?
 - Do you have any evidence to support this thought?
 - Do you have any evidence against this thought?
- Is there an alternative explanation or viewpoint?
- If you had a close friend in this situation, what would you say to them?

Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Effectively Communicating Emotions



Effectively Communicating Emotions: “I” Statements



- Are listener-friendly
- Help express emotions in a healthy way
- Reflect your perspective
- Reflect non-defensiveness

Effectively Communicating Emotions: “I” Statements



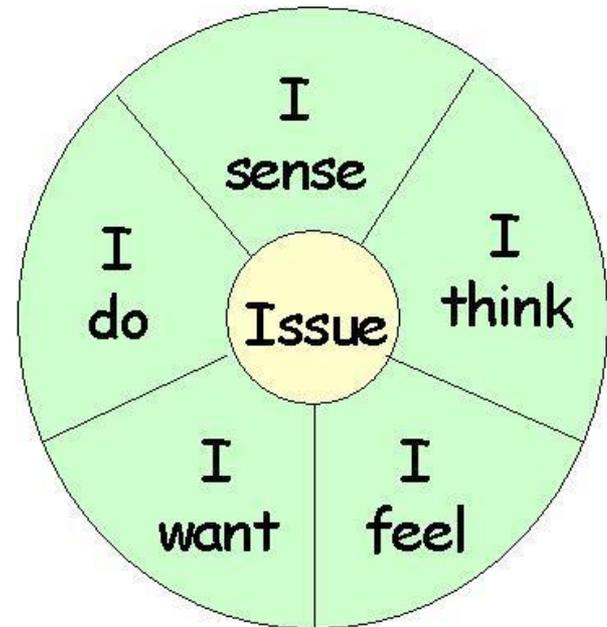
- I think
- I feel
- I believe
- I wish
- I wonder

Effectively Communicating Emotions: “I” Statements



■ Practice with your partner

- What time to go to sleep
- What to have for dinner
- What to do this weekend
- What to do for date night



Effectively Communicating Emotions: Reflective Listening



■ Reflect back to the speaker

Content

- “You said...”

Emotion

- “You feel frustrated...”

“I heard you say that you are feeling hurt because of what I said to your mother.”

Effectively Communicating Emotions: Reflective Statements



- Non-judgmental
- Reflect what you heard
- Paraphrase
- Seek to help you better understand

Effectively Communicating Emotions: Reflective Listening



- Practice with your partner
 - ❑ What to eat for dinner
 - ❑ Which movie to see
 - ❑ Who should pick up the kids from practice
 - ❑ What to do for date night



Effectively Communicating Emotions: Validation



- Reflect empathy and understanding
- The opposite of validation is disregarding or dismissing
- Validation is *not necessarily* agreement



Effectively Communicating Emotions: Validation



- “It sounds like...”
- “That really sounds overwhelming.”
- “I can see why you are so upset.”
- “That sounds really exciting.”

Effectively Communicating Emotions: Practicing Validation



■ Practice with your partner

- Recount a happy event
- Talk about the last time you went out to eat
- Talk about the last time you went to a game
- Tell about your day
- Tell about the first time you tried a new activity (learned to drive, learned to golf)

Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Communicating Assertively



Communicating Assertively: Non-Verbal Communication



■ Posture

- Sit upright with a relaxed posture

■ Body Language

- Movements should be natural and open

■ Personal Space

- Maintain a reasonable amount of personal space

■ Eye Contact

- Maintain frequent not constant eye contact

Communicating Assertively: Non-Verbal Communication



■ Facial Expression

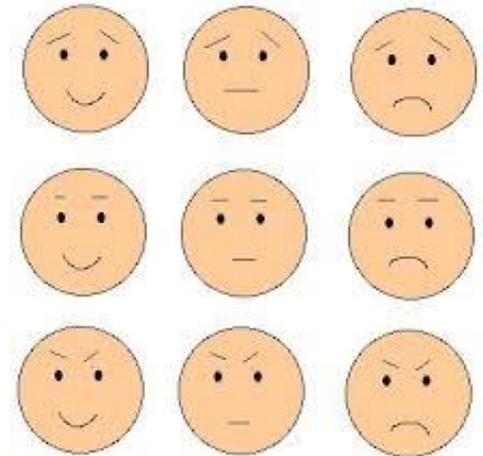
- Facial expression should be consistent with the message

■ Tone of Voice

- Voice should be warm and not overly loud

■ Fluency

- Speak evenly without rushed words or hesitating



Communicating Assertively: Verbal Communication



■ Healthy Communication

- State the facts
- Acknowledge your personal feelings
- Make a fair request

- “When I drove to work today, I noticed that the car is nearly out of gas (fact). I felt annoyed and I got angry (feeling). When you use the car to run errands, I would like you to refill the tank (request).”

