



*By Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott - June 29, 2022*

It's frustrating to hear that your spouse feels unheard or misunderstood, especially if you're doing your best from one day to the next. However, it's possible for effective communication to break down before either of you realizes what has happened. The good news is, it's possible to repair these issues and restore intimacy. Here are some things you can do to help them know that you're listening.

### **1. MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO LISTEN ACTIVELY**

Listening well is challenging when we're feeling defensive or offended. It hurts when your spouse says, "*You never listen!*" We miss the point of the conflict entirely when we defend ourselves. If your spouse has complained about feeling unheard more than once, there may be several reasons why. Rather than immediately going on the defensive, you need to uncover **why** your spouse is feeling that way. Then, you'll need to learn what you can do to reassure them that you're listening.

### **2. USE BODY LANGUAGE TO INDICATE YOU'RE LISTENING**

Your body language can tell your spouse a lot about whether you're listening to them. What you're doing with your body during a conversation—like posturing or lack of eye contact—can reveal where your attention is going. Pay attention to your body language next time you and your spouse engage in a serious conversation to see what your tendencies might be.

Here are some tips for better listening through body language:

- When possible, face each other and make eye contact
- Make physical contact when appropriate, such as holding hands
- Turn off the TV, put your phone away, and set aside what you're doing.

### **3. REFLECT YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS**

Reflecting your understanding of your spouse's message can help you demonstrate that you're following them. Repeat what you understand, then let them clarify where needed. Afterward, if you have clarifying questions, ask them. Let your spouse know you want to understand their position. When you ask questions, that tells your spouse that you're here for them and you're interested in what they have to say.

### **4. DON'T RUSH YOUR SPOUSE THROUGH A CONVERSATION**

If you want your spouse to feel heard, don't rush them through a conversation. Avoid completing their sentences, urging them to "spit it out," or pushing them to hurry up. When you rush your spouse, that tells them you'd rather be doing something other than listening to them. Give your communication plenty of breathing room and you'll start seeing more positive change.

### **5. BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELVES**

If you have a long history of misunderstanding or pain in your relationship, then your spouse may ask to see *lasting* change before the trust between you is restored. You might not be anticipating how long it could take to rectify the situation. But making incremental changes and consistent efforts over time will go a long way.

Be prepared and exercise patience and empathy, both with yourself and your spouse, as you heal this part of your relationship.