

Introduction to Biblical Counseling

What are Ten Fair Communication Rules?

Introduction

A. Every relationship on planet earth exists because of words whether good or bad, spoken or unspoken.

1. Words that were spoken:
 - a. Good words: praise, affirmation, encouragement, support, positive.
 - b. Bad words: criticism, demeaning, shaming, put-downs, yelling, cursing.
2. Words that were not spoken:
 - a. "I love you," "You're special," "I'm proud of you," "You did a great job," "I'm glad you're my wife (son, husband, daughter, friend)," "You are a gift to me (us)," "I'm grateful for you."

B. God bases our relationship with Him on words.

1. Jesus is even called, "The Word,"
 - a. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."
 - b. John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."
2. Our faith in God comes by hearing the Word of God.
 - a. Rom. 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

C. One of the first issues addressed in the New Testament as recorded in the first book written down by James, dealt with communication.

1. James 1:19
2. James 3:1-12

D. Communication is the number one counseling issue, bar none.

E. Most relational conflicts have, as one of the central issues, an inability to communicate.

1. You will hear the frustration in statements like:
 - a. "We just can't talk."
 - b. "There is no talking to him."
 - c. "We just get in a big fight."
 - d. "He just walks away."
 - e. "We can't have a civil conversation."
 - f. "She just gets angry."

F. Every relationship is bound to have conflicts which may include arguments. // this includes churches, schools, business and families – sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law.

1. Dr. John Friel, Ph.D. states, "That all couples (including friends) who never fight are in trouble just like couples who fight destructively all the time. (Why?) Because we are human beings with different needs and wants and values and tastes and beliefs, conflict and therefore fighting will occur. In truth, there are no couples who don't fight. Some couples just do it so covertly and craftily that we can't see it and they aren't aware of it. If you put any two people together for any reasonable length of time, conflict will arise..." (A.C. Guide, p. 169)
2. There is no such thing as a compatible couple.
 - a. Relational studies indicate that happy or unhappy couples have a similar number of irreconcilable differences. They argue about the same thing (money, household chores, work obligations, kids, priorities, vacations).
 - 1) Unfortunately, 69% of issues are never resolved. Dr. John Gottman
3. Verbal conflicts can have a positive benefit which would include understanding each other better, revealing needs and bringing God's presence and biblical tools into the conflict.

G. Most surveys on marital problems list communication as the "most common problem."

What roadblocks to communication have you observed?
 How do you think those communication obstacles were developed?
 How have you personally been affected by poor communication?

H. There are many individual differences that contribute to frustration in communication.

1. There are gender differences.

- a. Men tend to emphasize logic and women tend to express themselves in *feeling* words.
 - b. Neither form of communication is wrong. The task is to understand each other's way of communicating and make allowance for both styles.
2. There are personality differences.
- a. One person can be outgoing and may be skilled with the use of his words. The other person may be less outgoing and have difficulty expressing himself verbally.
 - b. Every child communicates differently even if they have the same birth parents.
3. There are cultural differences.
- a. Italians may communicate in a strong volume with emotion compared to an Asian person who may speak in soft tones with emotional control.
 - b. North Americans may speak more directly while Latin people may speak more indirectly.
 - c. Germans tend to be frank to a fault (critical) while another culture would be more diplomatic and tactful.
 - d. None of these are necessarily wrong ways to communicate, but in each culture, it is a normal way of communicating.
 - e. Couples who marry a spouse from a different culture, usually fail to understand they are marrying a culture, not just a person. Failure to understand the communication styles of each culture may result in marital conflict.
4. There are birth family differences within the same culture.
- a. One person was able to share anything with anyone in their birth family while the other was more private and emotions were not expressed.
 - b. One may have come from a very dysfunctional home that is characterized by three things: Don't talk (keep secrets), don't trust (you'll only get hurt), don't feel (emotions are not acceptable).
5. There are life experience differences that contribute to communication conflicts.
- a. One may have experienced abuse and rejection and carry a lot of emotional baggage while another may have experienced warmth and acceptance in their family.

- b. Whatever you experienced growing up, you will tend to think it is normal and you might reproduce it in your present relationships, though it may be hurtful to another.

Ask the group to go down this list and describe what communication problems could exist in each of these categories.