Communicating Assertively: Whole Messages



■ Observations

- Statements of fact, neutral, no judgments

■ Thoughts

- Beliefs, opinions, theories

■ Feelings

- Emotional state

■ Needs

- Statement of need



Communicating Assertively: Practice



- Practice assertive communication using one of the techniques learned
 - Request to go to a new activity this weekend
 - Request help with a household chore
 - Request that your partner participate in one of your hobbies or interests
 - Request a day trip

Effective Communication Skills for Couples



Negotiation in Communication



Negotiation in Communication: Negotiation Strategy



■ Collaborative Problem Solving

- Know what it is that you want
- State what you want in behavioral terms
- Listen to the other person's point of view
- Make a proposal
- Ask for a counterproposal
- Achieve a compromise

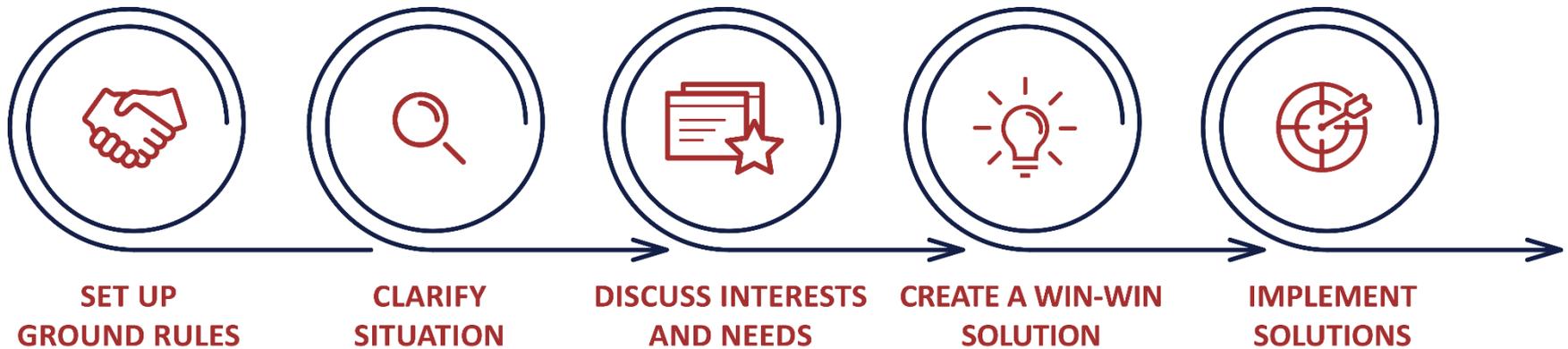
Negotiation in Communication: Practice



- Choose one of these topics to negotiate with your partner
 - Where to go on the next vacation
 - Where to have dinner
 - What movie to see this week
 - What to do on Saturday



Negotiation in Communication: Negotiation Strategy



Negotiation in Communication: Set Up Ground Rules



- I accept conflict calmly
- I want a fair, mutually agreeable outcome
- I'm flexible



Negotiation in Communication: Clarify Situation



- Briefly describe the situation, objectively without feelings or judgments



Negotiation in Communication: Interests and Needs



MY INTERESTS	MY PARTNER'S INTERESTS	SHARED INTERESTS

Negotiation in Communication: Interests and Needs (Example)



MY INTERESTS	MY PARTNER'S INTERESTS	SHARED INTERESTS
See mom	Stay home	Keep peace
See sister	Read, watch TV	Relax
See cousins	Work on the shed	Feel close
Preserve family ties	Be relaxed, not have to be the good son-in-law	
Look good to my family		

■ Tentative Solutions:

- My ideal solution: Drive out Wednesday, stay with mom, return on Sunday
- What I could live with: Shorter visit
- Unacceptable: Not going at all

