

Keys When "Married" to Farm Stress

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"G8 Marriage Communication 4U2"



Marriage + Farming = Good Luck which may over or underestimate the difficulty of raising a family on a farm but research shows couples are pretty satisfied with their choice to farm. Keeping marriages healthy is key because healthy kids come from healthy parents and healthy parents come from healthy marriages. There is compelling evidence that healthy marriages have beneficial social and economic impacts for both parents and children, including physical and physiological health (Ola & Mathur, 2016).

The aim of this publication is to share tidbits of advice on marriage communication, much of which was adapted from or taken from **"The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Enrichment Network" (NERMEN) and the Healthy Relationships program. For more information: <https://www.fcs.uga.edu/nermen/>**

Communication is much more than words as non-verbal communication is as important as verbal since 65%-85% of message is often non-verbal. When simply texting or emailing versus calling or meeting face to face, know the message can drastically change. Facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, touch, volume, posture, proximity of personal space can all impact how the message is received.

Communication is full of **"Bids for Connection"**—as kids and spouses constantly make bids to connect in relationships for affection, attention, and help.

How a spouse or child responds often separates happy couples and families from unhappy ones. How you **"turn"** is an important fundamental to any type of relationship.

- Turning away**—ignoring the bid and continuing what he or she was doing....
- Turning against**—can't you see I'm busy...why do you want to waste your money....
- Turning toward**—well that sounds like fun...I'm happy you considered us...that is interesting but are you sure we can afford it? NERMEN

Make it a point, and practice, as repetition makes a habit, to turn towards family and friends to invite them to share more, with genuine interest. If not a good time, still turn toward them and share why. Use positive words and tone.

"What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility." Leo Tolstoy

In our bids for connection, we send messages. Below are **unhelpful messages** that many give:

- 1) Giving Advice—"what you need to do is...there's an easy fix for that...why not do it this way...."
- 2) Talking about YOUR feelings and experience rather than validate theirs—"I felt same way when..."
- 3) Making their pain seem unimportant—"You'll get over it...life will go on.... It's no big deal...."

Versus **Helpful Messages** to practice:

- 1) Acknowledge **their** THOUGHTS and FEELINGS—"It seems important to you that..."
- 2) Invite more discussion—"I want to understand more/why/how...what difference will it make"
- 3) Acknowledge that the pain or confusion is REAL—"You must feel awful" "Tough situation"

"Seek first to understand, then be understood"—Steven Covey

Healthy marriages tend to have arguments and at times, even conflict when challenging each other. Struggles can increase marital bonding as couples struggle to know each other better or experience a tragedy or turbulent time together. Conflict can also fester and divide.

Be **"conflict careful"** around kids as kids often **imagine** (think the worst); **magnify** (make bigger than it really is); and **internalize** (it's my fault) why mom and dad aren't getting along. As a result, kids might act out; turn inward; have trouble concentrating or interacting well with others; and/or have poor academic or other performance.

Probably no person who has experienced marriage could argue that communication skills are not important!

Speak and Hear skills are BOTH important. Below are Speak Skills when sharing thoughts, feelings and concerns:

- Start with positive words/tone at ratio 5:1 or 20:1
- Carefully select words and tone and body language—Gentle and non-threatening
- Explain how you feel and think, using details—Use "I" statements and name specific behavior that concerns you or how it makes you feel—"I feel/think...when you...say or do...."
- Avoid the trigger words—**you** always and **you never**—turns conversation into fights
- Keep it brief, allowing your partner to paraphrase (repeat) or validate what was heard.

Marital and Family arguments sometimes go in circles with each spouse/member trying to prove they were right. Sometimes you are right, but that's not the point. If you can recognize part of the argument that you were wrong in, simply saying "I was wrong." can help. Resist following it with, "But..." Yea, But... I understand, But... OK, But... I did, But... Source: *Marriage Moments*

When listening to another, Practice **“HEAR” Skills** when someone shares thoughts, feelings or concerns

- **Honor the Other**—valuing and respecting with genuine interest (eye contact) for their thoughts and feelings, not focusing on your response
- **Accurate Empathy**—understanding and imagining how other is feeling and respecting feelings as real and valid
- **Allow Difference of Opinion**—even if don't agree—listen without judgement or sharing how you feel, unless asked
- **Repeat to Confirm Understanding**, “I heard you say...I understood you feel...I think you wish....”