I. (Regardless of the varying differences) Every relationship must establish and agree upon fair communication rules in order to communicate well. // This is in spite of what the differences are and what condition the relationship is in.

- 1. Warning: Negative styles of talking and arguing based on ineffective communication rules must be corrected if the relationship is going to flourish in a healthy way.

Ask the group what communication rules or guidelines they have established with any relationship (spouse, kids, parents, in-laws). How did they develop them? How would they evaluate their effectiveness? What changes would you make if you could?

J. It is important that you establish mutually accepted communication rules with the parties involved in the conflict before you begin the resolution process. // In marriage, this should be decided before marriage. It is a must for premarital counseling. Either way these rules must be decided on before you process an issue.

- 1. All games have rules and the players agree on those rules before they play unless they all agree to do whatever they wish.
 - a. II Timothy 2:5 “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”
- 2. One cannot just make up rules in the middle of a game or relationship to suit his own purposes if it is going to be mutually satisfying. In marriage these “rules” should be added to their wedding vows.
 - a. That’s the reason all games come with printed rules that must be decided upon by all players before the game starts.
 - 1) God has given you many positive communication rules in scripture that can bring more enjoyment to the relationship if they are followed.
 - b. The quality (enjoyment) of the game of life is in direct relationship to all the players playing by the rules.

- 1) Philippians 2:2 “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”
- c. Young children like to change the rules in the middle of a game. Adults sometimes attempt to do the same thing, especially when they are angry or believe they are losing an argument.

Ask the group what firsthand experience they have had when there were or were not mutually agreed upon conversational rules. What was the outcome of either type of discussion or argument?

3. Agreeing on the rules now and making any necessary changes before you play (communicate) will guarantee success later and improve the quality of life in Christ in your family.
 - a. Failure to agree on the communication rules will lead to further conflict, hurts, distancing and withdrawal.
 - b. King Solomon stated in Prov. 14:12, “There is a way (to communicate) which seems right to a man, but the end (result of that form of communication) is the way of death” (more distancing and withdrawal).
 - c. Prov. 12:15a, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes...”
 - 1) He believes he is entitled to talk, argue or debate any way he wants.
4. (But) If you continue to communicate in the way you always have, you’re going to get the same result you have always gotten. (Remember) Communicating in the same negative way over and over again expecting different results is the definition of insanity // or is very dysfunctional.
 - a. Most couples who are at a point of divorce are usually deeply involved in highly repetitive and dysfunctional patterns of communication (arguing).
 - b. Dr. Howard Markman states, “It is not the fact that couples argue that ruins a marriage but it is how they argue that determines if the future is bleak or bright. He and his colleagues can watch how a couple argues and can predict in 15 minutes with 90% accuracy who will or will not be together in five years.
 - 1) Four characteristics of a troublesome future are: 1) blame shifting, 2) pattern of escalation, 3) invalidations (name calling) or 4) withdrawing (avoidance).
 - 2) Four characteristics of a bright future: take personal responsibility for what is yours, 2) Control emotions and not raise your voice, 3) maintain mutual respect and no disgust or demeaning the other

person, 4) stay engaged in the discussion and not withdraw physically or emotionally.

5. Church business meetings would go much smoother if they adopted the following communication rules. This is one way to demonstrate they are of one mind in Christ (Phil. 4:1).

K. Building relational harmony must start with your conscious decision to “choose” to communicate differently than you have in the past. Happiness is a choice!

1. Rom. 12:18 “If possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”
 - a. “Depends on you” or depends if you choose to play by the agreed upon communication rules even if others don’t.
2. Changing a few communication patterns can make a huge difference in your relationship.

L. Believers on all continents have the same problems in communication as the unbelievers have. // What is the difference?

1. Believers have the communication tools, the power to use the tools, the training to use the tools with experience, the support while using the tools (Christian friends, church) and receive a reward from God for using the biblical tools (II Cor. 5:10).

