

Exercise: Intentional Conversations

Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC

PART 1: Daily Conversations

EVERY DAY, I want you to have a conversation about your day. This conversation should be at least 5 minutes long, but it can be longer if you want. It's important to keep in mind that while the other person is talking, *listen* to them. Even ask questions, if you want! You can either check in each day to find out when is a good time to do this, or come up with a standard/scheduled daily time that is the same each day. And when you talk, here are the things I want you to share with each other. (Do all of them.)

1. Talk about the **best thing** that happened to you today.
2. Talk about the **worst thing** that happened to you today.
3. Talk about **something new** you encountered today (a new idea, a new person, a new situation, a new object, a new *anything*).

"I don't know" is not an acceptable answer. Every day, you can come up with an answer to these questions. Of course, some days (maybe most days), your answers won't be super exciting or interesting. That's okay. Maybe one day the "new" thing is meeting somebody famous, but on a more typical day maybe it's just something you heard on the radio. (If you find that you struggle with coming up with anything new, then you may need to do something different: read a new book; research an interesting topic; follow the news; join an online discussion group; take on a new challenge/project, etc.). Talk about these things, whatever they are. And feel free to ask each other questions!

PART 2: Weekly Triple-A Conversations

Pick ONE DAY A WEEK, perhaps on the weekend, when your normal conversation about your day is replaced by a conversation about your relationship. The list below is your guide. One person should start and talk about all 3 things and then the other person should do the same. Feel free to give positive feedback to each other. This is a time for honest expression and genuine listening. I don't care how satisfying or disappointing your week has been, use this time to focus on the positive and avoid criticism.

1. **Appreciate:** Talk about one specific thing you appreciate about your spouse. Try to talk about something from the past week--something he/she did or said that was positive to you. (That means you should be attentive during the week, mindful of the good things coming from your spouse.)

When you do this for the first time, ask this question of each other: What are the things you most want to be appreciated for? Each week, try to especially focus on communicating appreciation about those things.

2. **Assess:** Talk about how well you think you did this past week in your attempts to "move toward with love and truth." Talk about ways you worked at getting it right, but also be honest about ways you didn't do so well. Evaluate yourself on how you did in following up on the #3 question (below) that you asked last week. If you need to, say your sorry and ask for forgiveness. Confirm your commitment to learning to love better.

3. **Ask:** "Tell me one thing I can work on this next week that would help you feel good about us?"
 - *To the person being asked:* When your spouse asks this question, don't pick a task from the top of your list... not at first, at least. If certain issues have been a source of conflict recently, maybe save those for later, once you have built a bit more trust in each other. Avoid things that you know will likely trigger a defensive response. But be honest; give an answer that does matter to you.
 - *To the person asking:* Be prepared to listen without being defensive. Commit to working toward giving what they ask. The point of this is to find out what you're not doing already, so the things your spouse asks for will not always be things that are natural/easy for you to do. Do your best to guard against moving away or moving against your spouse, and attempt to give a "moving toward" reaction.