



# DATE *Night*

AT HOME

TALK TO ME, LIKE LOVERS DO



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WELCOME TO  
YOUR

*at-home*  
DATE NIGHT!

The first section of this handout is intended to pair with an instructional video, so if you haven't watched it yet, click **HERE** to follow along!

If you have already watched the video, this guide is for the two of you to take things a little deeper. Check out each section for more questions to ask each other, topics to dive in to, and ways you can strengthen your communication!



## GET THE MOOD GOIN'

There's no doubt that transitioning between work and home-life is a huge challenge when everything's happening in the same building (or even room). So a great way to be sure your mind is focused on date night is to set up a romantic spot!

Grab some comfy blankets and pillows, some dim lighting and candles, soft music, and a cozy drink before you start the night. It will help you both be able to take the next 45 minutes to focus completely on each other, and each other only! Now, gather up the supplies you'll need for the activities in this date night.

### SUPPLIES YOU'LL NEED:



**A ROMANTIC SPOT**  
(CANDLES, PILLOWS, TEA, ETC.)



**FOUR BOWLS**



**TWO PENS**



**A BAG OF MARSHMALLOWS**  
(OR A PIECE OF BREAD)



**TWO NOTEBOOKS**



**A TIMER**



**M&M'S OR OTHER ROUND CANDY**



**TWO STRAWS**

## ACTIVITY 1: THE BLIND ARTIST

### SUPPLIES NEEDED



### HOW TO PLAY

To set this game up, put 20 of the candies in one bowl, and 20 in another. Each person gets one bowl with candy and one bowl without. Put your pair of bowls right next to each other.

Set your timer for 60 seconds.

Your goal is to transfer as many of the candies as you can in 60 seconds, but you can only do it by putting the straw in your mouth and suctioning the candy to it by sucking air in. You can't use your hands to steady the straw!

After 1 minute, count the number of candies you moved! Whoever has the most in the originally empty bowl wins that round. For the second round, try moving the bowls about a foot apart and see how many you can move in 60 seconds.

For the final round, try putting the bowls on opposite sides of the room and see how many you can move!

## OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT?

In this game, the distance between the two bowls made a huge difference in how many of the candies successfully made it through the transfer.

When the two bowls are right next to each other, the game's really easy. But if the two bowls are far away (or on different sides of the room), it makes it way more complicated. And similarly, the distance between you and your honey makes a huge difference in how well (and how easily) you communicate! Being close to each other at the beginning of a difficult conversation makes communicating much easier. And the less distance there is between the two of you, the more likely your attempts at communicating will be successful!



### KNEE-TO-KNEE

Now turn, facing each other, and spend a few minutes answering these questions:

What are some ways we can minimize the emotional distance between us so that communication feels easier?

Have I done anything recently that created unnecessary distance between us?

How can we try and prevent that from happening again?

GIVE EACH OTHER A

*smooch*

AND LET'S KEEP THIS DATE  
NIGHT GOING!

## ACTIVITY 2: STUFF IT DOWN

### SUPPLIES NEEDED



A TIMER



A BAG OF  
MARSHMALLOWS  
(OR A PIECE OF BREAD)

### HOW TO PLAY

Using big puffy marshmallows (or bites of bread), have one person stuff as many as they can in their mouth in 30 seconds. When the timer's done, have them say, "Lesser leather never weathered wetter weather better."

If you want to play it fair, have the other person take a try at it! Come up with a funny saying for them to say outloud.

**PRO TIP:** Now's a good time to grab a glass of water and refill that teapot!



## OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT?

If you felt really silly doing this activity, you were probably doing it exactly right! Even though this one gives everyone a great laugh, there's also a great lesson to be learned. Has your honey ever done something that made you a little irritated or slightly annoyed, but you put off the conversation for later? (You don't have to answer that, we've all been there!) Well, let's say each one of those marshmallows (or every bite of bread) is one of those conversations that you held on to and (literally) closed your mouth. When you shove those conversations down for later, it ends up making everything harder in the end. The more of those little things you hold on to, the harder it is to communicate your emotions, frustrations, and needs well when you do decide to start talking.

