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## Communication and Conflict in your Marriage

Excerpts taken from [www.christinehammondcounseling.com](http://www.christinehammondcounseling.com)

### *A Different Way of Communicating*

Do you have the same conversation with your partner over and over? Can you recite their response even before you begin the conversation? This can be the beginning of no communication which can either lead to an unhappy relationship or divorce.

There is a better way. It can change. By listening, looking and repeating before responding to your partner, you allow them to feel heard. This in turn allows you to more fully understand their point of view. When you understand them, your response is different which translates to more understanding from your partner to your point of view and increased understanding before they respond. The cycle becomes a more positive type of ongoing communication.

**Listen.** When your partner is speaking, listen intently to them resisting the urge to rehearse in your mind a response. Listen for repeated words, phrases, or emotions; this will give you a clue as to what is really important to them. Voice inflection can also identify the real issue or at least the issue that your partner is most passionate about discussing. Ironically it is usually the last thing a person states that is the most significant, not the first. If you are spending your time thinking about your response to the first thing they said, you will miss the major issue of the discussion.

**Look.** Body language, the time of day, the location of the discussion, and the

emotions displayed all provide information as to the type of feedback your partner is hoping to receive. For instance, if your partner confronts you with their hands on their hips, with an angry face yelling, at the end of a long day while you are walking in the door, your partner is not interested in giving you a chance to have positive feedback. Instead they are more interested in getting the upper hand to most likely get their way about an issue. If instead your partner sets a time and place with you in advance for the discussion, greets you warmly with a pleasant smile, your partner is looking for a mutual agreement instead of the upper hand. Turn around is fair play, so if you want to be treated kindly by your partner about an issue, you should do the same for them.

**Repeat.** Before you respond, repeat what you have learned from listening and observing, not just the words they have said but the emotions they have expressed as well. Repeating what you have learned gives your partner the chance to correct any misunderstood information before you respond. If you respond before receiving clarification, then you may be responding to the wrong issue and make the situation even worse. Feeling loved is about knowing that your partner truly listens and understands you, so take the time to complete this step before moving on to the next one.

**Respond.** Only after you have listened, looked and repeated what your partner has expressed should you respond to what they are saying. Resist the urge to cram everything you have been thinking into a short time period. Instead, select one issue and respond to it allowing time for your partner to respond to your comments. Resolving one issue at a time actually saves time rather than downloading a bunch of things all at once which can be overwhelming to your partner. Once an issue is resolved, take a break rather than moving on to the next topic, this allows both of you to absorb the conversation and reflect on what was discussed.

Communication is difficult and the process to improving your communication is often learned. Not everyone communicates the same way so understanding your partner's personality is an important element. But if you use the listen, look, repeat, and respond method, it will go a long way to helping increase positive communication.



## How to Fight Fair and Win

Have you ever had a fight with your computer? Everything is going fine one minute and the next thing you know the computer begins to act up. It starts with one program and then leads to another. You fight back by shutting down the dysfunctional program and trying to control or anticipate the next problem. It retaliates back by doing something new and unexpected and before you realize what is happening you are doing battle with an inanimate object and sadly it is winning.

If fighting with an inanimate object is frustrating, try fighting with a human. You begin on one topic and before you know it you are on another topic that has nothing to do with the original topic and you can't even remember why you were fighting in the first place. Talk about unpredictable and frustrating. However, it does not have to be this way. There is a better way to fight if you think of it in terms of how you handle your computer properly.

**Pay attention to the problem at hand.** Just because your computer is acting up does not mean that the entire computer is bad or that it must be replaced. It just means that something is not working and it needs your attention. Just as you look for the underlying issue with your computer troubles, so you should look for the underlying issue at the root of your fight. If the underlying issue is fear, then address the fear; if the underlying issue is guilt or shame, then address the guilt or shame. Focus your efforts on the one area that is not working instead of all of the other areas, just as you would focus on your computer problem and not your office problem, your relationship problem, your car problem, and any other problem that you may have.

