

The Social Connection Planner

**A Tool to Help
You Better Meet
Your Social
Needs**

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Conversation Menu

Research suggests that when it comes to our social interactions, it's quality, not quantity, that matters.

High quality interactions involve being able to share personal information and going deeper than traditional small talk. These conversations foster emotional intimacy, leading to feelings of closeness and connection.

Studies suggest that quality interactions are of particular importance to introverted people's mental wellbeing.

Fortunately, there's a growing network of deep conversation events around the globe, allowing you to engage in meaningful conversations while meeting new people.

Examples include:

- » [Deep Conversation Meetups](#)
- » [Conscious Cafe](#)
- » [Trigger Conversations \(UK\)](#)

On the following page, you'll find our example 'Conversation Menu'.

Why not suggest starting a weekly Conversation Dinner with your friends, family, partner, colleagues, or someone you're just getting to know?

You can even take it in turns to create your own conversation menu. There's lots of inspiration online – search Google for "deep question examples".



CONVERSATION MENU

STARTERS

What's been the highlight of your week so far?

What are you enjoying about your life at the moment?

What are you looking forward to in the future?

MAIN

Do you have any goals you're working towards right now?

What's a personal challenge or obstacle you're currently facing?

Have you had any interesting insights about yourself recently?

DESSERT

What's the most interesting thing you've read or learned about recently?

What would you like to learn more about in the future?

What's a new experience we could share together in future?

*“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel **seen, heard, and valued**; when they can give and receive **without judgment**; and when they derive **sustenance and strength** from the relationship.”*

– Brené Brown

Improving Your Communication Skills

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.” – Stephen Covey

We’re a society of poor communicators. Why? Because nobody teaches us this stuff. The good news is that you’re reading this right now, and as the saying goes: If you want to change the world, start with yourself. Refer to the quote on the previous page and try to be honest with yourself. Could you make more of an effort to help others feel seen, heard and valued? Most of us could improve in this area.

Poor communication habits trigger social disconnection. Become a better communicator and open yourself up to experiencing higher levels of social connection, intimacy and love.

Poor Communication Habits	Effective Communication Habits
<p>Partial listening – Splitting your attention between multiple things besides the speaker, such as being distracted by a digital device, your thoughts, or by a task you're doing.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Speaker A tries to communicate with Speaker B who continues to send an email on their phone while also attempting to listen.</p>	<p>Mindful listening – Giving the speaker your full attention; removing distractions, noticing your thoughts and then redirecting your attention to what the speaker is saying, and pausing your tasks.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Both speakers put their phones in their bags while communicating and practise refocusing on the content of what the other is saying when they notice their minds wandering.</p>
<p>Mind reading – Assuming you know exactly what the other person is feeling or thinking without asking them directly.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I can tell you’re having second thoughts.”</p>	<p>Checking perceptions – Asking clarifying and probing questions to find out if your interpretations are accurate.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I noticed you changed the subject pretty quickly, could you tell me what you’re thinking?”</p>
<p>Hijacking – Redirecting the conversational focus on yourself instead of allowing the other person to fully express themselves. Be mindful of talking about yourself a lot and showing limited interest in others.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Oh yeah – I’m having trouble with my boss as well at the moment...”</p>	<p>Probing – Asking questions to improve your understanding of what the other person is thinking, feeling and needing. Showing that you can relate to what the person is saying after they've have the opportunity to express themselves first.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “You’re having trouble with your boss? How come?”</p>
<p>Judging – Evaluating the other person and what they're saying rather than mindfully listening to them. Similarly, be conscious of the habit of projecting your own values and beliefs onto others.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Labelling someone as being selfish after something they've just said to you, and following your thought trail around this instead of listening to them. Feeling dislike towards people if they don't share the same values and beliefs as you.</p>	<p>Non-judging – Communicating with an open-mind, being curious, and accepting that everyone is different – everyone has their own unique set of experiences. Honoring the fact that we all have a right to our own opinions, values and beliefs.</p>