M. What are 10 basic communication rules (tools) that can get you talking in a healthy positive way?

1. Prepare to add your own rules that reflect the Scriptures in principle or precept.
2. This is not an exhaustive list.

Fair Communication Rules

- I. **Stop interrupting, talking over each other or cutting each other off but start concentrating on listening and understanding what is actually being said. // (Why?)**

A. Talking is not listening.

1. Talking over someone is an indication that little or no effort is being made to understand them. Instead it may be a desire to win an argument, to defend yourself, to control the conversation or to punish in anger.
2. In one of the earliest books written in the New Testament, one of the very first issues addressed was communication.
 - a. James 1:19 Let every man be swift to hear (and understand), slow to speak...
 - 1) Swift = quick, speedy, accelerate your listening efforts. Concentrate on understanding what is being said.
 - 2) The first quick step of good communication is to become a good listener with the goal of understanding; getting the facts, seeking to learn, maintaining an open mind, trying to understand the other person's feelings or point of view.
3. True, most of us can listen faster than people talk. That is because God wants us to put some mental energy into understanding what is being said. But when it's your turn to listen, really listen. This demonstrates to others you value and accept them.
 - a. Simple rule: One talks, one listens.
 - b. American Indians while speaking to each other in a group would have the one speaking hold a stick. When it was another's turn to speak, the first speaker would pass the stick to the next person. It is God's goal to get the "talking stick" out of your hand as fast as possible. Be quick to listen (pass the stick) and slow to speak (hold the stick) (James 1:19).
4. Waiting for a person to complete his thought takes a great deal of patience and self-control and definitely demonstrates respect and honor for others.
 - a. Rom. 12:10, ("Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love), in honor giving preference to one another."
5. Both patience and self-control are the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23). If one is filled (controlled) by the Holy Spirit both of these qualities will be evident in the communication. Impatience and impulsive talking is indicative the selfish flesh is in control. The results of the flesh being in control is the destruction of relationships (Gal. 5:19-21).
6. Jumping to a conclusion is the most dangerous jump you can make in relationships. Stop making quick assumptions.
 - a. Prov. 29:20, "Do you see a person that is hasty (quick) in their words? There is more hope for a fool (getting it right) than for them."

7. The number one complaint in communication related conflict is that others do not pay attention.

Ask the group how they have felt when they were interrupted in the middle of a thought. How did they feel as the conversation concluded?
 How did you feel as a child when your parent did this to you?
 How do you think your child feels when you do this to him? Do children have the right to talk appropriately with their parents without being cut off or interrupted?

B. Tolerating is not listening.

1. Failing to appropriately respond to a reasonable attempt to talk is the opposite extreme of interrupting. It is passive disgust coupled with an effort to control or to punish.
 - a. Giving an appropriate nod from time to time will communicate you are listening and making an effort to understand.
 - b. Focus on looking at the speaker.
2. Tolerating (stonewalling, shutting down, withdrawing) is one of the four guaranteed ingredients that can predict the end of the marriage or relationship. The other three are criticism, contempt and defensiveness.

What would someone look like or act like who is merely tolerating but not listening?

3. Pay attention to their words, body language, expressions and tone of voice.
 - a. This will allow you to validate the person's perspective and feelings.
 - b. Words are only 7% of communication.
4. Listening takes concentration.
 - a. Listening gives you the opportunity to learn.

C. Preparing a defense (answer) is not listening (That's warfare).

1. Don't think about what you are going to say before you have listened and understood and clarify (mirror back) by what you believe you heard. // This is hard!
 - a. If you need a moment to think about what is being said, then state, "I'll have to think about that for a minute."

- b. Prov. 18:13, “A person (parent, spouse) who answers a matter before listening (and understanding), it is a folly (or foolish) and a source of shame to them.” // It is foolish and shameful.
- 2. Defenders tend to lose because they are not good listeners and they are focusing on their defense and not on listening to understand.

Why would defenders be losers?

- a. Points are rarely scored by defenders in sports.
- 3. Usually, the only thing that is being defended is our pride, worth or value and a childlike need to win or control.

What's the difference between a defense and an honest explanation?

- 4. If an explanation would be helpful for the other person's understanding, offer to explain either now or at a later time what was behind your action or decision. Let them choose when they are ready to hear your explanation. Usually the offended one's mind is not open to listen to your explanation right now.

D. Healthy people listen to understand. Unhealthy people interrupt in order to control or to gain more advantage because of fear and selfishness.

- 1. The Hebrew word for “understand” is “hearing.” Listen to King Solomon's prayers as he begins his reign.
 - a. I Kings 3:9 “Therefore give your servant (Solomon) an understanding (lit., hearing) heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?”