Negotiation in Communication: Create a Win-Win Solution



- There are many ways to negotiate
 - Take turns getting what you want
 - Do both activities or requests
 - Tit for tat (trade desired solutions)
 - Compromise part of what I want, part of what you want
 - Split the difference between two solutions
 - My way when I do it, your way when you do it

Negotiation in Communication: Implement Solutions



- Begin once you have agreed upon a workable solution, make a plan to implement the solution
- Check in later to review progress



Negotiation in Communication: Practice



- Choose one of these topics to negotiate
 - Where to go on the next vacation
 - Where to have dinner
 - What movie to see this week
 - What to do on Saturday
 - Eat at home or take-out
 - Rent a movie or go to the movies

Bibliography



- Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Bodenmann, G., Bradbury, T. N., & Pihet, S. (2008). Relative contributions of treatment-related changes in communication skills and dyadic coping skills to the longitudinal course of marriage in the framework of marital distress prevention. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 50(1), 1-21.
- Buzzella, B. A., Whitton, S. W., & Tompson, M. C. (2012). A preliminary evaluation of a relationship education program for male same-sex couples. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 1(4), 306-322.
- Gottman, J. M. & DeClaire, J. (2001). *The Relationship Cure: A five-step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships*. New York, NY: Harmony Publishers.
- Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1995). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- McKay, M., Fanning, P., & Paleg, K. (2006). *Couple Skills: Making your relationship work*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- McKay, M., & Rogers, P. (2000). *The Anger Control Workbook: Simple, innovative techniques for managing anger and developing healthier ways of relating*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Bibliography



- Nay, W. R. (2014). *The Anger Management Workbook: Use the STOP method to replace destructive responses with constructive behavior*, New York, NY: Guilford.
- Parr, P., Boyle, R. A., & Tejada, L. (2008). I said, you said: A communication exercise for couples. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 30(3), 167-173.
- Patterson, R. (2000). *The Assertiveness Workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Pickett-Schenk, S. A., Cook, J. A., Steigman, P., Lippincott, R., Bennett, C., & Grey, D. D. (2006). Psychological well-being and relationship outcomes in a randomized study of family-led education. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 63(9), 1043-1050.
- Robinson, J. (2012). *Communication miracles for couples: Easy and effective tools to create more love and less conflict*. San Francisco, CA: Conari Press.
- Rogge, R. D., Cobb, R. J., Lawrence, E., Johnson, M. D., & Bradbury, T. N. (2013). Is skills training necessary for the primary prevention of marital distress and dissolution? A 3-year experimental study of three interventions. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 81(6), 949-961.
- Schramm, W. (1954). How Communication Works. In Wilber Schramm (Ed.) *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (pp.3-10). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Bibliography



- Weeks, G. R. and Fife, S. T. (2014). *Couples in Treatment: Techniques and approaches for effective practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Appendix A



Resources for Military Community



afterdeployment

Wellness resources for the military community.



Post-Traumatic Stress



Depression



Anger



Alcohol & Drugs



Tobacco



Physical Injury



mild Traumatic Brain Injury



Stigma



Spirituality



Anxiety



Families & Friendships



Life Stress



Suicide Prevention



Sleep



Resilience



Military Sexual Trauma



Health & Wellness



Families with Kids



Financial Health



Work Adjustment

New & Featured



Kids Deploy Too!
MilitaryKidsConnect.org

inTransition
COACHING · EMPOWERING · CONNECTING

"The coaching support helped me stay **connected** and **focused** during a stressful time."



New Expert Blog
Updated Weekly!



Participate in Research



Learn more about **Environmental Exposures**



Visit afterdeployment.dcoe.mil for more information



inTransition

COACHING • CONNECTING • EMPOWERING

- Voluntary and confidential program
- Supports service members as they move between mental health care systems or providers
- Provides a personal coach, and resources and tools to help during the transitional period

[*intransition.dcoe.mil*](http://intransition.dcoe.mil)



DOWNLOAD THE REAL WARRIORS APP
FREE on the App Store™

Created for warriors, veterans and military families, users can upload photos to the Wall, salute others and access 24/7 resources.



Version: 1.1 | iOS

REAL WARRIORS ★ REAL BATTLES
REAL STRENGTH

Saluting and supporting those who serve.

Visit realstrength.realwarriors.net

Confidential Help for Service Members and Families

- A single source of information and assistance for service members and military families
- Private, discreet, individualized support
- No-cost, tailored, confidential
- Trustworthy information and resources — from the Department of Defense

