

**Getting what you want starts with *knowing what you want*.**

Sounds obvious, right? It isn't! Many of us waste months or even years on jobs, friendships, and relationships that aren't right for us, just because we haven't been honest with ourselves about what we're looking for. Once you get clear on your expectations, it's about a million times easier to stand by them and express them to others.

**What is your dating/relationship purpose?**

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**What do you need/want to give in a relationship?**

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**What do you absolutely need to get?**

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**What are your deal-breakers?**

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**Now that you know *what you want*, let's begin the business of *how* to communicate those desires.**

It's important to communicate these things with love and candor and clarity.

It might sound crazy but you have a responsibility to yourself + your partner to be clear about your needs and expectations. No one else, not even your partner, can read your mind and know what you need **IN TERMS OF** support, intimate contact, time alone, domestic order, independence, sex, love, or financial security.

So how do you communicate your needs in a way that doesn't create defensiveness + anger? And offers the best chance of your partner being willing to listen and fulfill that need?

**:: If expressing your needs is something you really struggle with** write out your “script” beforehand. You don’t have to read it to your partner, but putting down your thoughts on paper can help you feel prepared and in the heat of the moment, you WON’T fall into old traps of passiveness or aggressiveness.

**:: Start the conversation by offering a straightforward description** of the situation you want to address. Leave out analysis, interpretation + accusatory language – try to make it as specific, impersonal + objective as possible.

**:: Your feelings:** When you tell your partner what you’re feeling, be careful not to explode in a vague, accusatory way (“*I’m angry and it’s your fault!*”) It might feel cathartic, but (shockingly enough) IT isn’t actually productive. To remain in ‘problem-solving discussion’ territory, hone in on the specifics as much as possible.

When you say “angry,” do you mean angry and stressed, or angry and irritated? Or are you really more confused or disappointed? The more specific descriptors you can use to describe how you’re feeling, the better.

**:: Duration.** How long have you been feeling this way?

**:: Causes + naming calling:** Don’t name-call, no matter how tempting, even if their actions really have been the catalyst. Blame creates defensiveness, not communication. Try to communicate the cause of your feelings in the form of their impersonal context and describe your own feelings rather than those of the other person.

**Formula:** When “X” occurs, it makes me feel “Y” and I’d really like to see “Z” happen.

**:: Request For A Behavior Change.** Ask for a change in behavior only - don’t ask for a change in values, attitudes, desires, motivations, or feelings. These characteristics are very hard to change. It’s like asking someone to be taller or more intelligent.

**Make a request where they can modify a specific, observable behavior.**

- *I want the apartment to be neater. I would really like it if you could put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher + close the drawers after you take stuff out of them.*
- *I want you to be less critical of me. I would appreciate it if you didn't make jokes about me being out of work in front of your parents.*
- *I want you to be more loving. It would mean a lot to me if you gave me a kiss when I came home from work and asked me how my day was.*

## *Other Things* to Keep in Mind

**Keep your tone as calm and level as possible.**

**Pick a time when your partner can give you their full attention.**

**Don't feel like having to ask for something makes it less valuable.**

It's easy to fall into the trap of believing that your partner should know what you need without you having to say anything – that if they really loved you and knew you, or weren't so selfish, they would just naturally do it. You might then feel that a change in their behavior is somehow less “real” or valuable if you had to ask for it.

But HUMAN BEINGS, even those in the closest of relationships, think and see the world differently. Something may seem obvious to you, but simply not occur to them – not because of some character defect or lack of love — but because they are simply a different person. Instead of seeing their inability to anticipate your needs on their own as a flaw, accept your differences. And instead of seeing behavior changes you directly asked for as less valuable, appreciate the way they're willing to meet that need.

**Communicating is a two-way street.**

Encourage your partner to make THEIR needs known as well, and do your best to listen to, understand, and try to meet those needs when you can.

**You have a right to ask, but that doesn't mean your needs will always be met.**

Your partner and kids have needs too, and their needs may conflict with yours. Making your needs known is not about issuing an ultimatum, but about open communication, compromise, and cooperation.

**If your partner is unwilling to compromise or cooperate with you in any way, you have a choice in how to proceed. You can:**

- Try to put this refusal in perspective with all the good things THEY DO offer. Is the issue such a big deal in the larger picture? If not, you express your disappointment + work to understand why you can't meet on this issue, but ultimately accept his position.
- Utilize a self-care card. Keep a “self-care card” in mind when possible in case your partner can't or won't meet your needs. For example, if you want to pursue more independent interests, but your partner doesn't give any ground, you might pay for and enroll in a weekly class you want to take anyway.
- If an issue is too important to you to simply accept a “No,” and/or if this refusal to meet your needs is a consistent pattern, in which you're always being walked over while giving a lot in return, you may need to end the relationship.