

Heart-Talk

Listening for Understanding

Important: This exercise is designed to create a safe, non-reactive opportunity to share, be understood, and learn about each other. If, at any time, either person feels a lack of safety, stop the exercise immediately, take a self-care break, and try the exercise again when both spouses feel calm and ready to try again.

Guidelines:

- Follow the Guidelines to have a successful experience. Not following the Guidelines can create a bigger sense of failure and a loss of hope.
- Set a time to do the exercise and decide, in advance, who the Speaker will be and who the Listener will be. Pray beforehand for a fulfilling time together.
- Do only one Heart-Talk per day, and make sure it is a positive experience.
- The Speaker should come to the exercise in a positive frame of mind.
- This is a 10-minute exercise – choose a time-keeper and agree to stop when the time is up. It is tempting to go longer, but overcome the urge to do so.
- In the first month of using these guidelines, choose only neutral topics to share about (no conflict or blame). After that, speak about whatever is on your heart. However, speak only about **your** thoughts, feelings, and desires – not about the listener. Use the word “I” instead of “YOU” when expressing yourself.
- The Listener shows up as a student who is there to learn about the Speaker.
- The Listener gives feedback intermittently (Example: “What I heard you say is that you think / you feel / you want / you need, you like, etc. Did I get that right?”) If necessary, the Speaker may repeat what was shared for clarity.
- The Listener does not otherwise comment on or question anything shared during the exercise but can ask questions for the purpose of clarification.
- When 10 minutes are up, enjoy what you have both accomplished.

Wrap up: At the end of 10 minutes, the **Listener** wraps up the exercise by:

- a. Asking: “Did I understand you well?”
- b. Stating, “Thanks for sharing all that with me. I want you to know that I do care about what you shared.”
- c. Offering the Speaker a hug and a kiss.

Note: After the exercise, do not continue the conversation. Let it be. The Listener can pray about what was learned and ask God for guidance going forward. The next day, change roles and allow the other spouse to be the Speaker.

Work Talk

Problem-Solving

Important: This exercise is helpful for solving everyday problems or working through marital issues. It involves a mutual exchange of ideas and prevents the conversation from becoming a debate. If at any time either person feels a lack of safety, take a self-care break and try again when both spouses feel calm.

Guidelines:

- Start with a brief Heart Talk where one spouse shares their thoughts and feelings regarding the problem he/she would like to see resolved. The listening spouse focuses solely on hearing, understanding, and caring about the request and then agrees to do a Work Talk.
- Before beginning, take a moment to pray silently or together about having a cooperative spirit and an openness to new ideas and options related to the problem to be solved.
- Agree to a Win/Win outcome where each spouse's ideas are valued.
- The spouse who brought up the issue to be resolved now leads the couple in a brainstorming session to discover as many options as possible to address the issue. Ask the question: "What are some really creative ways we might address this issue?" Be creative and even a little "crazy" to come up with options you've never considered before. If necessary, use outside resources to discover other options.
- Take turns presenting new options, and introduce each new option by stating, "WE could...". At all costs, avoid saying, "YOU could..."
- Don't settle for just two options. Expand your thinking by coming up with as many options as possible – 10 options would be a good goal.
- List all options on a piece of paper as they are presented, but **do not** evaluate the options before you have come up with at least 10.
- To evaluate your options, make a new list ranking them from least feasible to most feasible. Be cautious about offending your spouse in this process. Be humble, generous, and open-minded.
- Together, choose one option to try first. Keep the second and third options as back-ups in case the first one doesn't work for some reason.
- Put the first option into action and, if necessary, circle back to the second and third options. If you're still not satisfied, brainstorm again. This time, try having another person outside the relationship brainstorm with you. Keep at it until you're successful. You will love the results!