

# Managing Tough Talks



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*Content on this side is intended for the educator's reference. The information on the back can be photocopied and shared with clients.*

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**Objective:** Clients will better understand effective ways to communicate – both how they speak and how they listen – during conflict.

**Audience:** This tool is applicable to all individuals who are in a relationship.

**Estimated Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Educator Instructions:** Review the instructions printed on the tool. Read through the top section on speaking clearly, and then have the client practice. It may be useful for the client to attempt this several times for different issues and areas of conflict. There are a variety of different communication techniques similar to the W.I.N. method (Speaker-Listener, I-messages, XYZ statements). While having different names, most approaches are similar in their aim to provide a structured format with emphasis on the person speaking for himself/herself, stating feelings, and assertively but respectfully stating what s/he would like to see changed. After completing the speaking portion, devote attention to listening carefully. You can emphasize that listening is equally as important as speaking when managing tough talks. Read through the bulleted items and then practice with the client. You could come up with a hypothetical conflict scenario and have him or her listen to you and then paraphrase back what was heard. If both partners are present, encourage both individuals to practice the speaking and listening steps.

**Discussion Starter:** In any relationship, couples have to deal with conflicts that arise. Talking through these issues can often be difficult, perhaps even feel impossible. Communication is a two-way street. Speaking clearly and listening carefully are both important. Communication in the midst of conflict can be very challenging. This page shares some basic tips on ways to talk to your partner when trying to address differences or problems. Also, there are some points on listening – being a good listener is just as important (and can be just as difficult) as being a good speaker. This type of speaking and listening should proceed very slowly, so it might feel a little awkward and unnatural. That is okay and expected. Slowing things down and talking more deliberately can help us get our point across without hurting our partner or our relationship. Let's give it a try!

**Follow-up:** In later conversations, ask if they have tried to apply any of the "Speaking Clearly" or "Listening Carefully" information. How difficult was it? What was the outcome? Has the client's partner tried to use this information?



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# Managing Tough Talks

It is not the absence of conflict that makes a relationship better — it is how we manage conflict that matters. Communicating during conflict can be very difficult. Though no one approach or method can be applied to every situation, certain skills and techniques can be helpful.

## Speak Clearly to be Understood

The “W.I.N. Formula” allows a person to more clearly address the real issue, state how s/he is affected by it, and express what s/he would like to change or improve.

<b>W</b>	<i>stands for WHEN...</i>	When you...	State the specific behavior you don't like
<b>I</b>	<i>stands for I...</i>	I feel...	Express your feeling or thought
<b>N</b>	<i>stands for NEED...</i>	I need/want...	Specify what it is that you want to change

### Example:

**When you** make jokes about me in front of your friends, **I feel** hurt and upset. **I would like** you to stop telling those jokes and would love to have you talk respectfully and build me up around your friends.

### Your turn:

When you... \_\_\_\_\_  
 I feel... \_\_\_\_\_  
 I would like... \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Listen Carefully to Understand

Listening carefully and well does not always come naturally to us. Listening takes work! Here are a few things to remember.

- Listen with full attention – Do not interrupt, disagree, or judge.
- Paraphrase what you hear – Start your response by making sure you heard the other person correctly. “So what I hear you saying is...”
- Seek to understand and ask questions if you do not understand – If you are confused or need clarification, politely ask for it.

Communication is a two-way street. It involves both speaking clearly and listening carefully to reach understanding. Following these steps can help you better manage conflict.

***Speaking clearly and listening carefully can help manage conflict in relationships.***