Poor Communication Habits	Effective Communication Habits
<p>Teaching or preaching – Offering solutions rather than listening and seeking to understand the other person; giving unsolicited advice.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Oh, my sister experienced the exact same thing. You should...”</p>	<p>Asking permission – Resist entering ‘fix mode’ and focus on mindful listening. When you’re confident that you’ve given the person enough time to fully express themselves and come up with their own solutions, you could ask their permission to give your advice.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Can I tell you what I’d do in this situation?”</p>
<p>Demanding – Making demands instead of respectfully asking for what you want.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Get your room cleaned now!”</p>	<p>Making specific requests – Asking someone to do something only if they’re willing to, rather than demanding something from them.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I’m feeling really frustrated about this. Would you be willing to clean your room now please?”</p>
<p>Discounting – Giving the message that the other person’s opinions, feelings and needs don’t matter.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “That’s not true! I never take you for granted.”</p>	<p>Validating – Communicating in a way that shows you’re taking the other person’s opinions, feelings and needs into account.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “It’s understandable that you feel like that considering the situation you’re in...”</p>
<p>Belittling – Giving the message that the other person should feel foolish for having a particular feeling, need, or opinion.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Wow, I can’t believe you actually think that!”</p>	<p>Supporting – Demonstrating acceptance, warmth, and care to the other person.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Okay, I’d be interested to know more about how you came to that opinion?”</p>
<p>Guilt-tripping – Giving the message that the other person is behaving immorally or is in the wrong for having certain needs.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “If you don’t trust me, then what’s the point? It tells me there’s something very wrong with our relationship.”</p>	<p>Summarising – Repeating what you’ve heard back to the speaker in a brief way to ensure you’ve understood them properly.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “So you’ve been feeling anxious because you haven’t been hearing from me as much when I’m away?”</p>
<p>Derailing – Shifting the attention from the other person’s feelings to your own to stop them from carrying on with what they were saying.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I can’t believe you’d say that – you’ve really hurt me.”</p>	<p>Being quiet and not interrupting – Giving the person time to think and express themselves fully.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Waiting for a few seconds without filling the pauses to allow the other person to think and finish what they’re saying.</p>
<p>Placating – Agreeing with someone without really listening or providing the opportunity for them to fully express themselves.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I know, you’re right – it won’t happen again okay?”</p>	<p>Reflecting – Repeating someone’s words back to them exactly to demonstrate that you’re listening and to move the conversation forward.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Speaker A: “To be honest, I was really disappointed that you forgot about it.” Speaker B: “You were disappointed I forgot...” Speaker A: “Yep, I was counting on having you there with me...”</p>



Review the communication habits on pages 12 and 13 and fill in the boxes below:

MY EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION HABITS

MY POOR COMMUNICATION HABITS

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION HABITS TO DEVELOP



Guided Discussion for Effective Communication

Here's a structured conversation exercise for improving communication in a relationship:

Step 1. Both people read through the communication skills table.

Step 2. Person A shares which poor communication skills resonated with them – what they'd like to work on improving.

Step 3. Person B shares their opinion about which communication skills they'd like Person A to work on improving.

Step 4. Person B shares which poor communication skills resonated with them – what they'd like to work on improving.

Step 5. Person A shares their opinion about which communication skills they'd like Person B to work on improving.

Step 6. Both people take it in turns to finish one the following prompts:

- » "I'm sorry that..."
- » "I hope that..."
- » "I understand that..."
- » "I forgive you for..."



Recognising Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse can be difficult to spot if it's been happening for a while, or if it's what you witnessed growing up. In your mind, it becomes normal instead of unhealthy, and it might increase over time.

Here are examples of forms of verbal abuse:

Abusive Anger – Any form of shouting or screaming.

Withholding – Blocking connection by refusing to share thoughts, feelings and information with the partner and refusing to listen; prolonged silent treatment with language such as, "There's no point in talking about it," "You don't need to know," and "You wouldn't be interested."

Name Calling – e.g., "You're too stupid to understand," "You're too sensitive," and "You're acting like a child."

Constant Criticising – Regular criticism that interferes with your mood and self-esteem, e.g., "You're never happy with anything," "You never clean up properly," and "Nobody actually likes you."

Degradation or Condescension – e.g., "Who else would want you?" "You only got the job because your boss fancies you," and "No wonder you're not losing weight – look at how much you're eating."

Minimisation or Denial – Downplaying or denying the significance of an emotion or event, e.g., "It was only a joke," "You have no sense of humour," and "It only happened because I had too much to drink."

Gaslighting – You recall something that happens and the other person tells you it's all in your mind or you're making it up, eventually making you question yourself.

