

Practicing Boundary Setting

Because you are in charge of your life, you are the only person who should be able to control your boundaries. Abuse happens when one person violates another person's boundaries. That's why it's important to be very clear for yourself, and very clear to others, what your boundaries are. If you have weak or uncertain boundaries, others are more likely to abuse you; if you have strong and clear boundaries, you will be more likely to remain in control of your life and keep yourself safe emotionally and physically.

Decide whether each situation below is an example of setting strong boundaries, or an example of weak boundaries. Write WEAK or STRONG on the line.

Joseph and Manuel are playing around and Manuel smacks Joseph on the back of the head. Respectfully, but without smiling or laughing, Joseph makes eye contact with Manuel and says "Listen Manuel, I know you're only playing but I don't like people putting their hands on me. Don't smack me like that again." _____

Sandra and Sam are kissing. Sam starts to push up Sandra's shirt but Sandra doesn't want to go any further. She quietly says "Umm, I don't know if we should be doing this, Sam." Sam says "It's okay, don't worry..." and continues. Sandra lets him even though it makes her uncomfortable, then finally says "It's getting late - I really have to go home." _____

Naomi and Sherika are shopping when Naomi tells Sherika she's going to slip a pair of earrings into her bag. Sherika says, "I'm not into shoplifting. Please don't do that when I'm around. If I knew you were planning on shoplifting, I wouldn't have come shopping with you." _____

Now you practice setting boundaries . . . Help the characters set boundaries by writing on the line what they should do or say to set strong boundaries.

Melissa and Rob have an important report due at work tomorrow, but Melissa wants to go out with her friends so she asks her co-worker Rob if he will stay late and finish it since he's already done with his half of the work. (What can Rob say to set boundaries in terms of what he will take responsibility for?)

Rich has been friendly with Jason for a while, and thinks he's a nice guy. When Rich's best friend Paul gets into an argument with Jason and starts talking negatively about him, Paul expects Rich to discontinue his friendship with Jason. (What can Rich say to set boundaries in terms of his friendships?)

Eric lent Jeff \$10 months ago and Jeff never paid him back. Now Jeff is asking him to borrow money again. (What can Eric say to set boundaries in terms of lending and borrowing money?)

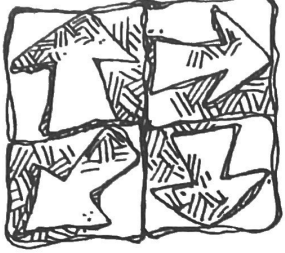
Tara needed help with job applications, so she made an appointment to see her employment counselor Ms. Ruiz. Tara showed up 45 minutes late, just before Ms. Ruiz' scheduled lunch break. (What can Ms. Ruiz say to set boundaries in terms of her time?)

What is a boundary you need to set in a relationship?

Person I need to set a boundary with: _____

Boundary I need to set: _____

What I can say or do to set this boundary: _____



How Do You Relate?

Most people use one of four styles of relating to others: Aggressive, Passive, Passive-Aggressive, or Assertive. Read the descriptions of the four styles and decide – which style do you think is most effective?

AGGRESSIVE people tend to overpower other people. They are often loud, bossy and dominating. When confronted with a conflict, aggressive people will often verbally attack others. They blame other people and are rarely willing to admit responsibility for their own part in a conflict. Aggressive people violate other people's rights in order to get what they want. Any use of violence is aggressive behavior.

PASSIVE people tend to avoid dealing with problems and do not speak up for their rights. They are often nervous or anxious, seem to have little self-confidence, and talk in a quiet voice. Passive people often try so hard to please others that they don't take care of their own needs. Because passive people 'stuff' anger instead of expressing it, the anger may build up inside. This built-up anger will either lead to an explosion, or the person may develop problems like depression, headaches and other pains, sleeplessness and anxiety.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE people often *appear* to be passive because they behave quietly and do not directly address conflicts. But instead of 'stuffing' anger, these people will 'get back at' the people they are angry with in a sneaky, underhanded way or in a way that will hurt the other person without drawing attention to themselves. They might even do things unconsciously to hurt the person they are upset with. Passive-aggressive people are often suspicious or distrustful of others. Because they do not address the real problem, they rarely get their needs met.

ASSERTIVE people are clear, confident, cool and in control of themselves. These people stand up for their rights without stepping on other people's rights. They speak directly, honestly and respectfully with a clear speaking voice. Assertive people are able to say "no" to things they are uncomfortable with, and are not willing to compromise their own values or beliefs in order to make others happy.

