



MARRIAGE SURVIVAL™

Leader Guide Lesson #2

Building Strong Communication

Slide 1



Communication is the foundation of healthy relationships. Good communication skills are important for every aspect of our lives. This presentation will help you to improve your communication skills which will help you to improve your relationships with others.

Slide 2



Healthy families build healthy communities (Adler-Baeder, et al., 2007). Healthy families have strong communication skills (University of Missouri Extension, n.d.). Communication is an important aspect of human life that helps human beings connect with each other as individuals and as groups.

References

Adler-Baeder, F., Shirer, K., & Bradford, A. (2007.) What's love got to do with it? The role of healthy couple relationships. *The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues*, 12 (1).
<https://www.theforumjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Whats-love-got-to-do.pdf>

University of Missouri Extension (n.d.) *Building strong families: Challenges and choices curriculum*. University of Missouri Extension.

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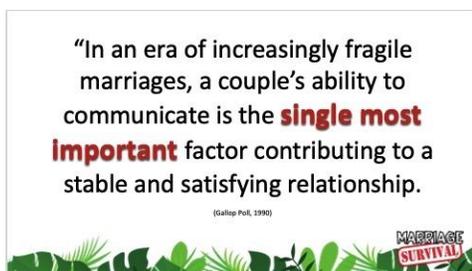


Communication requires both speaking and listening. Everyone has different perceptions of the world based on their unique life experiences. Being aware of how these experiences effect our interpretation and making efforts to counteract these filters as we communicate with others can help us to avoid misunderstandings in relationships (Markman, et al., 2010).

Reference

Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2010). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.

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Many couples are not very good at communicating. Couples who are able to openly express their feelings in an emotionally safe environment are generally most successful at maintaining healthy communication patterns. Typically, these couples deal with situations as they arise and avoid burying frustrations.

“Good communication is an important part of all relationships and is an essential part of any healthy partnership. All relationships have ups and downs, but a healthy communication style can make it easier to deal with conflict and build a stronger and healthier partnership” (Department of Health & Human Services, 2019).

References

Department of Health & Human Services (2019). *Relationships and communication*. State of Victoria.
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/relationships-and-communication>

Gallup Poll. (1990). *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1989*. Scholarly Resources Inc.

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Effective communication is the key for any relationship to be happy and successful. In fact, studies show that communication has a major impact on the success of relationships and marriages (Markman, et al., 2010).

In general, successful communicators are made, not born. Becoming a successful communicator generally involves learning how to effectively communicate and improving on these skills. The key elements of the communication process can help you avoid miscommunication and enhance your chances of having a happy relationship.

Instructor's Note: Use Handout #5: Communication is the Key.

References

Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2010). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.

Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J. & Whitton, S. W. (2002). Communication, conflict, and commitment: Insights on the foundations of relationship success from a national survey. *Family Process, 41*: 659–675. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2002.00659.x

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Often times we think we know what someone meant, when we really don't. How about these misconceptions?

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What She HEARD...
 "Don't you think you should clean the house, tend the kids, and go to work?"



What He SAID:
 "Are you feeling better dear?"

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Communication is a two-part process where information is provided clearly and is received accurately without defensiveness (Markman, et al., 2010).

Communication is the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings (Mackler, 2018).

References

Mackler, C. (2018, March 22). *5 easy ways to communicate better in your relationship*. One Love Foundation. <https://www.joinonelove.org/learn/5-easy-ways-to-communicate-better-in-your-relationships/>

Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2010). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.

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"Communication is to relationships what breath is to life."

(Satir, n.d.)

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A pioneer of family therapy, Virginia Satir, once said, "Communication is to relationships what breath is to life" (Satir, n.d.). Communication is the largest single factor that determines what kind of relationship a person has with another.

Reference

Satir, V. (n.d.) *Communication is to relationships what breath is to life*. Quote Master. <https://www.quotemaster.org/q422f91b26a83b1d5060dd4d595b7952f>

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How Do We Communicate?

7% in word

38% in tone of voice

55% in body language



(Landmark research by Mehrabian, 1981)

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When we communicate, we do so mainly using nonverbal signals (Mehrabian, 1981). This body language includes our facial expressions, amount of eye contact, movements, gestures, and touch. The tone in our voice as we speak also conveys great meaning. The way you look, listen, and move while communicating with others indicates more about how you are feeling than words alone ever can (Gottman & DeClaire, 2002).

Understanding and using appropriate verbal and nonverbal techniques can help you connect better with others, express what you really mean, navigate conflicts and challenging situations, and build better

relationships with others (Gottman & DeClaire, 2002).

References

Gottman, J.M. & DeClaire, J. (2002). *The relationship cure: A 5 step guide to strengthening your marriage, family and friendships*. Three Rivers Press.

Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Wadsworth.