E. Choose to avoid lectures, monologues, forced late night argument marathons. // These are forms of control and a form of verbal abuse.

F. Learn to talk with others not at others.

- 1. Talking at others is narcissistic and self-centered because we really do not care about their opinion and are not being sensitive to our listeners' feelings.

G. Focus on making each sentence short, simple, clear and direct. Speak calmly, clearly and confidently.

H. The things that distract you from listening to others include a focus on your own point, other distracting thoughts, deciding that you already know what the other person is going to say and twisting the other's conversation to fit your own expectations. (Mason, p. 131)

I. Ways to indicate you are listening are, being silent, pausing before speaking, making eye contact, physically turning toward the person, uncrossing your arms and nodding when appropriate. (Mason, p. 131)

1. Turn off the TV, put down the cell phone, put down the newspaper, turn away from the computer monitor and stop texting.

II. Stop calling each other negative names that tear down the worth and value of a person. Start focusing on using words that reflect mutual respect, value and love (Rom. 12:10).

A. Communicate the worth or value you put on each person.

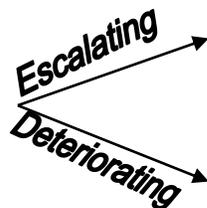
1. Honor the person although you may disagree with their opinion. You are talking to someone who is very valuable in God's sight.
2. Honor is an attitude of the heart, not an agreement with others' opinions (I Peter 3:7; Rom 12:10; 13:7).

Reflect back on your life and share any hurtful names you were called. What were those names? (You might ask them to clean them up a little.) How did those names impact your life?

B. Calling each other negative names is an obvious sign that the topic or issue at hand has been abandoned and an argument is escalating while the relationship is deteriorating.

1. Escalating in an argument (usually in anger) begins the de-escalation of the relationship.

a.



- b. This is where they come for counseling because it is very hard to rebound.
2. At this point the one or ones who are escalating the argument have given themselves over to Satan and he will then begin to do Satan's destructive work for him.

- a. Prov. 12:18a, “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword...” to cut someone down.”
 - b. Ephesians 4:26, 27, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath. 27) nor give place to the devil.”
 - c. Proverbs 15:18, “A wrathful man stirs up strife, But *he who is* slow to anger allays contention.
3. Remember Satan’s goal is to kill, steal, destroy (John 10:10).

C. Name calling is a defensive tactic designed to avoid facing the current issue and bring that issue to closure. // It is a distraction from the real issue. The issue is really not the issue now.

D. Calling each other names is usually done when one has a weak position or feels he is losing in the discussion or is angry and wants to inflict emotional pain.

E. God’s Word is very clear about the sin of calling each other negative names.

- 1. Apostle Paul firmly stated, “Let no corrupt (unwholesome) word proceed out of your mouth” ((Eph 4:29, NKJV). This includes calling each other degrading names.
 - a. “Corrupt” rotten, i.e. rotten fish (Matt. 13:48) or fruit (Matt. 7:17, 18)
 - b. Corrupt words issue forth from a corrupt heart. They’re bad for your breath.
 - 1) Luke 6:45, “A good man out the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
 - 2) Note: Luke goes to the source of evil treasure, the heart, not the behavior. Changing the behavior and not the heart will result in the behavior returning again later.
- 2. Apostle Peter clearly stated (I Pet. 3:9) Do not return insult for insult or evil for evil.
 - a. If this principle was kept most all arguments (not discussions) would cease.
- 3. Jesus stated, (Matt. 5:22b) “Whoever says to his brother (spouse) ‘empty headed’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says ‘you fool’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (a burning trash dump).

F. There are three phases of an argument.

1. Often an argument will start with an issue that never gets resolved.
2. It will then degenerate to picking on each other, issue hopping, name calling or bringing up past history in order to hurt the other person.
3. If this argument escalates, it will cause one to start questioning the relationship (separation and divorce). Once you start questioning the relationship, insecurity steps in.

G. Name calling can be a selfish attempt to control another by shaming them. // It is an attempt to add unjustified shame.