At the end of each day, think through your withholds, or what you withheld from saying to your spouse. Whether it's... "This kind of got on my nerves..." or "Thank you for doing this," take time to share what you refrained from saying. Pretty soon you'll see a pattern of what thoughts you do or don't share. For instance, you may frequently tell your spouse all of the annoying things they do but you don't share all of the good things.

### KNEE-TO-KNEE

Now turn, facing each other, and spend a few minutes answering these questions:

What's one conversation that you've put off this week?

Is there anything I do/don't do that keeps you from having those small conversations with me?



## ACTIVITY 3: NAME THAT TUNE

### SUPPLIES NEEDED



TWO NOTEBOOKS

TWO  
PENS

### HOW TO PLAY

Write numbers 1-10 on your paper. If following the video, the guide will play 3-5-second snippets of 10 songs. As soon as you know the name of the song, write it down, corresponding with the order of songs played. Bonus points if you get the artist! The person with the most correct songs wins!

*Note: If you're doing this without the video, take turns picking songs and playing 5-second snippets for the other person to guess. Here are some great examples you can use!*

### SONG EXAMPLES TO CHOOSE FROM

I Will Always Love You • Don't Stop Believin' • Eye Of The Tiger • All Star  
Mr. Brightside • Rolling In The Deep • Build Me Up Buttercup  
You Make My Dreams • Wouldn't It Be Nice • Raspberry Beret • Jessie's Girl  
Don't Go Breaking My Heart • I'm A Believer • Under Pressure  
We Are Family • Dancing Queen

## OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT?

Some of those songs were probably pretty easy. The ones you know well are the ones you've listened to time and time again. The rest were probably songs you recognized, but hadn't heard quite as often. It's the same with communication in your relationship. The more you communicate with each other, the more you'll know each other, even if life is in a season of moving so fast you only have a 5-second snippet to interact. But, if you only communicate in pieces and you don't take the time to fully listen, it'll be difficult to truly understand and know each other.

Speaking in shorthand and expecting your spouse to get the full picture is tempting, but it doesn't work out well in the end. For instance, if you tell your spouse to pre-set the coffee for the next day, but you don't mention that you need it to brew at 5:30am because you'll be running out the door to your 6am workout, and you'll have no time to wait for it to brew... You can't get mad at your spouse for only filling the pot with water, adding the filter and grounds, and then leaving it for you to press "brew" when you're ready. So slow down, share the full scope, and be intentional with not only WHAT you communicate, but HOW.

### KNEE-TO-KNEE

Now turn, facing each other, and spend a few minutes answering these questions:

Life doesn't slow down. So how can we make our communication more of a priority to be sure we're on the same page?

Are there specific areas or times in my life where you feel like I only communicate in snippets?

## ACTIVITY 4: THE “NEWLYWED” GAME



### HOW TO PLAY

Start off with each person having a notebook and a pen. Assign one person to be player 1 and the other to be player 2. Sit back to back. If following the video, the guide will read out questions to answer. Your goal is to write the same answer, without looking at each other's papers. When the time comes, reveal your answers to each other! If you both wrote down the same answer, you get a point.

*Note: If playing this game without the video guide, take turns coming up with questions! Here are a few examples to get you started.*

### QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

1. What did player 1 wear on your first date?
2. What's player 2's weirdest quirk?
3. Who's the better cook?
4. Which Disney character is player 1 most like?
5. What would player 2's entrance song be?
6. What is the first movie you saw together?
7. If player 1 could only eat one food for the rest of his/her life, what would it be?
8. How does player 2 like his/her eggs cooked?
9. Who would win at a game of Monopoly?
10. Who's the better driver?

## OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT?

Chances are pretty good that you didn't answer all of those questions the same... and that's okay! You may feel like you know your spouse really well, but when life gets busy and the two of you stop communicating as much, it's easy to also stop learning about each other. Pay attention to your spouse. Be their understudy. Think about how they're growing and changing as a person. Communicating regularly and asking questions often will guide you to ultimately grow closer together through every season of life.



### KNEE-TO-KNEE

Now turn, facing each other, and spend a few minutes answering these questions:

What's something you're really passionate about right now? (What makes your heart happy?)

What are some activities we could do together?

GIVE EACH OTHER A

*smooch*

AND LET'S KEEP THIS DATE  
NIGHT GOING!

THANKS FOR

*playing*  
ALONG!

We hope you enjoyed this at-home date night! Spending quality time with your love is always a good idea, and we're so glad you chose to do that today.

The next few pages have some tools you and your honey can use to strengthen the communication in your relationship.



## WHY DOES PLAY EVEN MATTER?

Sometimes, couples throw play out the window and replace it with serious adult responsibilities like careers, raising children, taking care of elderly parents, household chores, etc. The University of Denver's Center for Marital and Family Studies research finds that the amount of fun couples have together is the strongest factor in understanding overall marital happiness.

But the more you invest in fun, friendship, and being there for your partner, the happier the relationship will be over time. The correlation between fun and marital happiness is high and significant.

### TAKE THE CHALLENGE

For the next four weeks, intentionally set aside time every other day to do something fun together. It doesn't have to be something that will take hours; it could be a 30-minute activity. Watching television together or sitting next to each other while online does not count as play. In an informal survey, couples say they do these things:

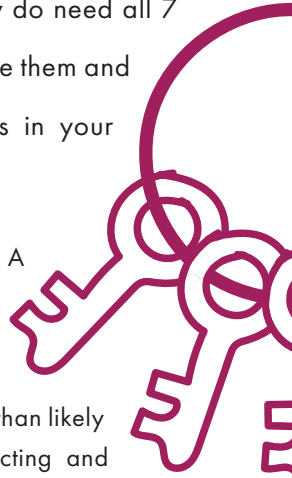
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Play games like Scrabble, Dominoes, Rook, Wii, Uno, Quiddler, Frisbee or Catchphrase. | Cook together, try new recipes and enjoy a great meal together. |
| Take a walk or run together.  | Work a jigsaw puzzle.   |
| Play a practical joke on each other.  | Do an activity together like running/fishing.                   |

Play isn't a luxury - it's a necessity. So don't just sit around reminiscing about how playful and adventurous you used to be or lamenting the fact that you never do anything fun anymore. Take the challenge and remember – playful people are a lot of fun to be around!

## 7 KEYS TO UNLOCK GREAT COMMUNICATION

Go ahead and pull out the janitor-sized key ring. You really do need all 7 keys to completely unlock communication. But, once you have them and use them a bit, you'll find they start to fill in some gaps in your marriage

- 1 Be intentional about spending time together talking.** A recent study revealed that the average couple spends only 20 minutes a week talking. Say what?? How is that even possible when you live with each other? Do you go to work, come home, eat dinner and binge watch a show? While you're more than likely sitting right next to each other, you're not actually connecting and talking. Research on what highly-happy couples do in their relationship shows that the happiest couples spend 20 to 30 minutes talking together a day.
- 2 Use more "I" statements and less "You" statements.** This decreases the chance of your spouse feeling like they need to defend themselves when you're having conversations or arguments. For example, if you're upset about the fact that they didn't call you to tell you there were running late, try not to say, "You're always late and you never call me and you don't care about me at all." Instead, try saying, "I'm upset that I didn't hear from you when you were running late. I worry about you, and it helps to hear from you so I know you're okay."
- 3 Be specific.** When issues arise, deal with them directly. Don't pull things up from the past or use broad statements like, "You do this ALL THE TIME." Try to note the exact moment and situation that's problematic. When you generalize issues, it actually makes them BIGGER and more daunting to handle. Plus, one issue is easier to dissect and correct than a hundred. So, if you want to reach a solution, focus on one problem at a time.
- 4 Avoid mind reading.** You may feel like you know your spouse better than anyone, maybe even better than they know themselves. HOWEVER, no one has the power to actually read other people's minds, except for Edward Cullen. But, even he couldn't read Bella's mind, and she was the person he loved more than anything in the world. High-five for the marriage insight, Stephanie Myers! So, just don't do it.



**5 Be cautious with how you express negative feelings.** There will be times when you feel bitterness, resentment, disappointment or disapproval, and you do need to be able to share these feelings.

BUT how you express these these thoughts is critical. "I am really disappointed that you are working late again tonight," is very different from, "You clearly do not care about me. If you did, you would not work late every night." Remember the power of your words. You can never "unsay" something to your spouse.

**6 Listen without being defensive.** For a marriage to succeed, you both have to be able to hear each other's complaints, worries and frustrations without being revved up to fight back. Although it's super tempting to fend for yourself when you feel like your spouse is taking something out of context or maybe even being (dare we say) a little overdramatic... being able to open up with each other about your feelings creates a safe space in your relationship.

Just remember, you're on the same team. Even when there's negativity between the two of you, the goal is for the team to win. So, listen to your spouse and think about what they're saying. Adjust and explain as needed.

**7 Freely express positive feelings and compliments.** We're ALL HUMAN. (Well, most of us are anyways.) It's much easier and more common for us to express negative feelings about each other than positive ones. For some reason, this becomes more and more true the longer you're married. That's why it's so important for the health of your marriage that you communicate affirmations to your spouse.

Things like showing appreciation, affection, respect, admiration, approval, and warmth allow you to make deposits into your spouse's love account. The goal is to have at least five positive deposits for every negative. If your compliments exceed your complaints, your spouse will naturally pay more attention to your grievances. If your complaints exceed your compliments, your criticisms will fall on deaf ears.



## 7 KEYS TO UNLOCK GREAT COMMUNICATION

First of all, ask yourself this question, “How do I know when my spouse is listening to me?” And secondly, “How does it make me feel to actually be heard?”

Most of us believe we’re good listeners, but in reality we live in a constant state of noise and chaos where it’s super difficult to focus, slow down and really listen.

### ONE THING IS FOR SURE:

You cannot listen well while you’re trying to do something else at the same time.

David Myers, the director of the Brain Cognition Lab at the University of Michigan, did tons of research that LOUDLY expressed how impossible it is for our brains to actually multitask. (And, yes. That includes you, multitasking queens.) The brain will act in parallel functions, meaning you can touch, hear and see at the same time, but when focusing on different tasks, the brain operates like a toggle switch - jumping from one thing to another. You cannot be looking at emails and listening to your spouse talk about their day at the same time. It’s literally impossible.

### SO, WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Here are three easy, awesome ways you can fine-tune your listening skills, strengthen your relationship, and form good communication habits.

## **1 BE PRESENT**

If you're in a place filled with distractions, move to a different room. If timing is bad and you just can't take your mind off of that big presentation you have to give tomorrow, say so and propose a different time to talk so you can give your full attention. Prioritizing your ability to listen and sharing your desire to listen well with your spouse will make them feel more heard before they even open their mouth.

## **2 ASK QUESTIONS AND ENGAGE VERBALLY**

While your spouse shares, show you're truly listening by asking clarifying questions, like, "What did you do after that?" or "Wow, that does sound hard." In heated conversation, this can also help you make sure you're tracking with the conversation and not making assumptions. Plus, it will fight the temptation you feel to start crafting your response instead of listening to the very end.

## **3 PAY ATTENTION TO BODY LANGUAGE**

Have you ever wanted to grab your partner's face and say, "Look at me when I'm talking to you!" Let's just be honest, it's so easy to tell when someone is "fake listening" by the look in their eyes. They may be looking at you and even nodding, but you know they're actually thinking about their response to you or what kind of dessert they want later... Don't be a fake listener to your spouse. (Or, anyone for that matter.) Solve this problem by turning toward your spouse when they're speaking and make eye contact with them. Maybe even hold their hand.

