

IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION

By Terri Phillips, MFT

As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist for the past 17 years, I have seen many couples in my office with relationship issues who are struggling and both people are in severe emotional pain. Over the course of the years, I have noticed that no matter what the presenting problem in the relationship seems to be, communication is the underlying issue that is present. It can be difficulty communicating feelings or needs, difficulty understanding their spouse's feelings or needs, or simply growing in different directions and not communicating at all.

Sometimes the communication in a relationship becomes more difficult as one or both of the parties are suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. It may be that the couple is just under stress from everyday issues related to family, finances and health. Whatever the reason is in your family, the communication issue must be resolved in order to move forward in your relationship.

Here are some small tips that can create big changes for the better in your relationship. First, make sure to set aside time EVERY DAY to communicate with your significant other. That time can be over coffee in the morning, after the day is done or even meeting for lunch. It can be a small amount of time such as 15 - 20 mins to just talk about your day and touch base.

Second, make sure to express your feelings with your partner by using "I" statements rather than "you" statements which can be interpreted as blaming. Third, make sure to listen to your partner's feelings by paying attention to what is said and asking clarifying questions if you are not sure what is meant. Fourth, make sure to argue in a fair way by thinking before you speak, refrain from using "attacking" words and never involve your children in adult disagreements.

Setting aside a "date" night once or twice a month with your spouse can also be very helpful. In using this date night, be sure to focus on talking, connecting and having fun rather than issues that could create an argument between you. Save those issues for another time.

If using some of these tips still doesn't alleviate the relationship strain or only creates a temporary fix, then it may be necessary for you to seek professional intervention. A licensed therapist can help you reach your relationship goals. Sometimes that may mean doing some work as an individual as well.

Neurofeedback can help individuals reach their calm alert focused zone making relationship communication an easier goal to reach. Neurofeedback is done in a therapist's office with sensors connected to the ears and scalp. By watching the computer screen game or pictures, you can teach your brain to operate in that calm

alert focused zone. This process is simple, non-invasive and only takes about 30 mins of your day once or twice a week.

When you are able to be calm, alert and focused at home, your ability to use appropriate communication skills will improve. As your communication improves, your relationship can improve as well. Remember, you don't need to suffer in a difficult relationship. You have the ability to take the steps necessary to have all that you want in your relationship!

Terri Phillips is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in Neurofeedback located in Temecula. Call 909-730-0410 or visit www.terriphillipsmft.com for more information.