

Conscious Loving and Sex, Part 3 – Communication

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In this series of articles, we explore the idea of consciousness as a way to enhance the sexual experience. And, the idea that sexual experience can expand your consciousness, as well. Each article is devoted to a different topic.

Loving Communication:

What is loving communication? It is the communication which happens when all participants:

- Listen well, without judgment or blame
- Create and maintain intimacy by their honesty and openness
- Trust themselves and each other, and are reliable
- Take responsibility for themselves
- Acknowledge, accept and appreciate each other
- Are able to give and receive constructive feedback and criticism
- Have learned how to resolve differences
- Know how to talk about difficult or scary topics

Did we have this behavior modeled for us by our parents and friends? Few of us did. Do we see lots of good role models for loving communication in movies and TV? Very rarely.

It's up to us to learn this for ourselves, which can be challenging, but not impossible. There are some great books out there with lots of suggestions. But if you are having trouble, see your therapist or relationship coach. A skilled professional can do wonders to help you along on the process.

Loving Communication and Sex:

Loving communication contributes strongly and positively to all aspects of relationship, including sex. As a matter of fact, if you have loving communication outside the bedroom, you're much more likely to achieve it inside the bedroom. It works the same in both places.

If you can speak your true feelings to your partner, and hear your partner's true feelings without blame or judgment, you can build a level of trust and understanding many people only dream about.

This is especially true with regard to sex. Intimate conversation can and should start before your first sexual encounter, and continue throughout the entire life of your relationship. Having healthy, honest conversations about sex (and everything else) is important. In order to achieve loving communication about the sexual, you must have good communication about the non-sexual as well. I will cover these topics that are specifically about sexual communication:

- Before You Start Having Sex
- Talking about Sex
- Asking for What you Want During Sex

Listening Well:

An essential part of loving communication is listening. Listening well means really paying attention, listening for feelings as well as meaning, and accepting and acknowledging what you hear. It is especially important to not be judgmental or blaming, because as soon as you move into judgment or blame, your partner feels attacked and will shut down, limiting or ending the conversation. And you don't have to agree to listen well. Acceptance and agreement are two different things.

Try to remember that your partner is human, with good and bad qualities, strengths and weaknesses, dreams and fantasies, likes and dislikes. Listening to your partner can be a great discovery of understanding if you don't make your partner feel wrong or punished for their true essence. So practice creating a safe space in which your partner can be totally honest and open with you.

You can start by repeating back what you have heard, calmly and without interpretation, as close to word-for-word as possible, then ask your partner if that is what they intended to say. If you have misunderstood, listen again, and try again to repeat it back accurately. Make sure that your partner feels heard, understood, and accepted before sharing your feelings and reactions with them.

Listening beyond the words can enhance your communication even more. What this means is to be aware of subtleties such as sounds, body language, facial expression, breathing patterns, eye contact, touch, and so forth. The more you get to know your partner's non-verbal communication style, the easier it is to tell what they are feeling, and when something needs to be said. You can then provide a supportive and accepting environment for the conversation to proceed.

Intimacy, Honesty and Openness:

By intimacy, I mean the state of being in a confidential friendship built on the innermost, essential and intrinsic nature of the partners. The two of you know yourselves very well, you express your true feelings to your partner, and you acknowledge and accept your partner's true feelings. All your feelings, including sexual ones.

Many people who are not familiar or comfortable with conscious relationships might say, "How can I tell my partner everything? There are parts about myself even I don't like or don't want to face. How can my partner face and accept them?"

What you might not realize is that your partner may already be facing them in one way or another, even if you don't express them verbally. For example, if you are repressing anger rather than expressing it, the anger will come out at inappropriate times and in inappropriate ways. For example, you may beat the children or the dog when they are completely innocent, or lash out verbally at someone for accidentally getting in your way. In the long run, it's better to speak them than to keep them buried.

If you can express both your sexual and non-sexual needs, desires, fantasies, and feelings to your partner, and if your partner can hear them without judgment or blame, then you can build the most solid of relationships, both inside and outside the bedroom.