Countering – Choosing to oppose your thoughts, opinions, and feelings on a regular basis, e.g., "That's not really how you feel," "You're wrong," and "I can't believe you like that."

Blaming – When you feel like everything is your fault, e.g., "It's your fault I'm yelling, you make me so angry!" "Look at what you made me do!" and "It's your fault we're never on time."

Repeated Accusations – e.g., "I know you're cheating on me," "I saw the way you were looking at him," and "You're always favouring your Dad more than me."

Threats or Manipulation – Making statements that scare, intimidate or gain control over the other person, e.g., "If you're not happy to do this for me, I'm sure I'll be able to find someone else who will," "If you leave, I'll hurt myself," and "If you keep nagging me, I'll give you something to really complain about."



Setting Boundaries: How to Respond to Verbal Abuse

Try to speak as calmly as possible to avoid further escalating the situation.

Name the abuse and request that they stop it.

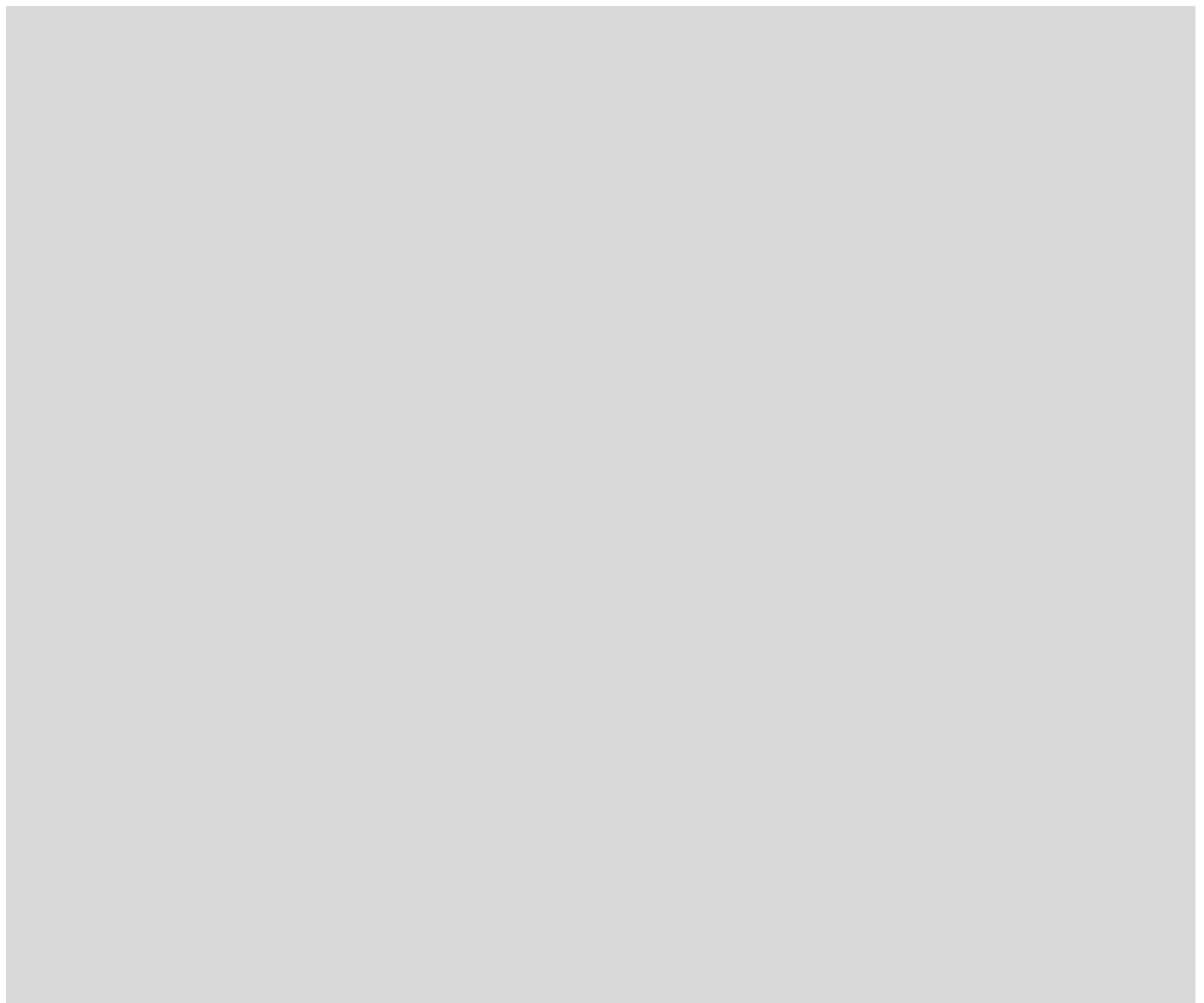
Examples

- *"You're being verbally abusive to me right now. It's not acceptable and I'm asking you to stop it."*
- *"You're gaslighting me and I won't accept it anymore. Stop it please."*
- *"You're constantly criticising me. It's a form of verbal abuse. It's not acceptable and I'm asking you to stop it."*

If repeatedly calling out the abuse doesn't lead to change and the person refuses to engage in a discussion (see the following page), you may need to consider limiting your contact with the person or ending the relationship.

Verbal abuse is considered a form of domestic violence. For more information on how to leave an abusive relationship, contact a domestic violence helpline or local support organisation.

My Reflections



Guided Discussion for Verbal Abuse

Step 1. Both people read through the list of verbal abuse examples.

Step 2. Person A shares their feelings and opinions about their own behaviour.

Step 3. Person B shares their feelings and opinions relating to their experience and sets boundaries around what they will and won't accept in future.

Step 4 (if appropriate). Person B completes Step 2 and Person A completes Step 3.

Step 5. Both people take it in turns to finish one the following prompts:

- » "I'm sorry that..."
- » "I hope that..."
- » "I understand that..."
- » "I forgive you for..."



“More than anything else, being able to feel safe with other people defines mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.”

– Bessel van der Kolk

Relationship Inventory Exercise

The aim of this exercise is to gain insight into your unhelpful patterns so that you can make wiser decisions in future. Spotting and changing your unhelpful patterns can help you experience higher levels of social connection, intimacy and love.