1. Jesus died not only to take away our sin, but also to take away our shame. Therefore, we should not add to others what God has taken away.
 - a. Heb. 12:2 “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
2. Shame attacks who you are (i.e. “You dummy”), guilt attacks your actions (i.e. “That was a dumb decision”).
3. Remember, the need to control, especially by shaming, is motivated by fear and pride, not by faith and humility.
 - a. We may want to control others out of our own fears or just our own selfishness.
 - b. Control of others is never based on faith; it is based on fear and selfishness.
 - c. Mature love removes fear (I John 4:18), but fear removes love or makes the person feel unloved.
 - d. Children who have controlling parents do not report feeling deeply loved by their parents. They grow up with a lot of anger.

H. Realize name calling is a form of verbal cannibalism.

1. Gal. 5:15 “But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”
 - a. Devouring one another in verse 15 is in contrast to loving one another in verse 14.
 - 1) 5:14 “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
 - b. Verbal cannibalism explains why relationships can be ugly.

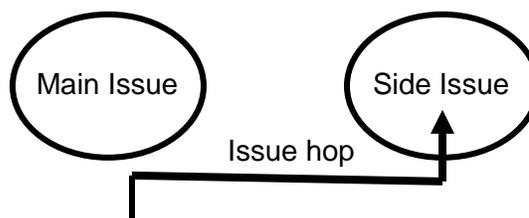
- c. Literal cannibalism was done with the belief that if they ate their enemy, they were able to get their enemy's power. It goes back to a power struggle for power and control.
2. When you view the other person as an enemy, you will try to crush them. Now Satan can fold his arms and walk away because now friends or mates turned enemies will hurt and destroy each other. They will do Satan's dirty work for him (adapted, DNA, p. 155).
 - a. James 3:6 "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell". (NKJ)
 3. Choose to stop yelling, swearing, using sarcasm or calling each other negative names.
 - a. This includes negatively labeling each other's behavior, suggestions or ideas.
 - 1) "You're crazy."
 - 2) "That's stupid."
- I. Name calling is the opposite of edification which is the process of building each other up a word at a time.**
1. Eph. 4:29, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."
 - a. "Edification" literally means to build up a person one brick (or word) at a time.
 - b. 
 2. Prov. 16:24, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones."
 3. Prov. 15:23, "A word spoken in season, how good it is."
 4. Hebrews 3:13 "But exhort one another daily while it is called 'today' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."
 5. Our choice is to be a builder or destroyer with our words.

J. Long arguments, name calling, and other hurtful words will result in questioning whether you want to stay in the marriage or relationship.

III. Stop skipping around from one issue to another. Instead, focus on one issue at a time. // This includes avoiding the use of the history channel (“Do you remember when...”) and blame shifting (“Look who is talking”).

A. Issue hopping is an effort designed to avoid staying focused on the issue at hand, // usually out of feeling guilty or the fear of losing an argument or the desire for revenge.

1. Drawing:



2. ill.: Often couples cannot remember what started the argument because they immediately started issue hopping from the original issue to something else forgetting what started the argument.

3. Couples requesting counseling will report they have 20-30 years of unresolved issues as a result of issue hopping and failing to bring any issue to a satisfying settlement.

B. (Instead) Make an effort to verbally acknowledge the other person's position and stay focused on it to completion. // How?

1. Many long arguments are attempts to get the other person just to acknowledge their position, not necessarily to get the other person to change his position.

2. (Remember) Acknowledgment of the other person's position or their reality does not necessarily mean agreement but it communicates you have at least heard their perspective. // Understanding a person helps to better communicate and relate with that person.

a. Just acknowledging the existence of another person's position is a very positive step forward.

1) “I acknowledge your position and I'll seriously consider it.”

b. Controllers refuse to acknowledge others' positions because they believe it gives the other person power they do want them to have.

3. Restate (or mirror back) in your own words what you heard them say without judging, evaluating, correcting or interrupting them. Paraphrasing or

repeating the key points of the speaker demonstrates that you want to understand what the person is saying.