**Patience, patience, patience.** Banging on your computer or pressing multiple buttons at one time when your computer is acting up will not solve your issue but it will most likely add to your troubles. When fighting, be patient with yourself and the other person just as you would be patient with your computer. Getting angry at the computer for acting up will not stop it from acting up and getting angry with the person you are fighting with will not minimize the tension but add to it. Just as having an "I'm in charge" attitude with your computer is unproductive so is having an "I'm in charge" attitude with the other person unproductive. Even if they are in a subordinate role, forcing someone to comply will only aggravate the problem.

**Press the restart button.** When all else fails, press the restart button on your fighting just as you would on your computer. Instead of continuing to fight, choose to walk away and come back to the issue later when emotions have calmed down. The key is to come back later to the issue;

walking away and not addressing the issue is as unproductive as never turning on your computer again just because it did not work that one time. It is even more important to come back to the person with an attitude of working out the issue and not with an attitude of "I'm right and you are wrong". If you went to your computer and said, "I'm right and you are wrong" do you think it would respond better? No. So if you treat an inanimate object with respect, how much more respect should you treat another human being.

You have a winning relationship with your computer when you learn to address the problems and not ignore the warning signs that something is wrong. Your relationships are similar when you take the focus off of yourself and focus instead on meeting the needs of the other person. Winning a fight is not about getting your way, it is about coming to a realization that we are all in this process of life together.



## Ranting and Raving

The other day a female client told me about her husband's ranting and raving over what seemed like nothing and then again it was something. His work was demanding more and more, he did not like his boss or the people he worked with, the house needed some repairs, his health was deteriorating, he got a stomach ache from his last meal, the dog wanted too much attention, and several other large and small complaints. His ranting and raving lasted well over several hours and resolved absolutely nothing. At the end, she was exhausted, frustrated, hurt and desperately wanted to help him but had no idea where to begin.

Sound familiar? Their ranting and raving does not seem to resolve anything in the moment and by the time it ends they feel better and you feel worse. It is as if they unloaded their garbage onto you but you did not get a chance to unload and if you do try to unload during their ranting and raving, you have just added about an extra hour onto the discussion. The rants and raves are not once a year incidents, rather they are almost monthly and if they don't do a little ranting and raving, the next one is likely to be twice as long.

For some people they type of relationship is likely to cause them to run away, they would rather not invest the time and energy into such a relationship. But for others, the benefits of the relationship far out way the monthly rants and raves, so they decide that the relationship adds more value to their life than it subtracts and they stay. This is the case for my client; she truly loves her husband, is committed to the relationship and wants to help but is unsure how.

**It's not your responsibility.** Their rants and raves are their responsibility not yours. This is extremely difficult to remember in the moment as the ranter and raver is likely to blame you for some if not all of the problem. Once you look back over the course of your relationship, you will realize

that even if you did change something that was not enough to stop their ranting and raving. It almost seems as if they have an insatiable appetite for ranting and raving and if it is not this than it is that. Their reaction is their responsibility; your reaction is your responsibility.

**Change your expectations.** During the ranting and raving you try to help the situation by offering advice, compassion or accepting responsibility for your mistakes, yet none of their efforts seem to reduce the ranting and raving. In fact, they seem to bring about even more and different



ranting and raving. If you want to offer encouragement, do. Just don't expect a return on your investment. Decreasing your expectations is not giving up rather it is recognizing that you are not in charge of their ranting and raving, they are.

**Look for the nugget of truth.** Ranters and ravers are not mindless people without intelligent thought rather they are people who have been pushed to their limit and they usually do have a valid point. The key is to find the nugget of truth in their ranting and raving and focus on that. For instance, they may be upset about your financial situation and declare that overspending on everything needs to stop. Well, if you are overspending on something, maybe it is the groceries, then work on modifying that behavior. Don't try to change everything all at once because it just does not work. Instead focus on changing one behavior at a time. Find one nugget and work on changing it.

Leave the other nuggets for another day.

**Try praying.** Ok, this is tricky because the type of prayer is extremely important. More than likely, after the ranting and raving is over, you are in pain and feel a heavy burden. So don't pray that the person ranting and raving will hurt like you or that God will take revenge on them. Rather pray to release the negative energy onto God so that you won't release the negative energy on someone else. Ranting and raving is like an infectious disease that can affect an entire community. Decide to end the cycle, pray, release, let go and if needed forgive the other person for hurting you. This will do far more good and will prevent the disease from spreading.

