

SPEAKER/LISTENER TECHNIQUE

Emotional safety is crucial if couples are going to develop intimacy. The speaker/listener technique provides structure to dialogue that makes it safe for couples to be open and share their inner most thoughts and feelings with one another. The technique ensures the flow of accurate communication in order to minimize misunderstandings and prevents couples from getting involved in power struggles and other weakening ways of communicating with each other.

Rules for the Speaker:

1. **Speak on one topic at a time.** Don't try to talk about more than one subject or cover too much ground.
2. **Speak for yourself.** Don't try to read the mind of your partner and talk about his or her intent. Instead talk about your own experience and side of the story. It helps to use non-blaming "I" messages rather than "you" messages.
3. **Stop after each point** to allow the listener to paraphrase. Stop often and allow the listener to paraphrase what you are sharing. If the paraphrase was not accurate then politely restate the part that was misunderstood.

Rules for the Listener:

1. **Focus on the speaker's message.** Put your own opinions and inner experience aside and really showing up to hear your partner's point of view. Don't offer your opinions until it is your turn to share.
2. **Paraphrase back what you hear.** Repeat the message back in your own words. This lets both you and your partner know you are tracking and understanding. Try to hear the feelings and meaning and not just the content.
3. **Ask clarifying questions** or for examples if something isn't clear. You don't want to ask too many questions or you will take over the conversation. But, it is okay to ask for clarification if you are unsure of what they mean. But, remember to paraphrase most of the time.

Rules for Both:

1. **The speaker has the floor** and is the only one who can share. It is helpful to use a real object to designate the floor. This can be anything at all. The listener does not get the floor, even when he or she is paraphrasing.
2. **Switch roles frequently.** One person should not dominate the dialogue. There needs to be balance in the roles.
3. **No problem-solving.** Remember that the purpose of the speaker-listener technique is to create emotional safety and ensure accurate understanding of one another rather than to solve a problem or make a decision. Most important is for each person to understand the point of view of the other with compassion and empathy.