- a. David Augsburger, Caring Enough to Confront, p. 23, “I want to hear you accurately, so I’ll need to check out what I hear at crucial points to be as sure as I can that my meanings match your meanings. I get an inkling of what your meanings are from your words, your tone of voice, your face, gestures, and body movements. But it is only an inkling. I must check it out at times by replaying what I heard for your approval, until you agree that you have been heard. I want to hear deeply, clearly, accurately enough that I am able – to some real extent – to feel what you feel, hurt a bit where you hurt, and want for you the freedom to be all you are becoming.” Be quick to hear and quick to understand.
 - b. ill.: “Am I hearing you say...”
 - c. ill.: “Am I hearing you right? Did you say ...?”
 - d. ill.: “What I hear you saying is...”
 - e. It is important that you do this with an open accepting face, not squinted eyes and furrowed eye brows.
4. By allowing the listener to repeat back to the speaker what the speaker said, it allows the speaker to then affirm that the listener heard him correctly.
 - a. (Speaker to listener) “Yes, I believe you heard me correctly.”
 5. Using “reflective listening” helps the speaker to continue to clarify their statements.
 - a. This is one of the reasons lectures are usually ineffective. There is little or no opportunity to clarify.

C. Make note of the other issues that come up in the discussion and make a commitment to return at a later time to address them, one at a time.

D. Issue hopping rarely settles any single issue.

1. Issue hopping is guaranteed to collect unsettled issues and results in accumulating negative relational baggage for the duration of the relationship.
2. Remember, many destructive arguments start with an issue, then drop down to issue hopping, name calling, blame shifting, which in turn result in questioning the continuation of the relationship (i.e., divorce).

IV. Stop outbursts of anger at all costs. Instead, focus on keeping control of your emotions and speak in mutual, respectful tones.

A. Loud, angry outbursts tend to shut down the flow of communication. When anger escalates, the relationship begins to degenerate at that point.



1. Prov. 15:1, "A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up strife."

How have you witnessed the unhealthy use of anger in your family, school, workplace or church? How did it affect you?

B. Unhealthy anger can be used to do at least seven negative things:

Unhealthy Uses of Anger

1. To **control** the other person // (to shut them down).
 - a. God never designed a relationship for one person to control another. The ninth fruit of the Spirit is self-control, not people, place or thing control (Gal. 5:22-23).
 - b. God calls controlling others as "lording (bossing) it over another" in I Pet. 5:3.
 - 1) God made it clear to the elders (pastors, leaders) that they are obligated to lead by example, not by bossing others around.
 - 2) God never gave husbands permission to boss their wives around.
 - a) The Apostle Paul never used the word "obey" in his treatment of the marriage relationship. "Obey" was used of children and slaves, not spouses.
 - c. Controllers are fear driven, not faith based.
 - 1) Fear based controllers are usually very self-centered and stuck emotionally at an early stage in their development and are very selfish.
 - 2) Love pushes away fear, but fear can also push away love.
 - a) I John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

- b) Rarely does a child or spouse feel loved when they are controlled. They feel rejected, belittled, and not valued.
 - d. Often, compliant pleasers marry angry controllers.
 - e. The result of angry controllers is spouses who walk on eggs.
- 2. To **change** the other person's behavior.
 - a. Anger does not produce an end product that is pleasing to God.
 - 1) James 1:20 "For the anger of man (or a mate) does not produce the righteousness of God."
 - 2) Anger does not produce God-like righteousness in children either.
 - a) Col. 3:21, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart."
 - b. Change is ultimately God's responsibility.
 - 1) Phil. 2:13 "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."
 - 2) John 16:8, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."
- 3. To **manipulate**.
 - a. Similar to number 1 and 2
- 4. To **avoid** the feelings of personal guilt, fear or other negative feelings.
 - a. If you do not want to feel the fear or guilt, you will shift to anger.
 - 1) King David did this when Nathan the prophet confronted David for his adultery. David went into a rage over the rich man stealing the poor man's only sheep. Then Nathan said "Thou are the man." David immediately knew he had been found out and said, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13).
 - b. Usually anger hides other negative emotions.
- 5. To **avoid** their own personal responsibility for wrong words, actions or attitudes.
- 6. To **remove** an obstacle that prevents you from accomplishing your own will (selfishness).
- 7. To **exact** revenge (payback).

- a. Rom. 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
8. Remember, anger can result in making very bad decisions. We usually do not do the next smart thing when we get angry, which results in a deep sense of shame later. Moses is a classic example
- a. Numbers 20:10-12, “And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ 11) Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and the animals drank. 12) Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’”
 - b. Deut. 32:48: 50-52, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses that very same day saying, 50) “and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to you people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people 51) because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel. 52) Yet you shall see the land before you, though you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel.”
9. Also, anger injects fear in the listener and that fear shuts down the mind and prevents hearing and responding.
- a. Discipline of children in anger may get an immediate response but not a long term change.
10. All couples, happy or unhappy argue, but the future of the relationship does not hinge on **what** you argue about but **how** you manage your negative emotions such as anger and fear (Dr. Scott Stanley, Dr. Howard Markman, University of Denver).

