

PROBLEM SOLVING IN RELATIONSHIPS

1. Schedule time to just talk

When problems start, communication often breaks down. You and your partner do not talk as much as you used to. To start improving your communication again, try making little appointments to chat about little things. For example, you could set aside 15 minutes per morning to sit and tell each other about your plans for the day. Or, you could give your partner a call on his or her lunch break to check in and see how your partner's day is going.

Scheduling time to talk about relationship problems can be useful as well. By setting a time limit for discussing your problem, you may reduce some of the tension in your relationship and get closer to a solution. For example, you could decide to discuss a specific problem from 7-8pm. Keep these conversations as light as possible and avoid discussing anything that might upset your partner during this time. The goal is to get a rapport going again. Of course, if your partner is having a bad day or is feeling stressed about something, listen and be supportive and encouraging.

2. Try to open up

Confront the conflicts with each other. If you and your partner are prone to shouting at each other during arguments, try going to a public place to discuss problem topics. Got to a library, a coffee shop, or the mall to talk through the issue. The knowledge that you may cause a scene if you yell at each other should help you to keep your voices down and have a more civil conversation.

3. Work on active listening skills.

Problems may also arise in relationships if a partner feels like he or she is not being heard. To eliminate this potential problem, practice active listening skills when your partner is talking to you. Make eye contact with your partner when he or she is talking. Do not look away, look at your phone, or anywhere else when your partner is talking to you. Give your partner your full attention. Nod your head and indicate your interest with neutral statements, such as "yes," "I see," and "go on." Rephrase what your partner has just said to make sure that you have understood him or her.

4. Stick to "I" statements.

Making "you" statements may cause your partner to feel as though you are assigning blame. This can lead to defensiveness and even a fight. Therefore, it is important to use "I" statements to let your partner know what is bothering you. For example, instead of saying, "You never make the bed in the morning," say, "I would really appreciate it if you could make the bed if you get up after I do."

5. Express your appreciation for each other.

Feeling unappreciated can cause problems in a relationship as well. That is why it is so important to remember to say things like “thank you” and “I appreciate you” as often as possible. For example, if your partner often loads the dishwasher after dinner and tidies up the kitchen, let him or her know that you value these activities. Say something like, “I just want to say thank you for keeping our kitchen so clean and nice. I appreciate that so much.”

6. Think before you speak.

Sometimes an argument may get heated and you may find yourself saying or wanting to say things that are meant to make your partner feel bad about him or herself rather than to solve your problems. If you feel the urge to say something hurtful to your partner, take a moment to stop and think about what the problem is and what you could say to move closer to a solution. For example, instead of calling your partner a mean name or insulting him or her in some other way, identify what you want him or her to do.

7. allow your partner to finish speaking before you respond.

Interrupting your partner before he or she has finished speaking is also a common cause of problems. If you often interrupt your partner, try to end this habit and allow your partner to finish speaking before you say anything. Doing so will help your partner to feel heard and give you a chance to learn what his or her complaint is all about.

8. Apologize if you are at fault.

Sometimes you will need to apologize in order to move forward with your partner. Try to be honest with yourself and determine if you are at fault and if you need to apologize. If you make an apology, make sure that it is sincere, specific, and expresses what you plan to do to make things right. For example, you might say something like, “I am sorry for not calling you to tell you that I was going to be late. I will try to be more thoughtful in the future.”

9. Acknowledge your partner’s feelings.

Acknowledging that you have heard your partner and that you understand how he or she feels is a good way to move forward. Avoid getting defensive because this will only lead to an argument and deepening resentment. Instead, let your partner know that you hear and understand. For example, you might say something like, “Okay, I hear what you are saying. I did not realize that you felt that way.” Do not get defensive even if your partner responds to you with a defensive claim, such as “You are always nagging me and you never appreciate how hard I work.” Acknowledge your partner’s feelings and move on.

10. Keep your promises.

Once you and your partner have come up with a plan to resolve your issues, make sure that you keep your promises. Otherwise, you may end up in the same place as you were before. For example, if you promised to take out the garbage every night after dinner, make sure that you do so. Otherwise, your partner may start to feel resentful and begin lapsing on his or her promises as well.

11. Give each other space.

Having time apart is a good way to keep a relationship fresh and healthy. Make sure that you maintain friendships and other interests so that you do not rely too heavily on your partner. It is important to have a life of your own as well as with your partner. Set aside some time each week to indulge in your own interests and spend time with your friends. For example, you might have a girl's or guy's night out once per week, take a class by yourself, or join a special interest group on your own.