

Free Sample of:

COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS

(without starting a fight)

What to Say and What *Not*
to Say to Your Partner

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Preface

Why a Communication Book?

Why is a communication book in the Mental & Emotional Wellness series? Simple: Effective communication with your partner can support and improve your mental health. Conversely, having fights, explosions, and holding in your feelings when it comes to your relationship will drain and diminish your mental health. Healthy communication with your partner optimizes your overall mental and emotional wellness. Whether you consider your relationship toxic or think it's simply in need of some fine-tuning, learning these techniques will be a useful addition to your overall well-being.

What Happens When You Don't Communicate?

When you have bitterness or resentment toward anybody, it's not good for your mental health. When you have it toward your partner—someone you see regularly, and maybe even live with—it's much worse.

Resentment is a slow-growing virus. When you first get together, it's all good and everything seems fun. Coffee together? Fun. A walk at the park? The best thing ever. Spending time together in general? Happy times. After a while, you have your first disagreement. *Things are so good and I don't want to ruin that*, you think. Your feelings, and theirs, get swept under the rug.

Your relationship is still mostly happy and fun. Eventually, your next fight happens. *We don't need to talk about this. Let's focus on having fun.* Again, both of your feelings are left unexpressed. At this point, there's a little bit of noticeable tension between the two of you. But not so much that things are “bad.”

After your feelings get shoved under the rug following the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh fights, the scale begins to tip. Whereas you mainly got along before, now, it's half and half. Your relationship feels amicable and fun half the time, with tension and frustration the other half. *We can get through this*, you think. *Let's just try and get back to how things used to be.* Ah, the good ol' used-to-be myth. Things can't go back to how they used to be. Ever. They can only evolve forward into something new. The something new can either be a worse version of your relationship, or, if you learn to communicate effectively, a better, happier, and more connected version of your relationship.

Why can't things go back to how they used to be? Because now, a plethora of feelings are involved. Before, the only feeling involved was happiness, but anger, frustration, and hurt feelings have entered the building. When those feelings are swept under the rug, you'll feel those emotions more and more often, eventually feeling resentful and bitter toward your partner at least half of the time, if not most of the time.

It's easy to be happy in a relationship early on when no upset feelings are in the mix. The challenge is to continue being happy after you've experienced unpleasant feelings associated with your partner. Do you know how to handle and process your feelings, or are you blaming them on your partner? By the end of this book, you'll have more power and confidence in dealing with your feelings and your partner's.

One of the primary keys is to stop shoving your feelings down. Instead, bring them up into the light, and directly communicate them. This is the best possible thing that could happen for your relationship, because holding them in creates a breeding ground of resentment toward your partner. Hold 'em in long enough, and you'll eventually grow to hate one another. The techniques found in this book will set you in a good direction. If you're already at the point of experiencing hatred toward your partner or vice versa, that's okay, too. What you'll learn here can turn that around.

This book isn't just about communicating your feelings—anybody can do that. It's about communicating them effectively, hitting two birds with one stone: 1. Dismantling resentment and bitterness toward your partner, and 2. Creating a more satisfying, happy, and intimate bond between the two of you. Does that sound good to you? Great, let's get started.

Introduction

You're wearing your surgical gown and gloves as you stand over the operating table, looking down at your unconscious patient. Your assistant hands you a surgical tool . . . the only problem is, you've never performed surgery before. In fact, you haven't attended medical school or so much as watched another surgeon operate on video. Yet, there you stand, scalpel in hand, about to make life-altering incisions with no training or know-how.

Trying to talk about your feelings with your partner can be a lot like performing surgery without having had any training. Sure, you can slice, jab, and poke around, but is that going to improve the health and happiness of the relationship? It certainly *can*, but only if you do those things in a skilled way. You'll learn those skills in this book, and they're easier than you think.

Most of us didn't have anyone in our lives to model communication that builds and strengthens relationships. Instead, we saw either a) the type of communication that tears relationships apart, or b) no communication at all (which is still a form of communication).

I had always heard through the grapevine that communication was important. "Communication is key," they said. "Communicate often," they preached. In my early dating experiences, I didn't even try. "You never share your feelings" was something I heard often from my first girlfriend. I received a lot of similar feedback throughout high school and the first few years of college. I had a change of heart during my senior year in college, beginning to see that the concept of communication made sense. So, I gave it a try. And, boy, did I try. Just ask the people I dated. (Actually, please don't.)

They'll tell you that I certainly did *try* to communicate. The thing about it is that trying to communicate without knowing how to communicate is like trying to diffuse an explosive device with no understanding of the wiring. And that's exactly what communication is—a diffusing process. Yet, for so many, talking about feelings remains a process of escalation and explosiveness. If you hold your feelings in, that still applies to you. Maybe you're not exploding at someone externally, but there's turbulence happening inside.