Now, see how well you understand the four types of behavior.

Read the following example of a situation between Kendra and Will, then read Kendra's four possible reactions.

Write the letter for whether Kendra's style of relating in that example is:

(A) Aggressive (B) Passive (C) Passive-Aggressive or (D) Assertive.

The situation: Will and Kendra made plans to meet at a party at 8:00. The party was given by a friend of Will's. Kendra hardly knew anyone at the party, so she was very uncomfortable being there alone when Will was 45 minutes late.

The responses:

1. When Will shows up, Kendra kisses him hello and acts like nothing is wrong. When Will says "Sorry I was late," Kendra says "It's okay." There is no further discussion of the issue. _____
2. When Will shows up, Kendra says hello and asks to speak with him alone for a minute. She says, "Will, you were 45 minutes late and I was really uncomfortable being here alone because I don't know anyone here. What happened?" She gives him a chance to explain and after Will apologizes she says "I accept your apology, but I don't like to be kept waiting. Next time I want you to call if you're going to be late." _____
3. When Kendra sees Will coming, she starts flirting with another man, thinking that will teach him not to make her wait. _____
4. When Will shows up, Kendra explodes. Before he even gets a chance to say anything, she begins yelling at him in front of everyone, "Where the (bleep) were you? Who do you think you are making me wait for you for 45 minutes, you inconsiderate (bleep – bleep)! You can forget about this party, we're leaving now!" _____



Assert Yourself With "I" Statements

One way of being assertive is to communicate your feelings and needs directly and honestly, without attacking the other person. The "I" statement is a way of doing this. There are four steps to making an assertive "I" statement.

Step 1: I feel ...

Make an honest statement about how you are feeling.

For example, "I feel hurt..."

- Hint - make sure you are really stating a feeling, not a thought or a belief about the other person. "I feel you are totally selfish..." is a "You" statement disguised as an "I" statement.

Step 2: Because ...

Tell the person what action or behavior of theirs has triggered your feelings.

For example, "...because you're cancelling our plans together so you can go out with your friends."

- Hint - Be specific about why you feel that way, and talk about the present, like in the example above, rather than the past, as in "you're always choosing them over me."

Step 3: I want or need ...

Tell the person specifically what you want or need from him or her now or in the future when similar situations arise.

For example, "I need you to keep your commitments to me. If you're going to cancel on me, I want to know at least a day in advance."

- Hint - Make your needs or wants reasonable, and make sure you phrase them as your needs, not as demands, as in "you better..." or "next time you will..."

Step 4: I will ...

This step is optional. Hopefully the other person will give you what you need after step 3. However, if the problem persists, tell the other person what you are prepared to do to respond.

For example, "I won't make plans with you in the future if you cancel on me at the last minute again."

- Hint - Don't make threats. Think carefully about what you say in this step because if you threaten something that you don't follow through with, you are giving the person the message that you don't mean what you say and your mind can easily be changed.

NOW YOU TRY!

Turn the following "You" Statements into "I" Statements using the four steps.

1. "You are such a lazy slob! I get stuck doing all the work around here! Clean up your mess now and don't ever let me see your dishes in the sink again OR ELSE!"

I feel _____ because _____

I want _____ (I will _____)

2. "You are so unreliable. You never follow through with anything you say you're going to do."

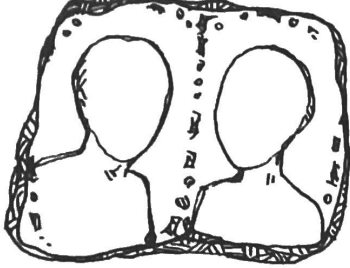
I feel _____ because _____

I want _____ (I will _____)

3. "I can't believe you're late again – you're so inconsiderate!"

I feel _____ because _____

I want _____ (I will _____)



