

# COUPLES COMMUNICATION COURSE

## Lesson 9: How Well Do I Know You?

Have you ever been to a restaurant and noticed that couple sitting nearby who barely speak to one another during the entire meal?

They chomp away at their food, looking anywhere but at their partner, without laughing, engaging in conversation, or asking questions. They look like two uncomfortable strangers.

If they can't interact in a restaurant when while sitting across from each other, you must wonder how much more disconnected they are in the privacy of their home.

Over time, couples tend to fall into a sad pattern of inattention to the details of one another's lives. They neglect to show curiosity and interest in their partner's thoughts, interests, dreams, likes, dislikes, and feelings.

However, emotionally mature couples make it a point to become intimately familiar with each other's worlds.

You know his favorite sports shows on TV, and you plan around those. He knows exactly how you like your coffee. She remembers the fight with your dad when you were a teenager that still causes you pain.

He doesn't press you to go to church every Sunday because he knows your inner doubts. You never tease him about those few extra pounds because you know he feels insecure about them.

Taking this interest and learning about one another on a daily basis not only improves your communication, but also it protects your relationship from the inevitable storms and difficulties you will face.

When a couple is already deeply aware of what each other thinks and feels, they are less likely to be thrown for a loop when challenges occur. For example, when a young couple has their first child, it creates a huge change in their lives, adding more demands with a lot less sleep.

Couples who know each other well and communicate often about their needs and feelings are much less likely to experience relationship unhappiness during this time of upheaval in their marriage when a baby enters their lives, according to research by John Gottman.

Becoming an expert on your partner not only protects your relationship during challenging times, but also it fosters intimacy, compassion, mutual interests, novelty, and admiration.

If your partner dreams of learning to sail, you might be inspired to join him in that dream. If you reveal your fears about your new job, your partner will be there to support and strengthen you. The more you learn about each other, the deeper and more connected your relationship will grow.

And because all of us continue to change and evolve over time, this mutual learning process is a lifetime endeavor. You can encourage, inspire, support, and motivate one another as you share your inner worlds year after year.

Rather than allowing yourselves to drift into your separate corners over time, assuming that you know everything there is to know about your partner, you can continue to reveal more and more of the depths of yourselves to one other.

So how do you remain an expert on your partner?

- It involves taking time every day to just talk to each other. Share the events of your day and how they impacted you.
- Share stories about your childhood, your past loves, your friends, your parents, and your life experiences.
- Discuss movies, politics, your religious beliefs, your hopes and dreams, your deepest fears, and your favorite memories.
- Become so curious and intrigued by your partner that you never run out of questions, as though you are a detective trying to gather every detail.

The key here is to give one another a safe environment in which to share anything without fear of judgment, derision, teasing, or shaming. You both want the freedom to share openly both the positive and not-so-positive parts of your inner worlds.

Does that mean you need to share or hear everything?

If there are certain things you don't want to hear, like the details about your spouse's past lovers, that's understandable. Or if you don't want to mention that time you cheated on a test in high school, no harm done.

You can create appropriate boundaries around sharing, as long as you aren't hiding something significant or lying to your partner.

But try to keep the door open for any kind of talking and sharing that gives you more insight and understanding of one another.

This kind of sharing and getting to know one another on deeper and deeper levels requires some vulnerability from both partners. Sharing your fears, dreams, and insecurities involves some risk, uncertainty, and emotional exposure. This might be deeply uncomfortable for one or both of you. But it is necessary for healthy communication and intimacy in your relationship.

The more you practice being vulnerable, and the more your partner embraces your vulnerabilities in a safe way, the easier it becomes.

We will talk about vulnerability more in a later lesson, but for now, it's important to recognize how valuable it is for you and your partner to work on getting to know each other better every day and to make this a priority in your lives together.

Do you think you already know everything there is to know about your partner? Let's find out in the next worksheet.