Before moving ahead, know that wanting to communicate at all is an excellent and noble desire. Look at the number of people who don't want to talk about their feelings at all. They wouldn't even consider picking up a book like this. Oh, and if you're someone who doesn't want to talk about your feelings, don't worry. You're going to find it's not only easier than you think, but can actually be a relieving and fulfilling experience.

I'm so glad you've joined me, because learning to communicate can create the satisfaction and happiness you've been wanting in your relationship. Let's look at an overview of the 13 Communication Techniques in this book.

Author's Note about This Sample:

The following communication technique shared in this free sample is geared toward people who find it challenging to speak up and share their feelings. The publishing agreements associated with this book allow only a small percentage of the book to be shared for free.

With that in mind, please note that the complete book **strikes a balance between motivating those who have difficulty speaking up to do so effectively and teaching those who tend to speak up too aggressively to channel their energy into approaches that are more effective in helping your partner understand your perspective.** Whether you fall more on the end of being too hesitant or too aggressive with communicating, the aim is effectiveness.

For example, if you don't communicate at all, it's ineffective because it doesn't give the relationship an opportunity to take in new information and integrate it into the overall ways of relating. Likewise, being too aggressive is ineffective (e.g., putdowns, insults) because the other person wants to address the perceived rudeness rather than hear what you have to say and why.

There are more subtleties to explore, for example, passive-aggressiveness and how that's equally as toxic as overt aggressiveness, and many such nuances are addressed in the complete book. But for the purposes of this sample, it's important for the reader to know that the entire book strikes a balance between the importance of speaking up for those who have difficulty doing so, and the importance of channeling aggressive communication into tactics that are more gentle without watering down the perspective being communicated.

Communication Technique #4

“This is Challenging for Me”

Instead of saying nothing, say, “This is challenging for me.”

Earlier, I alluded to the idea that saying nothing at all can be just as toxic and harmful to your relationship as an outright insult. I see this regularly in my office. A couple comes in with their relationship hanging on by a thread. I ask, “How are you when it comes to communicating about things you feel upset or bothered about?”

“Well, I don’t, really. I kind of keep it all to myself. I don’t have a lot of thoughts and feelings about those types of things.”

“You don’t?”

“No. Growing up, we didn’t talk much in my family. If there was an argument or an issue, we kind of kept to ourselves and then things just went back to normal after a few hours or a couple of days.”

“I see. Can you share more about that?”

“Yeah. I remember when my brother was sick. He was in and out of hospitals for a while, and eventually died. We didn’t talk about it. My dad started drinking and my mom became hyper anxious about everything. We never actually had a conversation about any of it.”

“That sounds like it would have been confusing.”

“Yeah. So, I don’t really have a lot to say when it comes to communicating about being upset or things like that.”

I don’t allow the conversation to end there.

“Let me ask you this,” I say. “Does your mind run wild sometimes? Do you experience what seems like a flurry or even an avalanche of thoughts that cycle around and around?”

“Oh yeah, definitely. I’m just not very verbal.”

“Well, these thoughts, they come in the form of images and words, right?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“So, you are verbal. There are words flowing through your mind. There are also images flowing through your mind, and if you were to think about those images, you would use words to describe them.”

“Yeah.”

“You can see, then, that you are *verbal*. It’s just that you don’t *verbalize*.”

The truth is, you have a lot to say. Furthermore, for the health of your relationship and for your own satisfaction, it’s important you say it. For whatever reason, you’ve decided, probably unconsciously, that saying nothing has a larger payoff than discussing how you feel. When this happens, it’s usually because you were either a) shamed for your feelings as a child, or b) put in a catch-22 by your caregivers. Let’s look at the consequences of each of those.

If you cried as a child and were told, “Crying doesn’t solve anything,” and “If you don’t stop right away, you’re going to have something to cry about,” then you were shamed for having feelings. If your parents couldn’t handle the fact that children cry and either ignored you or tried to force you to stop, you were shamed for your feelings. When a child is shamed for having feelings, they tend to grow into adults who don’t share their feelings with partners.

In high school, I distinctly remember my girlfriend saying, “You don’t share your feelings with me.” At the time I was only 15, so I was still being raised in a household where the message was that having feelings is shameful. When my girlfriend said this, it bounced off my brain like a basketball on the pavement. There was no place in my mind for her statement to register.

My next major relationship was during college, and I did try to communicate. It didn’t work, because the only feelings I knew how to express were anger and frustration. I didn’t know how to express fear, sadness, or anxiety, because I was still living from an unconscious shame-based identity.

Next, those who experience a catch-22 often end up utterly confused. The catch-22 goes like this: Your caregivers encouraged you to share your feelings with them. They might say things like, “Talk to me; you never tell me how you feel,” or, “I just want to know what you’re thinking.” Then, when you do tell them your feelings, they say, “Here’s why you shouldn’t feel that way,” proceeding to explain, in detail, why your feelings are wrong.

