

Enrich Your Marriage: Heart Talk

Heart Talk gives you and your spouse the opportunity to talk about your feelings, emotions, fears and longings in order to deepen your understanding of one another. The goal is to improve intimacy but first you need to create a safe space. To do so, follow the three steps of ICU: Identify, Care and Understand.

In the ICU method, there are two roles to ensure safety: a speaker and a listener. One person begins by being the speaker and when they feel understood in the message they are trying to communicate, the speaker and listener switch roles. Keep taking turns until both spouses feel understood. The speaker and listener each have three things to focus on while communicating: (I) identify the feelings, (C) care about the feelings and (U) understand the feelings (see diagram below).

Steps for Heart Talk:

1. Either spouse can initiate “Heart Talk” at any time when either or both of them are experiencing strong emotions (positive or negative). At that point, you can go to your spouse and safely ask, “Do you have time for Heart Talk?” By asking permission, you’re showing respect and creating more safety. If your spouse says yes, move into the ICU.
2. Identify: The speaker starts with this simple phrase: “When *this* happens, I felt *this*.” The key is to focus on the emotion, not stating opinions, judgments or accusations. The role of the listener is just that: to listen. Don’t react with solutions or make a defence.
3. Care: Both the speaker and the listener need to care about the speaker’s heart. If the listener realizes he or she can’t care, it’s time to stop. If you cannot let your spouse’s emotions touch you, you are not in a safe space to participate in Heart Talk.
4. Understand: At this point, the listener will try to summarize what the speaker said by saying, “So what I hear you saying is *this*.” Then you check in with the speaker by asking, “Is that right?” And the speaker will either say yes, or further explain their emotion. Once they feel heard, the listener will ask “Is there more?”
5. Once the speaker is finished, the listener can validate by saying, “Thank you for sharing” or “What you said means so much to me” or “You mean so much to me” or “That makes sense.”
6. Now you can switch roles and let the listener become the speaker and so on until both feel understood.

Speaker		Listener
Identify what I'm feeling: "When <i>this</i> happens, I felt <i>this</i> ."	Identify	Seek to identify what the speaker's heart is trying to say.
Care about my heart.	Care	Care about the speaker's heart. Let their emotion impact you.
Help my spouse understand what I'm feeling.	Understand	Seek to understand your spouse's feelings by summarizing what you heard and asking clarifying questions.
	Validate	"Thank you for sharing."

Tips for the speaker:

- Ask for a time to talk ("Do you have time for a Heart Talk now?")
- Share what you feel, fear and/or long for
- Share information slowly, softly and in bite-size chunks
- Unsure of how to name your emotions? Find a list of feeling words on page 3 that go beyond "mad, sad, glad, etc."

Tips for the listener:

- Don't be a "speaker in waiting"
- Remember understanding doesn't mean agreeing
- Check if you've understood and if there is more
- Validate with a caring statement before switching roles (e.g., "That makes sense. Thanks for telling me.")

Mad	Sad	Glad	Afraid	Confused	Ashamed	Lonely
Bothered	Down	At ease	Uneasy	Curious	Uncomfortable	Out of place
Ruffled	Blue	Secure	Apprehensive	Uncertain	Awkward	Left-out
Irritated	Somber	Comfortable	Careful	Ambivalent	Clumsy	Unheeded
Displeased	Low	Relaxed	Cautious	Doubtful	Self-conscious	Lonesome
Annoyed	Glum	Contented	Hesitant	Unsettled	Disconcerted	Disconnected
Steamed	Lonely	Optimistic	Tense	Hesitant	Chagrined	Remote
Irked	Disappointed	Satisfied	Anxious	Perplexed	Abashed	Invisible
Perturbed	Worn out	Refreshed	Nervous	Puzzled	Embarrassed	Unwelcome
Frustrated	Melancholy	Stimulated	Edgy	Muddled	Flustered	Cut-off
Angry	Downhearted	Pleased	Distressed	Distracted	Sorry	Excluded
Fed up	Unhappy	Warm	Scared	Flustered	Apologetic	Insignificant
Disgusted	Dissatisfied	Snug	Frightened	Jumbled	Ashamed	Ignored
Indignant	Gloomy	Happy	Repulsed	Unfocused	Regretful	Neglected
Ticked off	Mournful	Encouraged	Agitated	Fragmented	Remorseful	Separated
Bristled	Grieved	Tickled	Afraid	Dismayed	Guilty	Removed
Fuming	Depressed	Proud	Shocked	Insecure	Disgusted	Detached
Explosive	Lousy	Cheerful	Alarmed	Dazed	Belittled	Isolated
Enraged	Crushed	Thrilled	Overwhelmed	Bewildered	Humiliated	Unwanted
Irate	Defeated	Delighted	Frantic	Lost	Violated	Rejected
Incensed	Dejected	Joyful	Panic-stricken	Stunned	Dirty	Deserted
Burned	Empty	Elated	Horrificed	Chaotic	Mortified	Outcast
Burned up	Wretched	Exhilarated	Petrified	Torn	Defiled	Abandoned
Outraged	Despairing	Overjoyed	Terrified	Baffled	Devastated	Desolate
Furious	Devastated	Ecstatic	Numb	Dumbfounded	Degraded	Forsaken