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Body language has a unique way of “speaking” (Scharlop, 2018). You can enhance effective communication by using open body language—body in an open positive and slightly leaning toward the person that is speaking, arms uncrossed and maintaining frequent eye contact (Paterson, 2000).

You can also use body language to emphasize a verbal message. For example, giving a friend a high five or pat on the back while complimenting him on his success or giving a hug to a loved one after sharing words of appreciation (Paterson, 2000; Scharlop, 2018).

Your body cues and tone of voice may outweigh the words that you are saying.

Instructor's note: Provide Activity #3 - Name that Mood to understand how tone of voice and body language impacts communication.

References

Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Wadsworth.

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Scharlop, M. (2018, May 14). *The power of non-verbal communication in a relationship*. Plantation Relationship Counseling.
<https://plantationrelationshipcounseling.com/power-of-non-verbal-communication/>

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Physical Touch

- The body is for touching
- During a crisis - touching is important
- Communicate how much touch is important to you




Physical touch is also a language. Research on human touch has revealed that babies who were regularly touched develop healthier than those who were not (Barnett, 2006). Physical touch is powerful in communicating in marriage which can foster emotional security (Chapman, 2015).

References

Barnett, L. (2006). Keep in touch: The importance of touch in infant development. *International Journal of Infant Observation and Its Applications* 8(2), 115-123. doi: 10.1080/13698030500171530

Chapman, G. (2015). *The five love languages: The secret to love that lasts*. Northfield Publishing.

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Affirmations

- Kindness
- Kind words
- Affection
- Humility




Mark Twain once said: “I can live for two months on a good compliment” (IMDb, n.d.). We all probably need much more than this.

The old saying “sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is a misconception. We remember hurtful words for years. Kind words express caring and love, which can soften anger and frustration and allow for greater problem-solving opportunities (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001).

References

Gottman, J. M. & DeClaire, J. (2001). *The relationship cure: A five step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships*. Three Rivers Press.

IMDb. (n.d.). Mark Twain biography.

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0878494/bio>

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Build the Praise:
We love it, we want it, we need it!

Use a “soft entry”
and a “flight plan”

“Small talk” ten minutes daily
(Gottman & Silver, 2015)



We all need positive feedback in our lives. Be sure to give your partner positive feedback. Each of us needs five to seven positive comments for each negative.

Learn to use a “soft entry” when you have issues and concerns by starting with something positive such as expressing appreciation before sharing concerns. This will make the “hard stuff” easier to take (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001; Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Take a break for when the conversation becomes too heated or intense. It may be helpful to have an agreement or “flight plan” ahead of time of where you will go, what you will do, and when you will reconvene your discussion. Sometimes a break during heated discussions can save the relationship. You can always address the issues at a later time (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001; Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Plan to spend at least 10-15 minutes every day talking to one another (Doherty, 2013). This will keep positive communication flowing and allow you to talk about small issues as they arise rather than stockpiling them until they may seem overwhelming. Talking also helps couples to connect and strengthen their relationship. What you talk about is not so important as taking the time for each other to connect; however, topics such as how each other’s day went or plans and goals for the future may be more beneficial to building relationships than talking about scheduling.

References

Doherty, W. (2013). *Take back your marriage: Sticking together in a world that pulls us apart*. The Guildford Press.

Gottman, J. M. & DeClaire, J. (2001). *The relationship cure: A five step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships*. Three Rivers Press.

Gottman, J. M. & Silver, N. (2015). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. Harmony Press.

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Discuss each of these:

- Take time for each other.
- Listen.
- Clarify if you are not sure you understand.
- Make an effort to get inside your spouse's head to really hear what they are saying.
- Be honest with each other.

We will discuss the "destroyers" in a few more slides.

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Remember that women and men hear and listen differently (Tannen, 2001). Some of the difficulties that men and women have in communicating may have a biological basis. There's considerable scientific evidence to suggest that men hear, listen to, understand, and produce speech differently than women do (Legato, 2019). Men are more likely to communicate to seek status, share factual information about things and gather information in order to problem solve; whereas women are more likely to use communication as a way to connect with others and build relationships as they share feelings and seek support.

Refer back to gender issues if necessary for additional ideas and differences.

Reference

Legato, M. J. (2019, November 14). *The differences between how we listen and what we hear*. <https://gendermed.org/the-differences-between-how-we-listen-and-what-we-hear/>

Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don't understand: Men and women in conversation*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

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Role Playing



- “Play back” what you heard.
- How did you feel as a listener?
- How did you feel as a speaker?
- What is the value of “playback?”

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Instructor's note: Provide activity for group to practice communicating. Activity #4 provides instructions for two different activities, Lego® building and finger painting.