In my opinion, being completely honest and open from the beginning of a relationship is the most wonderful way you can begin. Although you may fear that your partner will find something about you to dislike, and therefore go away, you might as well find

out now, rather than five years and two kids later! Believe me, the things you try to hide will not stay hidden forever!

If you are in a long-term relationship and you have withheld the truth, or have been telling lies, then it is much harder to shift to honesty and openness. It may require a therapist or relationship coach to help you get started, because your partner may have trouble hearing the truth after so long. But it's important to begin now.

For some people, and I have spent time in this group, really getting in touch with your own feelings can be a challenge. For years, it was easier for me to shut down, clam up, and drink or watch TV instead of getting in touch with my true feelings. With practice, however, it is getting easier and easier. And the continual expression of my feelings to my sweet wife, and her acceptance of me as I truly am, continues to support this process. Not that it is always easy. I have read several psychology self-help books that helped, and seeing a couple of therapists was very productive. Sometimes I still have to make an extra effort to get in touch with my feelings and coax them out!

I suggest having regular talks, where each partner shares any "withholds" that may have built up. Withholds are things that you haven't said to each other, for a variety of reasons, including fear, anger, embarrassment, confusion, stress, or lack of clarity. Each partner gives the other a safe, accepting, supportive, friendly ear. You can use a key phrase to begin this, such as "I realize that I have a withhold..." or "Do you feel you are withholding anything that you'd like to share?"

Receiving a withhold can be challenging. Sometimes your partner may be withholding specifically because they know the topic might hurt or upset you. The most important thing is to try to suspend or delay your reaction, even if the withhold is shocking or disturbing. You need to let your partner tell you the whole withhold, breathe deeply, and understand that they are telling you the truth as they see it. Arguing with their truth is not productive. Understanding it is.

Trust and Reliability:

What takes years to build, but can be destroyed in a few seconds? What is MUCH more difficult to build a second time, if it has been weakened or damaged? TRUST.

A question I hear often is "How can I make him or her trust me again?" The answer is, "You can't. All you can do is BE TRUSTABLE and HOPE they will be willing to trust you again." Trust, once lost, is very difficult to gain again.

Why is trust necessary in a sexual relationship? Because if your partner cannot trust you, he or she cannot relax with you. Reaching the heights of sexual ecstasy requires complete abandonment of the ego. It requires that you go somewhere with your partner that people seldom go in today's world. When you go to this incredible place, you become as vulnerable as you can ever be. You must trust your partner before you are willing to go there.

You can't build real trust with words alone. Real trust is earned over time, lots of time, by actions that align with words. This means you have to be honest and reliable. If you say one thing and do another, someone will find out. If someone finds out, then your partner is likely to find out also. And you can't have an ecstatic sex life with a partner who doesn't trust you.

If you have complete and undivided integrity, uprightness of character, and you are reliable, then trust will build. This doesn't mean ACTING like you're reliable. It means BEING reliable. If you say you'll do something, DO IT. If you say you won't do something, DON'T DO IT!

Responsibility:

Taking responsibility for your life is a big step in achieving happiness, both sexually and non-sexually. This means avoiding the victim position, and taking responsibility for your part in whatever is happening.

I was once a champion at being the victim. Life seemed unfair. It felt to me as if everyone was out to take advantage of me. I blamed everything on someone else. There was a warped sense of

superiority in this. If everything was someone else's fault, then it was never my fault!

However, if you get stuck in this victim position, you are destined for misery. No matter what you do, you feel that others are constantly bullying you. No fun!

How do you change this? By starting to wonder, "What have I been doing to contribute to this situation?" And guess what! You can always find something you have done, or haven't done, that helped to set up or further the problem. Once you see how you have contributed, then you can begin to change it. This gives you power! Suddenly, you get more control over your life.

What if someone is abusing you? That's not your responsibility, is it? Well, when you take responsibility for your part, you can see that you have the power to change it. For example, you might decide to leave, instead of stick around.

What if your relationships always seem to turn out badly? First, you have to see the pattern... that requires honesty and insight. You can begin to do this by looking back over your past relationships, to find similarities that point to elements in YOURSELF. Things like the kinds of partners you choose, the way you treat them, your attitudes and expectations about the relationship, and so forth. When you take full responsibility, you get to learn how to make things different... how to break the patterns that are making your life unpleasant.