If you'd rather talk than write, you could go through the questions below with a friend or family member. Alternatively, you could call a helpline and talk it through with them.

In what ways did I contribute to the breakdown of this relationship?

- Did my story distortions or attachment style influence me to enter this relationship?
- Could I have communicated more effectively?
- Did I leave the relationship to protect myself from getting hurt?
- Did I focus too much on the other person's perceived flaws? Did I have unrealistic expectations of how relationships should be?
- Could I have managed challenging feelings such as fear, jealousy and anger better?
- Was any of my behaviour unacceptable? If so, how would I like to act in future?


In what ways did the other person contribute to the breakdown of this relationship?

- Could they have communicated more effectively?
- Could they have managed challenging feelings such as fear, jealousy and anger better?
- Was any of their behaviour unacceptable? If so, how would I like to respond if I was faced with similar behaviour in future?

My Relationship With:



Relationship Inventory Worksheet



The Five Love Languages

The concept of 'love languages' was coined by a marriage counsellor called Gary Chapman.

He suggests that we all have a primary and secondary way that we prefer to receive love.

Understanding love languages can help couples increase their relationship satisfaction. Problems can arise if you project your own love language onto your partner without taking their needs into account, as love languages don't always align.

Here are the five love languages Chapman identifies:

1. Words of affirmation. Verbal expressions of love, care and appreciation, e.g., "Thanks for doing that for me," "You look lovely," and "I love you." If this is your primary love language, you may feel dissatisfied in your relationship if your partner isn't comfortable expressing verbal affection. Experiencing verbal abuse will also feel particularly distressing.

2. Quality time. Spending time together as a couple and giving them your full attention. If this is your primary love language, experiencing a sense of distance and partial listening from a partner will be particularly distressing.

3. Acts of service. Doing kind things, such as making your partner breakfast in bed and going out of your way to get their favourite food. If this is your primary love language, feeling unsupported will lead to feelings of dissatisfaction.

4. Physical touch. Sexual and platonic touch, such as holding hands, hugging or having sex. Lacking these will feel particularly upsetting if it's your primary love language.

5. Receiving gifts. If this is your primary love language, you feel particularly loved when your partner surprises you with small gifts as a token of their love and appreciation for you. For you, actions like gifts speak louder than words.

Click [here](#) to take the test for free.

My primary love language:

My secondary love language:

