

## Feel Felt Communication Tool



Sometimes we need to set aside time to have conversations without interruptions to focus deeply on the topics at hand. When tough topics need to be addressed, or even smaller issues that are not of major concern but that feel vulnerable and need some discussion, the following method can work wonders.

### **“THE BIGGEST COMMUNICATION PROBLEM IS THAT WE DO NOT LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND. WE LISTEN TO REPLY.”**

This technique will help you and your spouse practice listening to understand and help your spouse ***feel felt***. It will teach you to listen deeply rather than just hearing the words or thinking of what words you would like to reply with. Learning LISTENING SKILLS will work wonders in your marriage relationship!

Here's the suggested protocol for using this tool.

1. One spouse becomes aware of a concern about the relationship that can't be addressed in 10-20 minutes and feels vulnerable or has other strong emotions around the concern whether it is about household routines, money, child rearing, in-laws, religion, careers/business, intimacy, or a recent interaction or event, etc.
2. You might want to create a code word to alert each other that you have a sensitive topic to be addressed in a special setting and that can't be discussed in everyday conversation. Examples might be: Top Secret Meeting, Staff Meeting, Connection Conversation, Feel Felt Communication, Hear My Heart Conversation, etc.
3. Set aside a time for private discussion without interruptions, if possible. At least a half an hour is strongly recommended.
4. Use a stick, baton, chopstick, feather, or something that is lightweight, can be held in the hand and passed back and forth between spouses.
5. The spouse, who requested the private meeting is **THE SPEAKER**, holds the baton and follows the prompts on page 2.
6. **THE LISTENER** listens with an open mind and empathy to try and understand their spouse's feelings and concerns. **THE LISTENER** remains as silent as possible until answering question #4 and #5 with a simple YES or NO.
7. **THE LISTENER** can only speak when he/she has a clarifying question to understand **THE SPEAKER'S** feelings and words better. **THE LISTENER** can use a simple sign such as raising his/her hand to request the baton to speak. Reflective listening\* may be used with clarifying questions about an emotion or situation. If someone says the word "green" that can mean light green, dark green, emerald green, khaki green, etc. An example of a clarifying question might be: "When I did (or said) \_\_\_\_\_, you felt forgotten or ignored. Is that right?" **THE LISTENER DOES NOT SHARE THEIR IDEAS, SUGGESTIONS, FEELINGS OR SOLUTIONS. THE LISTENER** passes the baton back to **THE SPEAKER** to continue.

If this is challenging for you – which is quite normal – find a trusted coach, mentor or friend to act as a mediator during the process to help with following these guidelines and keep emotions calm and the mind more logical.



PROMPTS FOR **THE SPEAKER** FOR DEEPER COMMUNICATION, CONNECTION AND UNDERSTANDING:

1. When you say or don't say this \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
2. When you do or don't do this \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I need your help by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Can you do THIS for me?
5. If NO, can you compromise by \_\_\_\_\_?

If NO again, respect that and return to this topic or situation later if needed.

**THE LISTENER** then repeats back the thoughts but especially the FEELINGS he/she heard **THE SPEAKER** share and ends with what he/she *can* do or *cannot* do for **THE SPEAKER** or any *compromises* made.

If there is time and a need for more conversation, **THE LISTENER** takes the baton and has a turn with their concern using the prompts here.

\*To learn more about reflective listening go to:

<https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/uploadedFiles/parcc/cmc/Reflective%20Listening%20NK.pdf>