V. Stop pushing others’ hot button issues designed to hurt someone in a sensitive area. Instead, stay focused on the issue.

A. Avoid escalating an argument by blurting out sweeping generalizations that are designed to push hot buttons.

1. You ... “You think you know better.”
2. You always... “You are always playing your computer games.”
3. You never... “You never carry your load.”
4. You must....

5. If only...
6. You should.... "You shouldn't do it that way."

B. Hot buttons can be used to remind the other person of their past failures, weaknesses, forgiven issues and/or lingering grudges (Ez. 18:22).

1. Never bring up a past event to hurt, to punish or to shame a person in the present. This is referred to "holding a club over their head."
2. If a past issue has not been settled then select a separate time to discuss it and do whatever it takes to settle it. Denial of an issue is not a healthy choice.

C. Hot buttons can also be used to stimulate fear in another person. Some of those fears are:

1. Fear of rejection
2. Fear of abandonment (threats of divorce or leaving)
3. Fear of not being loved
4. Fear of not being heard or validated
5. Fear of failure
6. Giving ultimatums

D. It is the responsibility of the one who has a hot button to disconnect it.

1. If a spouse brings up a past, shameful event, it pushes your hot button, it does not create it. That act tapped into your fear of rejection, failure or abandonment. It is your responsibility to deal with those fears through your relationship to God and thus "cut" the wires leading to that hot button.
 - a. Those who fail to cut the wires of the hot buttons usually admit, "They really know how to push my buttons." But cutting those wires (i.e. dealing with the sensitive issue) ends the fears of others pushing those buttons resulting in fear, anger, shame or guilt.
2. A lot of energy is spent trying to prevent others from pushing our buttons which is an effort to control the button pusher's behavior.

E. It's also the responsibility of the button pusher not to push them causing fear, guilt, shame, abandonment.

VI. Stop demonstrating physical signs of disgust and start honoring.

A. Our body posture, tone of voice, facial features, and gestures make up at least 80% of the emotional communication between two people (A.C. Guide, p. 129).

1. Content - 7% Prov. 12:18
2. Tone of voice – 38% Prov. 15:1
3. Facial expression – 55% Prov. 6:12

B. Contempt (or disgust) is one of the four predictors of potential marriage failure

C. Some physical signs of disgust to avoid:

1. Taking deep sighs
2. Rolling of eyes
3. Frowning
4. Hands on hips
5. Finger pointing
6. Get into their face/cornering
7. Crossing arms
8. Throwing up your hands
9. Looking at the ceiling, floor, or to the side of the room

VII. Stop withdrawing, pouting or the use of silent treatment but stay connected and engaged.

A. This may be designed to protect your from being hurt again.

B. The silent treatment may be designed to punish the other person emotionally by withdrawing your love, care, admiration, etc.

1. Although we may hurt God by our sinful behavior, He will never withdraw His love. Out of love, He will correct our wrong behavior.
 - a. Hebrews 12:6a “For whom the Lord loves, He chastens...”
2. Wives and daughters have a strong need to be and stay connected to their husbands or fathers. Withdrawing emotionally and relationally causes very deep wounds. The act of withdrawing is usually done to punish and/or inflict pain. This is sin!

C. It's our responsibility to go to them, not to avoid them.

1. Matt. 18:15 (Paraphrase) If your mate hurts you, go and tell him between you and him alone how he hurt you. If your mate hears you, you have gained your mate back. If he does not listen to you, involve an appropriate third party like your pastor.

D. Declaring a temporary "time out" can be a helpful tool to prepare your heart and mind to return to the discussion in a calmer frame of mind.

1. Use the time to cool off and/or rethink what is really taking place and what is really important.
2. Plan a "reconciliatory conversation" after a period of cooling down.
3. Often the issue is not the issue. Often there is something deeper or behind the point being argued.
 - a. Discovering this is not easy but it *is* very important.

VIII. Stop walking away from an important discussion without first affirming you will return and continue the process at a specific time later.

