What To Do When You Don't Feel Heard In Your Relationship

By Lianne Avila, Marriage & Family Therapist  MFT 41507
What To Do When you Don’t Feel Heard In Your Relationship

I have worked with many couples in my practice. Most of the time when a couple comes into therapy, they want help with communication. I’m sure you have heard the key to a good relationship is good communication. This is partly true. The other part to a good relationship is being a good listener.

I know it is frustrating when you feel your partner isn’t listening to you. You may feel like your partner is putting work or the children first. What’s really most important in a relationship is that your partner feels first. This is how your partner knows that you have their back, no matter what.

When I hear the complaint, “I don’t feel heard” I can’t help but wonder, what your part is in this problem? This is actually more complex than you think. You learn a lot about relationships from your family of origin. You also learn from past relationships. This can make it difficult, because your expectations can be based from the past.

Nevertheless, when you don’t feel heard in your relationship you feel hurt and stressed out. No one likes this feeling.

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Here Are 4 Strategies To Help You Reconnect With Your Partner

• **#1- Tone and body language.** I’m sure by now you’ve heard the saying, it’s not what you say it’s how you say it. This really is true. I want you to stop and do a rewind of your relationship. What has your tone and body language been like?

• **#2 - Soften your startup.** It’s important to start the conversation gently. AKA, complain without blame. You don’t want to criticize. Criticism often uses words like, always and never. You also attack your partner’s character. When you do this, it puts your partner on the defense.

Instead of starting the conversation with a “you” statement, start the conversation with an “I” statement. Start by describing the situation nonjudgmentally. Then, express how you are feeling about the situation.

And, lastly ask for what you need. For example, “I feel left out when you come home and don’t talk about your day.” “I need you to tell me the details for your day, and ask about the details of my day.” Make sure that you talk clearly about what you need, in positive terms.

If after you have the conversation, you notice your partner doing what you asked for, make sure to tell you partner that you appreciate it. For example, if you were upset that your partner wasn’t helping with the laundry and he does after the conversation, thank him and let him know how much you appreciate it. Especially after he has worked all day.

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- **#3 - What happened to touch?** When was the last time you touched your partner with affection? And not because you had to, but because you wanted to. As human beings, we need to be touched.

  Unfortunately, our culture is getting away from this. But, this doesn’t mean that you have to. Remember, playful touch. You would just rub up against your partner in the kitchen for no reason. Holding hands, just because. Kissing when you left for the day, and when you reunited at the end of the day.

  All those simple pleasures, help keep you and your partner connected emotionally.

- **#4 - What happened to YOU in this relationship?** I have seen this a lot in my practice. After being in a relationship for a while, you put yourself last. You put everyone else’s needs first. This can lead to feeling burnt out. After a while, you will begin to resent your friends and family. I want you to come up with a list for seven days of self-care. There is an example of how to do this on the next page.

  How do you let your partner know that you have something you would like to talk about? How often do you yell at your partner? Or, is it the opposite, and you aren’t speaking to your partner?

  I have been trained to use “The Gottman Method for Couples”. This method comes with over four decades of research. What they found is, the way you start a conflict discussion predicts how it will end. You also set a tone, for future conversations about the same topic. I suggest using gentle start up.
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This starts with the tone that you use. This means no yelling. You want to treat your partner with respect and understanding. When you are having an important conversation, make sure it’s just the two of you. You need to shut off all electronic gadgets.

This means you are genuinely interested in what your partner has to say. Make sure to make eye contact. Have an open mind, and stay focused on the conversation.

Here is an example of 7 days of self-care:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>10 minutes of meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>10 minute walk in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Drink a healthy smoothie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Deep condition your hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Get a massage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Have coffee with a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Pray for 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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You also want to make sure that you are getting plenty of rest, eating nutrient rich foods, and getting plenty of exercise. Keep in touch with friends and family. You don’t want to isolate.

Start with one of these strategies today. By doing this you are starting to make an investment in your relationship.

If you find that this is not enough, please call me at (650) 892-0357 or email me at Lianne@LessonsforLove.com and we can set up a private time to talk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

~Lianne

Lianne Avila, MFT is a marriage and family therapist in San Mateo, CA. She has worked with couples and families for 17 years. Please reach out to her today if you need help making your relationship work.