

# **Chat' bout - Importance of Couple Communication on Reproductive Health Matters**

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# Objective

- To provide participants with information to help couples communicate more effectively on issues related to reproductive health.

# Content

- Definition of couple communication
- Importance of couple communication
- Outcomes
- How to help

# Introduction

- Couple, or spousal, communication can be a crucial step toward increasing men's participation in reproductive health . Since men, as well as women, play key roles in reproductive health, communication is necessary for making responsible, healthy decisions.

# Definition

- In Couple Communication, partners learn how to talk and listen to each other so that they can make better decisions, resolve conflicts, and control anger. Learning how to talk and listen to each other can be gained through pre-marital preparation, education, or counselling. These interpersonal tools help couples to build a more satisfying, fulfilling, and mutually respectful relationship.

# Importance of Couple Communication in Reproductive Health Matters

- Helps couples articulate their ideas, thoughts, attitudes and feelings about family planning and reproductive health, with each other.
- Helps couples share responsibility for reproductive health.
- Allows couples to express their concerns about reproductive health issues, such as fears about unplanned pregnancies or STIs.

# The Importance of Couple Communication

- It can encourage shared decision-making and more equitable gender roles.

# Obstacles to Couple Communication

A complex web of social and cultural factors impede such discussions .

- In many societies sex is a taboo subject for men and women to discuss.
- Also, men and women are often afraid of rejection by a sex partner, especially at the beginning of a relationship. Consequently, they may not bring up uncomfortable issues, such as sexual history or use of contraception .

# How Do You Start?

- Find the right time and place to open discussion.
- Explore your feelings and make a commitment to communicate in spite of anxiety.

# **Aim for communication that is:**

- Open
- Honest
- Clear
- Specific
- Respectful
- “Win-win” solution

# **When talking about feelings, wants and needs, it is important to use “I” statements:**

- I feel....
- I would prefer
- I like when you
- I want...
- I need.....

# Tips that can improve your listening skills

- Keep your mind on what your partner is saying, rather than how you will respond.
- Face your partner and make eye contact
- Hear your partner out. Don't interrupt.
- Ask questions if there's something you don't understand.

# Tips that can improve your listening skills

- When your partner finishes speaking, check to see whether you have got the message she intended. Try saying something like “So what you are saying is...” and then listen to her response.

# Outcomes of Family Planning Communication for Couples

1. Better control over family size.
2. More attention for each other/children.
3. More satisfying sexual relationship.

# Outcomes of Couple Communication

- Pro: men and women who discuss family planning are more likely to use contraception, to use it effectively, and to have fewer children.
- Con: when men and women do not know their partners' fertility desires, attitudes about family planning, or contraceptive preferences, the consequences can include unintended pregnancies, transmission of STIs, gender-based violence and unsafe abortions .

# How to Improve Communication about FP

1. Upgrade skills/knowledge to enable passing on/sharing of information.
2. Respect each other.
3. Support each other in related health matters.

# How to Improve Communication about FP

4. Take part in discussions on all family planning methods.
5. Use services provided for men at the health facilities.

# **Be Supportive of Women's Contraceptive Choices**

- Support your partner's contraceptive choice.
- Help your partners to receive products and reproductive health services when needed.
- Provide the resources needed to obtain these services.

# **Be Supportive of Women's Contraceptive Choices**

- Remind your partner to use the method chosen.

# **Increase Communication Between Partners.**

- When reproductive health decisions are taken jointly (i.e. by both partners), these decisions are more likely to be implemented and followed through.

# **Increase Communication Between Partners (cont'd)**

- Some women become pregnant only because they believe their partners want more children. But this may not always be true.

# Conclusion

Communication plays a very important role in the choice of family planning and reproductive health behaviour. Effective communication empowers people to seek what is best for their health, and also includes decisions on whether to control their family size and/or whether to use a family planning method.

Source: "Couple Communication" Population Reports, Volume 46 number 2, The John Hopkins School of Public Health, 1998.