

## Listening Skills for Couples

Conversations are successful when both people feel heard. We often are waiting to react, defend, or blame rather than listen to **seek understanding and connection**. Listen for feelings. Here are the 3 main steps to practice for both people to feel heard & connected.

- **MIRRORING:** Summarize what you hear your partner saying and repeat it back to them. Also, give the person time to finish and check for accuracy (really give them time, count to 10 in your head before speaking). Forget any of *your reactions* at this moment. You are the receiver at this time.
- **VALIDATING:** To feel connected, you must let each other know that you “*get*” how your partner can feeling that way. *Even if you disagree*, you can still validate how *they* could feel that way. You are totally unique people with difference experiences and perceptions. (As relationship expert and researcher, Harville Hendrix, says... “You can be right, or you can be married.”)
- **EMPATHIZING:** Imagine how your partner must be *feeling and really put yourself in their shoes*. This is an important step. This is where you get to really understand each other’s needs. Now you can help each other out more in the future and try not to take things as personally. Empathy is key for authentic connection.

## SENDER

- **“I would like to discuss** (short description of the topic).  
**The purpose of the talk is** (state a goal – just to vent, brainstorm solutions, clarify something), **and I will need about** (say how long you may need – 5 min., 1 hour).  
**Would this be a good time for you or when would be a better time?”**
- **Send an “I-message” about your concerns, feelings, thoughts or needs.** (2–5 sentences.)
- Listen to the summary and give accuracy check.  
Resend if necessary.
- **Check the accuracy of the mirroring and resend, clarify, or modify any parts not clearly received.**  
**“Yes, you got it all. (or) You got most of that. I also said...”**
- Listen to and *receive the validation.*
- Listen to and *receive the empathy.*
- If RECEIVER did not get the feelings right or did not get **all** the feelings, share with RECEIVER again.  
**“I think I felt more... (or) Yes, and I also felt... “**

**Thank you for listening.**

(Now switch)

## RECEIVER

- “Yes, now would be fine. (or) I am so tired, could we do it at (a specific time today or tomorrow)?”

(keep the commitment agreed upon)

- Listen for the overall message and feelings. Try not to react, get defensive, or take it personally.
- Mirror. - “What I heard you say, was ...”, or “Let me see if I got all of that...” (Summarize what they said and be careful not to “spin” or give opinions. This is not the time to counter, correct or give your opinion. You can paraphrase, but using their words is most helpful).
- Mirror back if there was an addition or correction.
- Validate. - “That makes sense. I can see how... (or) I understand that you... given that...”
- Empathize. - “I imagine you might be feeling... (or) I see you might have felt...”
- Accuracy check. - “Is that what you are feeling?”
- Validate or Empathize again as needed.

“Thank you for sharing.”