Increasing the Joy in Relationships

Show genuine interest/concern (eye contact, focus)

Be affectionate/empathetic (tender touch)

Be appreciative (attitude of gratitude)

Be accepting (yet disciplined)

Share Your Joy (overcoming sorrow)

(Adapted from NERMEN) Joke Around (respectfully)

Not all conversations go well. Some conversations need a timeout and some need a chance just to do over. When conversation goes negative, below are some ideas when couples or family members just need to **Hit the Brakes and Repair some things that were done or said!**

1. **Common Ground**—“Let’s try to tackle this together” Accept Differences/Respect
2. **I need to calm down**—“Can I take that back?” or “Can we think for 5 minutes then talk?”
3. **Sorry**—“Let me try again...Forgive me....I didn’t think of it that way....”
4. **Get to Yes**—“I see what you mean....Can we compromise....Agree to Disagree...”
5. **Stop Action**—“Arguing is only making it worse...Can we write feelings in a letter?...Can we time out?”
6. **I appreciate**—“I see your point...we are both saying....I know this isn’t your fault...we both want what is best....”

In addition, at times conversations just need a longer, soothing break—20 minutes, positive thoughts, no blame, avoiding triggers that invoke negative language.

Bottom Line: *Healthy Communication → Healthy Persons
→ Healthy Couple Functioning → Healthy Parenting =
Healthy Child Wellbeing. Learn/Practice Communication!*

But, not all marriages or other relationships make it or have the best interest of the relationship in mind. Before relationships get to “irretrievable damage”, spouses can be on the lookout for **“Signs of Relationship Troubles”** as highlighted by *John Gottman, Relationship Researcher*:

1. **Criticism**—self right, other wrong—“you always...you never...why can’t you ever...”
2. **Defensiveness**—“you’re the problem, ignoring other, yes-but..., not true, you’re the one...”
3. **Contempt**—name calling, rolling eyes, hostile humor, sarcasm, mockery—most poisonous!
4. **Stonewalling**—conveys disapproval, distances oneself, disconnection, silence, mumbling, removing oneself physically (85% of time it is the males who use this strategy)

These signs highlight a need for possible outside help, a facilitator, friend or counselor who might highlight these troubled habits for the good of the marriage.

In the End, Farm and Family Communication is Key!

Farm couples and members that can’t share thoughts, feelings, budge, give an inch, say they’re sorry, acknowledge wrongdoing—tend to drive a wedge—it only goes so far before it splits. In the larger farm family, think about these **Seven Biggest Disagreements in Farm Family Communication** and how they play out in your farm family.


1. * Decision-making--who makes them/who is included?
2. New ideas for change--is change threatening or better?
3. Money-spending policies--who decides who spends?
4. Time-off policies/vacations--where are your priorities?
5. Family and business goals—Loyalty to farm vs spouse?
6. Managing farm employees--which boss do I listen to?
7. Role of Spouse (s) -- what are the expectations?

*** Who makes the decisions is the ultimate!**

Adapted from Dr. Ron Hanson, Univ of Nebraska-Lincoln

In sum, the Top 10 skills to communicate to each other:

1. I love you—**appreciation** *Author Unknown*
2. I’m sorry let’s work it out—**forgiveness**
3. I hear you saying....—**listening**
4. You make sense to me because....—**validation**
5. I imagine you must feel....—expressing **empathy**
6. I would like this—what would you like? **desires**
7. Thank you for—**gratitude**
8. Would you please do this?—most are **not mind-readers**
9. I am feeling....—**responsibility to share** ideas/feelings
10. I forgive you....—**acceptance**, it goes both ways.

So, if married to farm stress, renew your vows and your commitment 4 Gr8 Marriage Communication 4 U 2 

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Spouses and family members, even very loving ones, sometimes need a "Do Over." When you catch yourself (or you are caught) saying or doing something hurtful, be humble enough to ask for a Do Over. Apologize. Rephrase your statement in a more sensitive way, Make an amend.

Adapted from: Marriage Moments