

# Talk Time Tips & Traps

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*The following are some “Talk Time Tips” and “Talk Time Traps” to use while communicating during your daily or weekly “Talk Time,” so that you both can feel seen and heard...especially when you may disagree.*

## Set a “Talk Time”

To make sure you have regular talk time in your marriage you may need to schedule it at least once a week or preferably each night to talk about your day and/or any issues that arise. This can be even just 15 mins, and it may work best after kids are in bed. Many couples find it helpful to keep a shared note listing the issues/topics they want to address, especially so they don't forget what items they wanted to bring up.

## Separated “Talk Times”

In the beginning, many couples find it necessary for only one of them to be the “speaker” at a time during the “talk time” session especially while they both develop the ability to actively listen instead of automatically responding or reacting. (See the “talk time traps” we discuss below.)

Only one of you (the "speaker") shares their thoughts/feelings while the "listener" just listens, reflects back, and validates what they are hearing to be sure they understand the speaker correctly and that the speaker feels heard. Then, the next night you switch roles, so the other person gets to be the “speaker” while the other just listens. The speaker can either respond to the conversation of the previous night and/or address anything else they'd like to discuss.

This separated “talk time” process helps make it easier for both spouses to develop the skill of active listening instead of the automatic reacting and responding that most of us default to doing. If you don't feel like you need to keep the conversation to only one of you speaking per talk time, and you feel that both of you are able to take turns listening and speaking during the same talk time session without being reactive, then that's great! Be sure the “listener” only listens or does these "talk time tips" below:

## “Talk Time Tips”

1. **Listen...**
2. **Reflect** – “I hear you saying...”
3. **Validate** – “It makes sense that you feel...” (You're just looking at it from their perspective...NOT yours!)
4. **Empathize** – “I imagine you feel... about that?” or “I imagine that feels....”)

The "listener" can ask questions if it still fits into listening/reflecting and trying to understand your spouse better. Be mindful that questions can often turn into one of the “talk time traps” below if you aren't aware of the thoughts and feelings behind your questions. Be sure you don't get off track with any of the “talk time traps” below.

Remember the, [“It's Not About The Nail”](#) video, which provides a humorous illustration of what it looks like to just listen, reflect, validate, and empathize (...and how hard it can be!) instead of doing one of the "talk time traps" below.

## Don't Talk If You're NOT at Neutral!

An important guideline for any meaningful discussions is to only speak if you are both “at neutral” emotionally. If either of you is not at neutral, you will simply be doing damage to your relationship—because your frontal context is no longer helping you regulate your emotions.

You can remove yourself from any conversations where either of you is not at “neutral” emotionally by simply saying, “Hey, I’m not at neutral, so we’ll have to come back to this later,” then immediately leave without further discussion. Keep in mind this is a statement you are making—NOT a question you’re asking!

## “Talk Time” with Your Therapist

If during your “talk time” you struggle to restrain the urge to automatically react with any of the following “talk time traps” you may want to keep a separate list of issues to save for your next counseling session where your therapist can help you both with the active listening. Learning to do this active listening process is much easier with a helpful mediator/therapist.

A good counselor wants to work herself/himself out of a job by helping you learn to communicate effectively on your own through active listening. Ultimately, both of you want to be able to resolve conflicts yourself without the help of an external source. The goal is to get you both to be able to do challenging discussions using only a healthy active-listening framework.

An underlying helper to continuously clear out your inner “garbage” is to do this “[process writing](#)” as often as you can until you simply don’t have so much stuff that gets triggered by your spouse, others, and just life itself. Counseling is also going to help you with this cleaning out process.

## “Talk Time Traps”

The following “talk time traps” are what NOT to do during your “talk time” sessions while “listening” to the other person:

1. **Resist** what you’re hearing
2. **Discount** what you're hearing
3. **Defend** yourself against what you’re hearing
4. **Explain** how they have it wrong
5. **Justify** yourself
6. **Try to Fix** something
7. **Take it personally**...make the discussion about you and how you feel instead of letting it be about the other's perspective, which are their legitimate thoughts and feelings. In that moment, as the listener, it's NOT about you!!

Until this active listening "talk time" becomes easy for you both to do while managing your own emotions and not reacting, you may want to save these conversations for you both and your therapist during your next counseling session where they can help you practice and develop these skills until you become an expert!