

L-O-V-E Conversations

To have a loving relationship, you will each need to communicate in a sensitive, loving way. You may feel very far from being able to do that right now. L-O-V-E conversations give you a platform for creating some safety in your discussions. You may like to make a flash card of the following simple words to help you stay focused on keeping your conversations “L-O-V-E conversations.”

When we communicate with each other, we need to:

- *Listen* with an
- *Open* heart and mind.
- *Validate* and acknowledge each other.
- *Express* our thoughts and feelings softly, simply, and slowly.

Let's look at the L-O-V-E conversation guide more closely:

- **L-O-V-E: Listen:** It is not by chance that L-O-V-E conversations start with listening. So often we want to do the talking, criticizing, pleading, or controlling. Necessary as it is to express our feelings and points of view, effective communication starts in the heart with a willingness to listen to the other (be it partner, child, colleague, or stranger). Listeners tune into words, but they also tune into feelings; for what is said in words, but also for what is said by facial expression and body “language.” So, while opening your ears and heart to listen to your partner, keep a careful eye on his/her face as well. Some readers may be inwardly groaning right now, because you may have received messages from your frustrated partner about your lack of ability to tune into feelings. To you, we say, “Don't give up!” Please read on. Tempting as it may be to interrupt your partner while he or she is talking, we encourage you to resist that urge. Listening without interruption conveys respect and a willingness to understand your partner's perspective.
- **L-O-V-E: Open:** An open mind is really just another way of saying, “I'm trying to listen to you as though we have just met and I haven't had time to develop any negative assumptions that creep in with relationship difficulties. It means being humble enough to realize that maybe there is something to learn if I listen to you with new ears. An open heart means taking in your words and allowing them to impact me. Allowing your words and experiences to move me.
- **L-O-V-E: Validate:** Before thinking about a quick reply to your partner's message, we would like to suggest that you slow down for long enough to validate and acknowledge what you have just heard your partner say. Press the pause button (or even better, the delete button) on self-defending comments and knee-jerk reactions. Make an effort to acknowledge that what your partner has just said is a legitimate experience for him or her. When you validate your partner you are demonstrating respect for his or her view of reality even though it may be different from yours.
- **L-O-V-E: Express:** Satisfying relationships typically involve conversations about feelings, hopes, dreams, and disappointments. When one partner is willing to share something of his or her “inner” life, and the other partner is willing to listen and validate what is

shared, the emotional bond between these two people is strengthened. So, disclosure is important and signals to the other person, "I trust you enough to tell you this personal information; you matter enough for me to want to let you in." Sometimes, it can be scary to disclose; indeed, in violent and disrespectful relationships, it is often not wise to do so. Disclosure works best when the disclosing partner has received some strong signals that the other is interested, open, and responsive. Sometimes, before disclosing, you may decide that you need to "test the waters" first; for example, with a question like, "Would you be willing to listen to what I've been thinking about since that last fight we had?" Or, "I've wanted to talk to you for a while now about my concerns about... would it be an OK time now for me to talk to you?" Just as listeners don't always have to agree with what their partner's say, disclosers can't always demand the attention that their partners are ready to listen immediately. Especially if you have multiple responsibilities (e.g., small children crying, business phone ringing), it is definitely helpful to negotiate a time to talk that is mutually suitable for conversation. For some couples, this may mean waiting ("Our relationship is too important to rush this."); for others it means making a priority of talking immediately ("Don't let the sun go down on our anger.").

Practice: Ready to have a L-O-V-E conversation?

Try out your first L-O-V-E conversation on a positive note. Identify the last time you had a good moment or interaction with your partner, felt close, relaxed, enjoyed an activity together, or noticed something you appreciate about your partner. Describe the situation or quality you appreciate below and the good feelings it evokes. Take turns sharing your good moments.

Description of Good Moment:

Good Feelings Evoked:

Debrief together: How do you feel inside about sharing your good moments and feelings with each other? In this moment how do you feel toward each other (closer, warmer, embarrassed, cautious, happy, calm, relaxed)?