**REMEMBER** Good communication is less about your mouth and more about your ears. Listening is a skill that takes practice, time and energy, but it's an investment that is totally worth it in any relationship. Your spouse will know that what they say really matters when you listen to them well.



## THE COMMUNICATION KILLERS

Ever heard of Dr. John Gottman? He's been researching relationship habits and predicting the success of couples for years and years, and he's just plain amazing. With that praise in mind, hear this:

According to Gottman, the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" are 4 forms of communication that put married couples at high risk for divorce, especially when they're used on the regular.



**CRITICISM** is defined as blaming, fault finding, or using negative labels to attack your spouse's character. For example, "How would you know? You're never home," or "My problem with you is ..." A harsh startup to a conversation or argument often comes in the form of criticism.



**CONTEMPT** is a lack of respect for your partner's dignity, or an attitude of looking down on them as unworthy. Forms of contempt include name-calling, put-downs, sarcasm, cynicism, swearing at each other, rolling of the eyes, mockery or hostile humor. Contempt is demeaning and conveys not just disapproval of their behavior, but disgust with who they are. While the other three horsemen show up in small amounts in most relationships, contempt is typically found in relationships that have already grown a little toxic. This horseman also includes belligerence, which is an aggressive and angry provocation or threat.



**DEFENSIVENESS** is a way of turning back a perceived attack. Someone who is defensive denies their partner's statements, refuses to admit their role in problems,

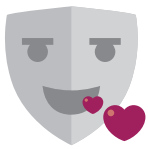
avoids responsibility for how they impact their partner or deflects complaints back onto the other person. Defensiveness is destructive because it escalates tension and creates an adversarial interaction.



**STONEWALLING** usually occurs as a result of escalating criticism, contempt and defensiveness as emotional overload becomes intense. Spouses who stonewall stubbornly refuse to give any verbal or nonverbal feedback that they are listening or attending to what their spouse is saying. Often they just get up and leave the room. It's like talking to a stone wall. Stonewalling is best seen as a containment strategy that spouses use to avoid further escalation of the conflict. The problem is that the stonewaller does not just avoid the fight, but avoids his spouse and the relationship as well. According to John Gottman's research, 85% of stonewallers are men.

### **SO, NOW THAT YOU KNOW THE POTENTIAL KILLERS...**

How do you stop them in their tracks? Here are the antidotes you need to stop those communication killers from doin' all the killin':



### **THE ANTIDOTE TO CRITICISM: GENTLE START-UP**

A complaint focuses on a specific behavior, but criticism attacks a person's very character. The antidote for criticism is to complain without blame by using a soft or gentle start-up. Avoid saying "you," which can indicate blame, and instead talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express what you need in a positive way. To put it simply, think of these two things to formulate your soft start-up: What do I feel? What do I need?

*Contempt:* "You always talk about yourself. Why are you always so selfish?"

*Antidote:* "I'm feeling left out of our talk tonight and I need to vent. Can we please talk about my day?"

Notice that the antidote starts with "I feel," leads into "I need," and then respectfully asks to fulfill that need. There's no blame or criticism, which prevents the discussion from escalating into an argument.



### **THE ANTIDOTE TO CONTEMPT: BUILD A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION AND RESPECT**

Contempt shows up in statements that come from a position of moral superiority. Some examples of contempt include sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humor. Contempt is destructive and defeating, and is the greatest predictor of divorce. The antidote is to build a culture of appreciation and respect in your relationship! By regularly expressing appreciation, gratitude, affection, and respect for your partner, you'll create a positive perspective in your relationship that acts as a buffer for negative feelings. The more positive you feel, the less likely that you'll feel or express contempt!