**Get busy.** When someone rants and raves the temptation is to replay the ranting and raving over and over in your head. We try to see where we went wrong, what we could have said instead to make a difference or how we could have stopped the cycle. This is a waste of valuable energy, instead, get busy doing what you need to do and put all thoughts of the incident out of your head. At first this discipline is difficult but with practice it becomes easier. You are what you think and if you continue to replay the negative thoughts, you will be negative in turn. You can choose to do something different and getting busy is more productive than stewing.

Ranter and ravers are not without their responsibility in the problem but you cannot fix them, they need to choose to fix themselves. Rather you can choose to do different behaviors, to think different thoughts, to absorb different emotions, after all you actually have more choice in the situation than the other person. Your positive reactions over time will make a difference in your life and hopefully the other person will want the same change in their life. Then and only then do you have the potential for a lasting solution.

# *The Power of Unforgiveness*

Take a moment and imagine the highs and lows of your life right now, what images or people would pop into your head? More than likely there are high moments with people and places of great excitement, joy, and love. More than likely there are also low moments that are still causing you some residual anxiety, stress or anger. One of the reasons those low moments leave residual emotional scars is because of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness of past events or people can be powerful and destructive even to your current relationships.

**Quick to anger.** if you find yourself quick to get angry over little issues, taking too many things personally, or to blowing things out of proportion to their significance, more than likely you are harboring unforgiveness. Anger is a powerful emotion that often has its roots in past rather than current events. Our unresolved past events especially those events that were traumatic in nature creep into our current anger outbursts.

**Biting sarcasm.** If you find yourself using biting sarcasm which is sarcasm that takes a dig at another person and find them not laughing or nervously laughing, more than likely you are harboring unforgiveness. Biting sarcasm is anger's close cousin and it is an effort to mask true feelings of anger and resentment. Perhaps quicker than an angry outburst, biting sarcasm can destroy a relationship because it is a back-handed attack.

**Malicious gossip.** If you find yourself needing to talk to several people about the same issue or person over

and over to get just one more perspective, more than likely you are harboring unforgiveness. Gossip is talking about someone behind their back. Some even go to the lengths to justify their gossip by saying they were just trying to inform or protect someone else. This is still gossip and your present relationships go on guard each time you talk about someone else behind their back.

**Dreaming of revenge.** If you find yourself daydreaming of getting back at someone or seeking out ways to outdo someone else to prove you are better, more than likely you are harboring unforgiveness. Revenge comes in many forms and it does not always have to be physically harmful to another person. Just wanting a person to get what they deserve, lose a relationship, have financial hardships, or feel pain is vengeful thinking. Your present relationships will then be in fear of retribution rather than feel your love.

Unforgiveness is powerful in that it gives you the false sense that you are in control. By harboring the negative feelings, a person can feel like they are in charge. But sadly, the person or event that caused the unforgiveness is really in control and in charge as you are merely reacting to the person or event. Take charge of your own life and don't allow someone else or something else to control what you are doing or how you are reacting. Better yet, turn your life and your unforgiveness over to God and allow Him to take care of the person or situation.

Christine is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor for Life-Works Group in Winter Park specializing in working with marriages, families and play therapy. For over fifteen years she has worked as a counselor, mentor and teacher of just about every age from preschool through adults, teaching women's issues, high school Psychology, Bible classes, pre-marriage classes and general age level studies. She loves to learn, grow, counsel, speak, write, teach and experience the blessings of watching others do the same.

She has her own blog **Christine Hammond, LMHC** at [www.christinehammondcounseling.com](http://www.christinehammondcounseling.com) which contains over a hundred articles on relationships, marriage, family, parenting, career counseling, addictions, ADD/ADHD, anxiety, guilt, stress, trauma, depression, and many more. It is her prayer that you are able to find hope, healing, nurturing, and restoration for all of the many relationships in your life.