Acknowledgment, Acceptance, and Appreciation:

Acknowledgment means that you both hear your partner's truth, and you express to them that you hear and understand it. Acceptance is being able to accept your partner AS THEY ARE, without feeling the need to change them. Appreciation is expressing to your partner that you truly like them, and are glad that they are in your life.

My friend, Jonathan Robinson, wrote a wonderful book called Communication Miracles for Couples (1997, Conari Press), which I think should be required reading for every high school student. His

insight into what people need and want were transformational for me. Here is what he has to say about acknowledgment, acceptance, and appreciation:

"In order to get the most out of your car, it helps to know what it needs to operate effectively. You need to know what fuel and oil it uses, and how to get things fixed when it's not running right. The same is true for human beings. Luckily, at our core, all human beings are pretty much the same. We all want the three As: acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance. In fact, the three As are like high-octane gasoline that makes the human personality run. They are the essential ingredients that convey love from one person to another. Without them, we become defensive and refuse to let anyone in. If you want to have a great relationship, you will first have to satisfy your partner's needs for acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance. And the more effectively you can help him feel loved, the more loving he will be toward you."

It is really true that if you are generous, without expecting in return, people will want to give more to you. This is true in all aspects of your life. You can give the three As to anyone as a gift.

In sex, think of the three As as foreplay. Giving the three As regularly and often will keep your partner more receptive and desirous of sex. Foreplay like this starts DAYS ahead! But the rewards are definitely worth it!

How to Give and Receive Feedback and Criticism:

Receiving criticism can be very difficult. Our friend, Warren Farrell, Ph.D., in his excellent book Women Can't Hear What Men Don't Say, gives excellent explanations about criticism. I'll let him speak on this topic, as he does it so well.

His article "Why Being Criticized Feels Like Being Killed" helps us to understand how hard it is to receive criticism, and gives some motivation for us to give criticism carefully and successfully.

Another of his articles, "Five Rules of the Game", gives suggestions about how to safely give feedback to your partner.

And when you are on the receiving end of feedback or criticism, remember something very important: There is always at least a little bit of accuracy in every criticism. If you can begin to wonder WHY you are hearing the criticism, and look honestly at what you are doing to invoke it, you will get some really important nuggets of truth. Look within criticism for things you'd like to change about yourself, and use them as motivators to make the changes.

How to Resolve Differences:

Dealing with conflict is an especially important part of loving communication. If you cannot talk about your differences, and have way to deal with conflict, your communication will wither and die.

Our friends Gay and Katie Hendricks, in their fabulous book Conscious Loving – The Journey to Co-Commitment, talk about the Co-Committed Problem-Solving Process:

The process that we have developed is organized around seven questions. Each question illuminates a specific area in which people in relationships typically get stuck. Very seldom do all the questions have to be used to solve a problem. Each of the questions is simple but holds unlimited possibilities. You can ask any of the questions of hundreds of times and get new and productive results each time.

In using the questions below to resolve relationship issues, focus more on the question than on the answer. The power of a question lies not so much in the answer but in the state of consciousness that it opens up. By asking a question, you let go of thinking you know the answer. The act of letting go is as important as the answer. So many problems in relating to each other come from getting stuck in our programs, thinking we know the way it is. If you can sincerely ask a question, you open up space in which a new solution can emerge.

The Questions:

1. How do I feel?
2. What do I want?
3. How is the past coloring my present?
4. What am I getting out of staying stock?

5. What do I need to say?
6. What agreements have I broken?
7. How can I be of service?

They go on to describe each of the questions in detail, and give an example sexual relationship problem that was solved by using all of them. If you get a chance, read this entire book. It is a gold mine of great ideas and suggestions!

How to Talk about Difficult or Scary Topics:

If you have something that's difficult or scary to say, it's important to talk at a carefully chosen time. Here are some guidelines for times to avoid:

- When you are in public
- When either of you are pressured or stressed
- When you are making love
- When you are arguing
- When you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol

As you are building your confidence and skill in loving communication, try to initiate deep conversations:

- When you are relaxed, well-fed, and well-rested
- When you are aware of your feelings, and can share them
- When you have thought about what you want to say
- When you are in a quiet, private space with sufficient time

Another good idea is to think in advance about what you want to say, and what your expectations are. Being clear about what you want and what you'd like the outcome to be will be helpful to knowing what to say. You can even make notes, to help you get clearer. I recommend NOT using these notes during the discussion, but they will help you prepare.

Before You Start Having Sex:

Even though most people are using their lips for kissing, not talking, at the beginning stage of relationship, there are important

things to discuss before you are physically intimate, such as birth control, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and your values, beliefs, and expectations.

Asking your partner whether or not, and when, they have been tested for STDs is very important. You don't want to expose yourself to the inconvenience, discomfort, and danger of STD's. It is possible that your partner may not be truthful about this, but hopefully before you have sex, you know your partner well enough to trust the answer.

If you have not been tested for STDs, it is a good idea to be tested regularly as long as you are sexually active. Remember that the HIV (or AIDS) virus may not show up in a test for up to six months after exposure. Be honest and open with your potential partner about the results of your testing. Your partner deserves to know the truth BEFORE you have sex.

Another thing to agree on is how you will deal with birth control. This should not be unspoken, and left to chance. If you both contribute to the solution, it can be more effective, less embarrassing, and something you can participate in together.

Of course, it's perfectly OK to talk about other sexual issues, concerns, ideas, likes and dislikes before you have sex for the first time!

Talking about Sex:

Being able to talk openly, honestly, and gently about sex can increase your closeness and intimacy with your partner, and make sexual ecstasy more achievable. I'd like to share a game with you which I learned from Jonathan Robinson and Dr. Suzanne Rapley's video entitled Intimacy and Sexual Ecstasy*. The game is called "The Naked Truth":

You sit together with your partner, face-to-face, in a romantic setting. Close your eyes, hold hands, and take a couple of minutes to remember a time when you felt totally in love with your partner. Picture that time in your mind. Re-experience where you were and

what was being said. Remember what it felt like to be so totally in love. Take your time, and then when you feel ready, open your eyes.

Then, each of you take turns expressing one specific thing your lover does, that you especially enjoy. When this is done, each take turns telling your partner one specific thing that he or she does in bed, that you don't particularly care for. If something your partner says is particularly hard for you to listen to, be careful not to respond; instead, breathe deeply, and let the emotions pass before you proceed with your next statement.

Alternate back and forth, each giving "likes" and then each giving "dislikes." Decide beforehand how many rounds, and you may want to openly discuss your responses once the structured part of the game is completed.

The more you practice sexual communication like this, the easier it will be to do it in an unstructured way, whenever the need arises.

Asking for What You Want During Sex:

Don't expect your partner to be a mind reader! It's OK to ask for what you want. In fact, it's essential to learn how. Nothing is more sensitive or vulnerable than a person's self-image regarding their sexuality. Many people, therefore, are afraid to ask for what they want, for fear of hurting their partner's feelings. Here's a simple process you can try which works well for many:

1. Appreciate what he or she is doing. (Don't complain, even if it doesn't feel good at the moment. Just appreciate the INTENTION, which hopefully is to please you.) You can say something like, "Thank you for the attention to my ear, I really appreciate it!" or "I've really been enjoying the neck rub!"
2. Ask for what you want. Be specific. You can say something like, "Would you mind rubbing my feet for a little while?" or "Would you slow down a little bit?" or "Would you gently scratch my skin with your fingernails?"
3. Say "Thank you, that feels wonderful." This part is really important. If your partner hears you say how great it feels,

he/she will be even more likely to want to please you with your next request, and feel safer making requests themselves.

In fact, this "Appreciate, Ask, and Thank" method works wonders in a lot of other areas besides sex and physical contact. Give it a try... you will be amazed.

Conclusion:

Talking openly and honestly with your partner about all topics, both sexual and non-sexual, will deepen your connection, strengthen your trust, solidify your relationship, and improve your sex life. I hope this article has given you some good ideas. Please put any questions or comments in our forum Conscious Loving and Sex.

Until next time,
William