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“Destroyers”

- Criticizing
- Evaluating
- Acting superior
- Degrading words

(Gottman & Silver, 2015; Paterson, 2000)



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Communication styles can become destroyers of relationships. Stay away from these destroyers. Learn to give feedback that will not damage a relationship. It is important to be able to say a negative comment or concern, but do not direct it as a personal put down or judgment of the other person (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Paterson, 2000).

This slide represents some ways a person using an aggressive style of communication would behave.

Instructor's note: Use Handout #6: Effective Communication.

References

Gottman, J. M. & Silver, N. (2015). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. Harmony Press.

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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Fouls

- Don't use the silent treatment
- Don't use lies to cover up
- Don't jump to conclusions

(North Dakota State University Counseling Center, 2017; Paterson, 2000)

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These are some of the ways that a person using passive or a passive aggressive style of communication may behave.

References

North Dakota State University Counseling Center. (2017). *Assertiveness skills: Four styles of communication*. https://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/self_help_library/assertiveness_skills/

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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More Fouls

- Guessing instead of finding out all the facts
- Not discussing what actually happened
- Don't get in-laws or friends involved

(North Dakota State University Counseling Center, 2017; Paterson, 2000)

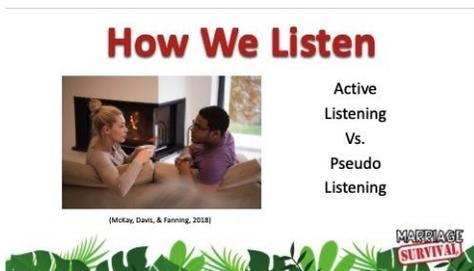
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References

North Dakota State University Counseling Center. (2017). *Assertiveness skills: Four styles of communication*. https://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/self_help_library/assertiveness_skills/

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc

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How We Listen

Active Listening
Vs.
Pseudo Listening

(McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 2018)

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Active Listening:

Paraphrase
Clarify
Give feedback
Maintain eye contact
Give full attention

Pseudo Listening:

You hear the words but are not tuned in.
Selectively listening, such as listening for one piece of information but ignoring the rest.
Listening just so you can rebut their comment.
Distractions such as TV, computer, phones, etc.
Be careful of blocks to listening such as mind reading (making assumptions), selectively listening (filtering for what you want to hear), judging, etc.

Reference

McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. (2018). *Messages: The communication skills book*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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Couples can resolve conflicts using healthy communication techniques.

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Steps to Healthy Communication

- Listening
- Interpreting
- Rephrasing
- Expressing yourself
- “I” messages

(Markman, et al., 2010)

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Good communication includes sending and receiving messages. It is important that you are able to listen, understand and express yourself. Each of these steps are important.

- Listening
- Interpreting
- Rephrasing
- Expressing yourself using “I” messages

Markman, et al., (2010) encourages people to use the “Speaker Listener Technique” as they communicate which utilizes all of the steps of healthy communication. In this technique one person states a thought and/or feeling (preferably using “I” messages) while the other is listening attentively. The listener then rephrases what the speaker has said (without defensiveness or rebutting what has been said) to ensure he/she received the correct message. If the listener didn’t quite get the message, the speaker clarifies what was communicated and the listener paraphrases again. Once the message is received, the individuals then switch roles so that the listener has a chance to express themselves as well. This method provides a way for both individuals to express their thoughts and feelings in a calm and nonjudgmental environment.

Reference

Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2010). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.

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Assertive Communication

- Helps to decrease anxiety
- Helps us to stand up for our rights and not be taken advantage of
- Encourages us to take responsibility for our decisions.
- Helps us to express positive and negative feelings and thoughts.

(McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2018; Paterson, 2000)



Communicating assertively with others:

- Helps to decrease anxiety.
- Helps us to stand up for our rights and not be taken advantage of.
- Encourages us to take responsibility for our decisions.
- Helps us to express positive and negative feelings and thoughts.

References

McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. (2018). *Messages: The communication skills book*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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Assertive Communication

- Encourages self-respect and mutual respect with others
- Increases self-confidence and self-esteem
- Gives us control over our lives and helps us achieve our goals
- Minimizes hurting others

(McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2018; Paterson, 2000)



Assertive communication is the ability to express positive and negative ideas and feelings in an open, honest and direct way (McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2018; Paterson, 2000). It recognizes our rights while still respecting the rights of others. It allows us to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions without judging or blaming other people, and it allows us to constructively confront and find a mutually satisfying solution where conflict exists.

Assertive communication:

- Encourages self-respect and mutual respect with others.
- Increases self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Gives us control over our lives and helps us achieve our goals.
- Minimizes hurting others.

References

McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. (2018). *Messages: The communication skills book*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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"I" Messages

"I" messages allow you to appropriately express needs and feelings.

