

# Respond and Validate FIRST!

*Really great conversation with NO traps!*

Ever start a good conversation with your partner, then out of nowhere it seems like it goes bad?

Guess what? You are not alone.

What is almost certainly missing is a simple **respond and validate**

There are very simple keys to having great conversations that do not escalate, go negative, or just go nowhere. Most couples who have not deliberately worked on their communication styles together get into (at least one of) the traps of MIS-communication:

- **They talk about the event or the “what happened.”** In other words, they talk about who did what, who said what, and the “thing” that happened. This often leads to a lot of blaming, reading each other’s motivations, deciding what they were thinking, and negative perspectives about the partner. Talking about “what happened” side tracks the real issue, the underlying feelings and meaning of the conversation or issue.
- **They talk about “who is right and who is wrong.”** Most issues and problems couples have are really not about “right and wrong.” It is usually about a preference, perspective, opinion or a deeper want, need or desire. When conversations move toward “right and wrong,” it generally leads to criticism of a person’s personality, becomes an attack, or points a finger which comes out as a defect in the other partner.
- **They try to “solve a problem.”** For couples in close, loving relationships, trying to solve problems first as a place to start communication is **misguided!** This heads the conversation (and the relationship) towards polarization; “digging in the heels” and “win-lose” scenarios will often be the result. It becomes me against you, and my way is the right way and yours is wrong or a bad idea.

***“How you talk” will always be more important than “what you talk about.”***

We have said it before: Couples must learn that until both feel their partner *cares for them*, is listening, and is attempting to understand them, solutions do not happen. *Couples get derailed most of the time if they start conversations anywhere except with feeling cared for, and attending to each other’s emotions.*

So what do you do instead?

**Respond and Validate First!** This means when your partner makes a statement, gives an opinion or shares an idea, your next response is not your thoughts, your opinion, your advice or why what they said is invalid! Instead, your **first response** is to **validate** what they said. You find what you can accept that they said, what does make some sense, what you can understand from their perspective, or at least acknowledge what you heard them say. **Why?**

- **Your partner feels validated and understood.**
- **We all want to feel cared for.**
- **Defensiveness and criticism likely doesn't happen.**
- **We listen better.**
- **We can then find solutions.**

**How about an example?** Let's say one partner says: "You know, it really hurt my feelings and embarrassed me tonight when we were at dinner with our friends and you corrected me about the kid's schedules."

**Don't say:** *"I didn't embarrass you." Or "Well what you told them wasn't right."*

**Do say first:** *"Oh, that hurt your feelings; I'm sorry, that wasn't my intent. I can see how you could feel that way. I wanted them to be able to get to the game on time. I will try to be more careful."*

When we answer our partners with our opinion or give advice before we validate what was said, it feels to our partner like we weren't listening, or don't care about what they said; like what we have to say is more important; that their thoughts, ideas and feeling don't matter. Which really feels to our partner like "I don't matter." Which is usually not what we really feel like, and not what we want our partner to feel like.

Right?

So, have *really great* conversations! Integrate the simple **respond and validate first** method, and don't get caught in the mis-communication traps!