A. Without this commitment to return, walking out of the room is a form of abandonment and shaming (Adult Child's Guide, p. 130).

B. Do not follow the other person around from room to room if one you have called for a time out.

1. Following a person around is often done by one who can't stand to leave an issue unsettled and/or because the one pursued rarely is willing to revisit the issue later, the issue does not get settled.
2. Either following someone around the house or just dropping the issue without settling it is not healthy.

C. When a person is done talking, they are done. Respect this boundary.

1. Domestic violence is sometimes triggered by the failure of one person to allow another person to call a time out.
 - a. Taking a time out can help you calm down and allow yourself to return to clear thinking.
 - b. Anger blocks the thinking process so it is very important to reduce the anger and take control of one's self.
2. It's important to honor the other person's time out and space.

D. Commit yourself to deal with the issues.

1. Failure to do this will allow the issues to either grow into a monster or accumulate unbearable luggage.
2. You may need to designate a specific time (“fight night”) each week to handle sensitive issues. Avoid the “all-the-time and any-place” approach to solve arguments. This makes it difficult to relax out of fear that another argument will erupt anytime and continue indefinitely.
3. Mutually agree on when and where to meet to discuss things that bother you. But do not do it on a “date night,” family night or during a time of intimacy. These times should be off limits.
 - a. Celebrate and remember what attracted you to each other in the first place.

E. There may need to be a third party brought in to help bring reconciliation.

1. Paul encouraged the church family in Philippi to do this for Euodia and Synthche (Phil. 4:3) and a wise brother to arbitrate between those going to court with a brother in Corinth (I Cor. 6:1-7).

IX. Stop all physical attacking: shoving, biting, poking, throwing things, slamming doors or physically restraining another adult. Start demonstrating actions that reflect genuine love.

- A. One husband pointed his index finger in his wife’s face and she bit it. Both acts were wrong.
- B. Don’t take the other’s car keys or block the door. They are adults and need to be respected as adults.

X. Stop disagreeing on the rules and start agreeing on these or other communication rules that you may add later.

- A. Scripture repeatedly urges people to be of “one mind” or in agreement in important matters.
 1. Phil. 2:2, “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.”
- B. Take these rules seriously.
- C. Review these rules when things are calmer and acknowledge (confess) when you violated your rules and ask forgiveness.
- D. Post these rules in a very visible place as a reminder like on your refrigerator door.
- E. Allow the kids to know you have communication rules and that they are going to become the family rules.
- F. Remember, your goal is not to change the person, but to change the rules on how you argue.

What communication rule would you add?
How do you feel that rule would help communication?
Do you think children should have to follow the same rules as adults?
How would they differ?

Keys for Success

1. Choose to communicate in a healthy way.
2. Stop interrupting, start listening.
3. Stop name calling, start encouraging.
4. Stop issue hopping, start focusing.
5. Acknowledge each others perspective.
6. Mirror back what you heard.
7. Stop outbursts of anger, start controlling yourself.
8. Stop pushing hot buttons, start focusing.
9. Stop showing signs of disgust, start accepting.
10. Stop withdrawing, start connecting.
11. Stop walking away, start reassuring.
12. Stop inappropriate physical contact, start caring.
13. Mutually negotiate the rules.
14. Post them visibly.

XI. Bibliography

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Fair Communication Rules

Small Group Questions

1. What gender, personality, cultural, birth family and life experiences have made it difficult for you to communicate to someone who is important to you?
2. What communication styles have you used in the past that you have found were not effective? What made you change them?
3. What have you done that has helped you to prevent interrupting or talking over someone? How did you learn to do that?
4. How have you been hurt in the past by someone who has called you names in a discussion or argument?
5. What has been the most powerful thing said to you that was beneficial to you? If appropriate, what is the most negative thing said to you and how did it affect you?
6. How do you feel staying focused on one issue at a time? Would that improve your relationships?
7. What have been some hot buttons you have had in the past and how have you disconnected them?
8. What non verbal forms of disgust have you identified in yourself and what have you done to correct them?
9. How has someone's withdrawing from you affected you? How did you respond? If it was corrected, how did that pattern change?
10. How has a third party helped you with a conflict with someone else?
11. How do you believe your relationships would improve if you and others agreed on these or similar communication rules?