They will tell the:

- Behavior
- Feeling
- How this impacts you




"I" statements encourage healthy communication. They allow for the speaker to know you understand them. "I" statements indicate ownership, they do not attribute blame, they focus on the behavior, they are direct and honest and contribute to the growth of your relationship.

They will tell the:

- Behavior
- Feeling
- How this impacts you
- Can also include directions on how to help your partner know your desires for the future. (What would you prefer would happen instead?)

References

North Dakota State University Counseling Center. (2017). *Assertiveness skills: Four styles of communication*. [ps://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/self_help_library/assertiveness_skills/](https://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/self_help_library/assertiveness_skills/)

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"I" Message Example:



"I feel frustrated when you do not take out the trash."

"I don't like having to ask you to do it when you have agreed to do it."




Instructor's note: Example of statements to help class understand "I" messages.

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"I" Statements

"I feel angry when you..."

"I get upset because you..."



Reflective Listening

"I can tell you are frustrated that I..."

"I see that you are upset by the ..."




Reflective listening is when we paraphrase back to our partners what they are saying to us to ensure that we received the message they are trying to convey to us (Markman, et al., 2010). This can be helpful to ensure we get the correct message they are trying to convey and not just our interpretation of what they have expressed to us.

Instructor's Note: Use Activity 5 - Communication Is Sweet or provide class time for couples to practice using "I" statements and reflective listening.

Here is a sentence to help couples begin. Combine

these pieces to form a sentence as follows: "I feel _____ when _____, because _____."

EXAMPLE: Partner one might say, "I feel scared when you are late home from work, because I worry that something might have happened to you."

Partner two would then respond with a reflective listening statement:

"I _____, that you _____, when I am _____."

For example, "I am sensing that you are concerned about me when I come home late. Let's see how we can make this less stressful."

Reference

Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Blumberg, S. L. (2010). *Fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass.

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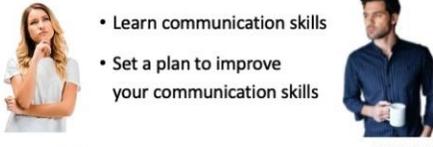
Text messaging is becoming a very common way to communicate. How much time do you spend "texting" your partner? Texting can save time, but because there are no visual or auditory clues (93% of communication) it can be challenging to know what the other person is meaning and can potentially create misunderstandings (Mehrabian, 1981). It's convenient, but use caution in letting it become your primary means of communication with your spouse.

Reference

Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Wadsworth.

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Learn Your Communication Style



- Learn communication skills
- Set a plan to improve your communication skills

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Build a strong relationship by building communication skills that work effectively for you. In our relationships, we have a “love language” style (Chapman, 2015). This is how we perceive “how loved” we are.

Instructor’s note: Use Handout #7: How Do I Feel Loved and What Do I Need. Give individuals time to complete their handout then share with their partner. Discuss Gary Chapman’s Five Love Languages.

Reference

Chapman, G. (2015). *The five love languages: The secret to love that lasts*. Northfield Publishing.

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How Do You Strengthen Marriage?



- Communication
- Time spent together
- Commitment
- Enhancement

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Build strong communication patterns by spending time together. By making time for your marriage, you are making it a priority and showing your commitment to making your marriage strong. Enhance your relationship with marriage education classes, marriage enhancing books, spending time together on dates and remembering the little things (e.g. notes, phone calls), etc.

Instructor’s note: Use Handout #8: Couples Communication Checklist and Handout #9: “I” Statements and Reflective Listening.

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Relationship Tip



One predictor of a life-long marriage is the level of commitment one brings into the marriage.

(Amato & DeBoer, 2001)

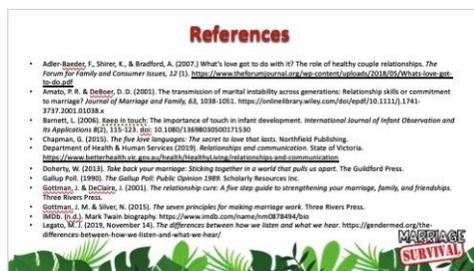
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Reference

Amato, P. R. & DeBoer, D. D. (2001). The transmission of marital instability across generations: Relationship skills or commitment to marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 1038-1051.

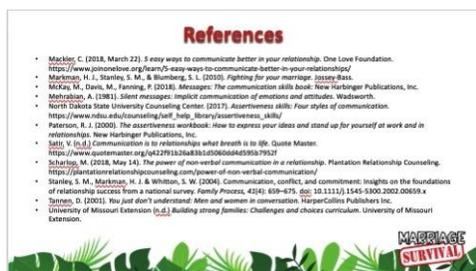
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- Mackler, C. (2018, March 22). *5 easy ways to communicate better in your relationship.* One Love Foundation. <https://www.joinonelove.org/learn/5-easy-ways-to-communicate-better-in-your-relationships/>
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