



COUPLE TALK

Communicating with Your Partner

Goal Setting in Marriage

Cindy Bond-Zielinski, M.S., FCS Ext. Agent

What are your marital goals? How similar are your and your spouse's goals for the marriage? How do you support each other in the achievement of individual and marital goals? How similar are you in setting priorities based on goals and values? Is your behavior consistent with your goals?

Setting goals in a marriage is as important as setting personal and professional goals. Begin setting goals for your marriage by asking yourself, "What do you want out of your marriage?" and "What do you want your marriage to look like in the future?" It's important to establish with your partner immediate goals (one month to one year), short-term goals (one to three years), and long-term goals (three to five years). How can you establish and achieve your marital goals?

Realize

Realize that both partners in the relationship have desires and expectations for themselves and the marriage. According to Dr. David Olson, co-author of *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths*, oftentimes partners are not aware of each others' goals and this can be misinterpreted as a lack of support that can eventually result in conflict. For example, if one partner would like to have dinner out together (without the children) at least once a month but it is an unstated desire, it can become an unmet expectation. This can result in resentment and frustration over time, which can give way to anger and bitterness. Sitting down together to talk about your goals brings the desires in someone's thoughts to the other person's ears.

Evaluate

Evaluate your personal, professional, and marital goals to see if they are actually in your and the marriage's best interest. When evaluating goals ask: Why is this important to me/us? What will happen to me/us if this goal is met? How will this improve the

marriage? This step will help to prioritize your goals and revise or formulate new ones.

State

Formally state the goals of the marriage. Write them down and post them where they can be seen and evaluated continuously. Goals should be stated in clear measurable sentences. One of the goals in a marriage may be to communicate with each other. Instead of stating, "Our goal is to communicate with each other" (which is too general) state "We will spend at least 20 minutes each night alone talking about our day." The second goal is very specific about how communication is going to be improved and it is also a realistic expectation. Setting a goal of two hours of talking may not be a realistic expectation for many marriages, but 20 minutes is a more achievable goal.

Defining and achieving goals is not always easy. Expect to come across obstacles, delays, and disappointments as you work towards fulfilling your marital goals. Set aside time on a regular basis (e.g., once a year during your anniversary) to re-evaluate your goals. Remember, setting goals in a marriage allows partners to work together for the betterment of their marriage. It allows each partner to know what the other wants so the couple knows the direction that their marriage is heading towards.



ADDED NOTE

When establishing your goals remember the **SMART** technique:

Specific—goals must be specific in detail

Measurable—goals must be measurable in quantity, time, cost

Achievable—goals must be achievable within a realistic time scale

Relevant—goals must be relevant

Time scales—goals must have a timeline to be finished