### **THE ANTIDOTE TO DEFENSIVENESS: TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

Defensiveness is self-protection (through anger or victimhood) in attempt to ward off a perceived attack. Many people become defensive when they are being criticized, but defensiveness never helps to solve the problem at hand. It's really just a way of blaming your partner. You're saying that the problem isn't me, it's you. As a result, the problem is not resolved

LET'S  
LAUGH, *Love*

and the conflict escalates further. The antidote is to accept responsibility, even if only for part of the conflict.

By taking responsibility for part of the conflict, even if they assert their opinion about the conflict, a partner can prevent it from escalating by admitting their role in the conflict. From here, this couple can work towards a compromise.



### **THE ANTIDOTE TO STONEWALLING:**

**PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING** Stonewalling is when someone completely withdraws from a conflict discussion and no longer responds to their partner. It usually happens when you're feeling flooded or emotionally overwhelmed, so your reaction is to shut down, stop talking, and disengage. And when couples stonewall, they're under a lot of emotional pressure, which increases heart rates, releases stress hormones into the bloodstream, and can even trigger a fight-or-flight response.

If you don't take a break, you'll find yourself either stonewalling and bottling up your emotions, or you'll end up exploding at your partner, or both, and neither will get you anywhere good.

It's important to take the full twenty minutes because it will take that long before your body physiologically calms down.

During this time, avoid thoughts of righteous indignation ("I don't have to take this anymore") and innocent victimhood ("Why is he always picking on me?"). Spend your time doing something soothing and distracting, like listening to music, reading, or exercising.



## WHAT YOU'RE SAYIN' WITH YOUR BODY

While talking and listening are important aspects of communication, they're just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, research shows that the majority of what we communicate is nonverbal. So no matter what words you are using, your actions really do speak louder than, and may even be more important than, your words.

Nonverbal communication can do many things: It can reinforce what is being said, or it can contradict what you are saying. It can reveal one's true emotional state. It can provide feedback to others. And, it can stop a conversation cold or cause a heated argument to boil over.

### REMEMBER

Posture, head motion, facial expression, eye contact and gestures ALL matter when we communicate.

Has anyone ever asked you if you're okay, but you're really not? You say you're fine, but you're totally not okay. You're saying one thing, but you mean another. An observant communicator will pick up on that and respond accordingly.

The thing is, even if you say one thing, body language can give strong clues as to whether your words are true. In fact, it has the power to add to, subtract or modify the meaning of your words. The nonverbal actions are more instinctive in nature, and are generally better indicators of what is really going on.

So, how can you be more conscious of the body language you are sending? And how can you read others' body language? Glad you asked.

Developing emotional awareness about ourselves and others can make us better communicators. An emotionally-aware person can read others more accurately. They can also create trust by using non-verbal signals to respond to others appropriately, in a way that shows understanding, care and concern.

## TIPS FOR READING BODY LANGUAGE

- Pay attention to whether words and actions match.
- Follow your instincts. That gut feeling you have could be because you're picking up on inconsistencies between verbal and nonverbal cues.
- What is their face showing? (Also be aware of what they're face is not showing, as if they're hiding something.)
- Is eye contact conveying interest or disinterest?
- Is their tone warm, confident and interested, or is it strained or deadpan?
- Is their posture stiff? Are their shoulders relaxed?
- If touch is involved, is it appropriate and comfortable or intimidating and hurtful?



### POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE

- Nodding
- Respecting personal space
- Smiling
- Friendly, regular eye contact
- Open posture
- Leaning in to understand



### NEGATIVE BODY LANGUAGE

- Head-shaking
- Violating personal space
- Minimal facial expression
- Avoiding eye contact
- Closed posture (folded arms)
- Fidgeting

ALL WE'RE

trying  
TO SAY IS...

Communication is a powerful thing, and how you express yourself each day to the one you promised forever to can give your relationship a boost... or slowly erode intimacy. Talking, listening and responding to your mate in a positive way takes tons of practice, and you're going to get it wrong plenty of times. You may even need help from a trusted counselor outside of your relationship to help you get it right, AND THAT'S OK.

***Just keep being open and honest, always. No matter what.***

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Lovers