Such a catch-22 can be utterly confusing, especially to a child who has no ability to decide for themselves whether the caregiver’s approach is appropriate or not. You grow into an adult and enter relationships with a *damned if I do, damned if I don’t* mindset when it comes to communicating your feelings.

Both of the above scenarios are challenging. I experienced the first, while my wife experienced the catch-22. It has taken steady, consistent, and dedicated work for her to begin trusting that she can share her feelings with me without being shamed, criticized, or told she shouldn’t feel the way she does. In Part IV, we’ll cover how to respond to your partner’s feelings.

You might find yourself having difficulty sharing your feelings with your partner. At its worst, the danger of not sharing your feelings is that an issue brewing beneath the surface will grow in size until it’s too late, and you’re on the edge of a breakup or of contacting a divorce attorney. You sat by and watched your relationship diminish, making little or no effort to speak up and communicate the issues you were having.

A breakup may not be in the picture, and in that case, the more likely option is that your relationship is just kind of “meh.” You’re not satisfied or happy with it and have come to see it as “just the way it is.”

You may not have realized that communicating your feelings and concerns is your responsibility. It’s not your partner’s job to bring that out of you, but it *is* their job to not judge or shame you when you do it. I can’t tell you the number of people who hold the belief that when they find the “right” person, that person will instinctively tend to their feelings and thoughts, relieving them of having to communicate them. Such a partner may exist in movies and novels, but I’ve yet to see a healthy, happy relationship where both partners weren’t taking responsibility for their own communication.

To make things easy on yourself, tell your partner, “I want to say something, but this is challenging for me.” Now, you’ve opened the door to a discussion. This is a huge step, and infinitely better than avoiding the subject completely.

Another common and unhelpful ideology about communication is waiting for the right time. You might think, *I want to communicate about this issue, but I’m waiting for the right time*. When I hear someone describe this, I know a disaster is on the horizon. I can’t tell you how many people have told me they were waiting for the right time, only to have months or years pass them by. Still not having communicated, it was too late. The relationship had been ended by the other partner, or divorce papers had been served.

There will never be a right time to communicate about hard things. This entire line of thinking is a fallacy because it’s not the right time you’re actually waiting for. Please read that again: You’re not actually waiting for the right time. What you are waiting on is the fear and anxiety about communicating to go away. It won’t. That’s why so many people end up waiting and waiting. Before you know it, you’ve waited too long and the relationship has self-destructed. Or you find yourself in a situation you never intended to get yourself into, such as being with someone you’re not compatible with.

Pitch the idea of waiting for the right time to communicate in the trash. Instead, acknowledge that you’re afraid to communicate. It’s okay. We all experience fear. You can feel afraid and talk to your partner at the same time.

* * * *

If this part of the book describes you, I want to acknowledge that it can be scary to begin speaking up. As a child, you may have been shut down when you tried to communicate your feelings. At the risk of sounding obvious, you must realize that you are now an adult who is capable of being assertive and standing up for yourself.

In sharing how you feel with your partner, you may be afraid that they’ll attempt to squash your feelings as was done to you during childhood. The difference is that you had no power back then, but you do have power now. If your partner tries squelching or minimizing your feelings, say, “These are my feelings, and they’re not up for debate. What I am willing to do is have a discussion about both of our perspectives and try to come to a resolution that is agreeable for both of us. What I’m not willing to do is sit here and have you tell me I shouldn’t feel the way I do.”

You have that right and that power. You don't have to sit there while your partner invalidates your feelings. Speaking of feelings, you're going to discover there's a huge difference between thoughts and feelings in Part II.

Keys to Remember

- Saying nothing at all and avoiding communication is toxic.
- Let your partner know you want to communicate your feelings, but it's challenging for you.
- Don't allow your partner to invalidate your feelings.
- Communicating your feelings is your responsibility, not your partner's. Likewise, it's your partner's responsibility to communicate their feelings, not yours.
- You have a lot to say, you're just not verbalizing it.

The complete book is available on Amazon.

- Paperback: \$11.99
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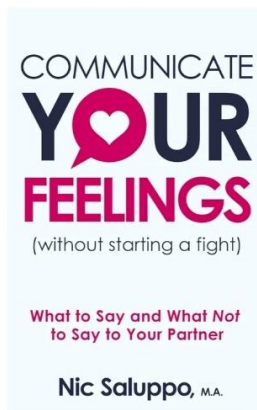
Nic Saluppo

Communicate Your Feelings (without starting a fight):
What to Say and What Not to Say to Your Partner (Ment
Emotional Wellness)

4.6 ★★★★★ (1,818)

4.5 on Goodreads (1,243)

Book 1 of 12: Mental & Emotional Wellness



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