

Recognize Safer Relationship Conversations

Couples communication and boundaries | Couples | 10 to 15 minutes

Identify conditions that support voluntary communication and when a different approach is needed.

Communication practice works best when people can speak, disagree, and stop without being punished. Before trying a joint worksheet, consider whether both people have that freedom. The purpose is to create useful choices, not to earn permission to be treated respectfully.

Conditions to look for

Both people can decline a topic, ask for time, and keep appropriate privacy. Each person takes responsibility for their own behavior. Listening includes curiosity and correction. A request can receive a no. Neither person has to prove love through access to passwords, money, sex, or constant availability.

When joint exercises may be unsafe

Threats, coercion, stalking, violence, or fear of retaliation call for private assessment and specialized support. A person being harmed is not responsible for ending abuse by communicating more skillfully. The National Domestic Violence Hotline cautions against couples therapy with an abusive partner.

A small practice when it is safe

Choose a neutral decision, such as a weekend task. Each person states one preference and one practical limit. Reflect what you heard before proposing a plan. End with a check: "Did you feel able to disagree?" If the answer is no, stop and discuss that privately with your clinician.

One condition I want to strengthen or discuss privately