

TIPS FOR COUPLES

In general, this list of “tips” revolves around three goals:

1. To hold a positive attitude towards your partner and his/her intentions
2. To listen and really understand your partner's perspective and needs
3. To express your perspective and needs in a clear, respectful, and effective manner.

DO's

- **Slow conversation down when it starts to get heated: take “time out”.** This is a short break to calm down and come back a little later. IMPORTANT: when using time out be sure that the other person is clear you are coming back to deal with it.
- To really listen: put your own ideas aside and try to understand what the other person is trying to **say, ask questions to get information that will help you understand, reflect back what you've** heard them say without judgment or sarcasm, and switch roles when the speaker feels heard.
- Have regular time to discuss how things are going in your relationship and home, for example: weekly meetings to plan the week and decide who is doing what.
- **Have a family calendar and try to be organized: there's less stress and emotion if everyone knows what is coming up and there's less rushing around.**
- Have regular times to connect and have fun. Shows that the relationship is important and increased wellbeing.
- Be open to change. If something is repeatedly not working well, sit down and discuss it. Brainstorm other possibilities.
- **Use “I” statement: “I feel..... From my perspective.....”**- rather than blaming statements. Helps us own our own feelings and recognizes that our partner may see it differently, decreasing his/her need to defend him/herself.
- Be consistent in communication, for example: tone, body language, words. Your partner cannot read your mind and inconsistent communication is difficult to interpret.
- Find ways to take care of yourself. Recognize a partner cannot meet all of your needs.
- **Say thank you and I'm sorry on a regular basis. Notice, appreciate, and** recognize all the good things your partner does for you. We all make mistakes, own them and acknowledge them so the relationship is repaired.
- Try to recognize when more help is needed (therapy). Repeated, unresolved, and hurtful arguments can add up over time until repair is almost impossible.
- Compromise: find solutions and use coping strategies that can meet both of your needs.
- Without any prompting: do caring things for your partner, based on your growing understanding of his/her needs.



DONT's

- **Don't argue in front of children or extended family. This can affect children's sense of stability and stress level and in families creates animosity and side-taking.**
- **Don't threaten to leave ("I can't take it anymore", "I had enough", "if you don't care, I'll find someone who does", "let's get a divorce then"....). Threats to leave the relationship shut down opportunities for solving the problem because the foundation of commitment to work things out is shattered.**
- **Don't bring up past arguments, hurts, or faults during a current argument to "prove" you are right.** The past argument discussion diverts from the current issue and leaves it unsolved. Focus on the current issue and feelings. If there are unresolved past issues, discuss at another time, when you are both calm.
- **Don't speak for the other person, act like you can read their mind or know their intentions, and don't tell them how they feel. Let them tell you themselves.**
- **Don't call names, say hurtful things, accuse, judge, or do damage verbally or physically. These things cannot be taken back and leave emotional scars. Try to express deep emotion without hurting the other.**
- **Don't keep count: this leads to endless tallying** of who is ahead, who does what, and sets the stage for mistrust and a competitive environment. If there is a serious imbalance in the relationships, it does need to be resolved, but will be noticeable without counting.
- **Don't use sarcasm or hints. Speak** clearly and directly, using examples if necessary.
- **Don't interrupt! Try to listen until your partner is finished.**
- **Don't make your goal winning the argument. If one person wins, the relationship loses. Make the goal** resolving the issue in a way that takes care of both of you.
- **Don't compare your partner with "other better partners" or past lovers.**
- **Don't criticize your in-laws EVER!!!!!!..... Even if you are right!!!!!!**

Dr. Alicia Ordóñez, C. Psych. and Dr. Jo Ann Unger, C. Psych.