CHAPTER 5

Communicating: The Arts of Listening and Effectively Expressing Feelings

The Communication Process
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Group Therapy
Nonverbal Elements of Communication
  Vocal Volume and Tone
  Eye Contact or Looking
Marital Group Therapy
Executive Sessions
  The Topic of the Executive Session
Group Therapy
  The Setting of the Executive Session
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  Expressing Negatives Directly
  Empathy
  Coping with Unexpected Hostility and Persistent Bad Moods
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  Be Assertive, Not Passive or Aggressive
Marital Therapy in Groups
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Summary

For effective communication, both what we say and how we say it are important. Becoming aware of the PLEASERS that are wanted by a spouse...
is a tremendous step forward in the communication process, but knowing what to say without the ability to transmit the message can transform intended PLEASES into bombshells. In this chapter we explore the skills of listening and expressing that determine personal effectiveness and marital satisfaction.

As you observe your married clients express to each other their likes and dislikes, their desires and needs, you will often discover that they don't convey their feelings directly or clearly. Ineffective communication blocks the sharing of beautiful moments and opportunities for greater intimacy, and worse, leads to conflict, to feelings of rejection and withdrawal. Table I has examples of common roadblocks to effective communication.

Emotional expression is not taught in schools. We learn it incidentally from role models, such as parents, siblings, and friends, and from the corrective interpersonal feedback our fledgling communication attempts receive. The interpersonal skills that our married couples demonstrate are acquired more by accident than by design. Part of our responsibility as marital therapists is to design a therapeutic program that can promote the learning of good verbal and nonverbal communication. With a systematic and structured training program, couples can learn to improve their ability to communicate directly, congruently, empathically, and supportively. Training focuses on the messages and how they are sent—on the content and style of communication, rather than on the why. Asking "Why did you (or I) do or say that?" frequently leads to intellectualization, rationalization, frustration, or friction. Learning to express feelings effectively requires practice in therapy sessions and also at home. Repeated practice is the soul of learning.

**TABLE I. Roadblocks to Effective Communication: Destructive Messages**

1. Ordering. "You get in here and clean up this mess right now!"
2. Threatening. "If you don't get in here this minute, there'll be no more TV tonight."
3. Moralizing. "It's your responsibility to clean up after yourself."
4. Providing solutions. "Why don't you start cleaning up during the next commercial break?"
5. Lecturing. "You'll have to learn to clean up after yourself if you ever want to make a good wife."
7. Pseudoapproval. "I can see you're too tired to clean up this mess tonight."
8. Reassuring. "You'll feel much better once you take care of this mess."
10. Analyzing. "You're just doing this to make me mad."
11. Interrogating. "Can you give me one good reason why you can't clean up now?"
12. Withdrawing. "I'm too tired to argue anymore. I'm going to bed."