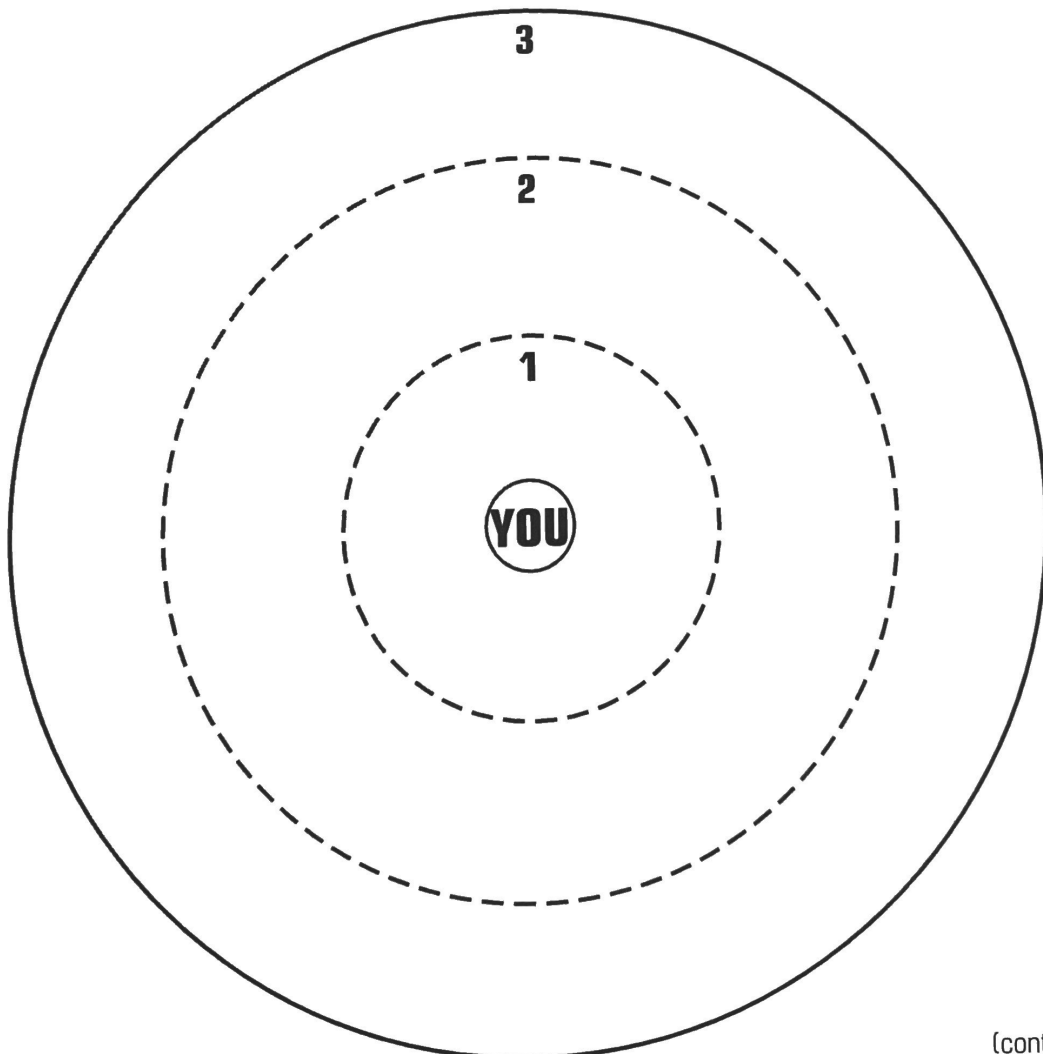
Understanding Boundaries

One important way to take care of yourself is to set strong and healthy boundaries around yourself and your life. A Boundary is like an invisible line around you. It is what separates you from other people. It is the line between what you are comfortable with and what you are uncomfortable with, what is acceptable to you and what is unacceptable to you. Boundaries help protect not only our physical safety, but also our emotional well-being.

Healthy boundaries are flexible. For example, you might open up your boundaries to let people you trust closer to you - you might share more information with them and feel more comfortable being physically close to them. But with people you don't know as well or people you distrust, you will probably keep your boundaries closed more tightly by not getting too personal.

DIFFERENT BOUNDARIES WITH DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS

In **circle 1** around "you", write the names of the people who are closest to you, and who you open up your boundaries the most for. In **circle 2**, write the names of a few people who you have good relationships with but are not as close as the people in the inner circle. In **circle 3**, mention names of people who you have relationships with that are not very personal. Is there anyone who has given you good reason not to trust them - who you feel you have to protect yourself from? Write these names on the **outside of the solid line**, which indicates that your boundaries are very firm with them.



Learning to Listen

Listening can be a difficult skill to master because it requires you to hear with your eyes, body and heart, as well as with your ears.

Effective Listening Skills

Focus on what your partner is saying paying no attention to internal or external happenings.

Listen to the words, tone of voice, notice the body language, feel the sincerity.

Clarify misunderstood points ("What did you mean when you said_____").

Ask questions for more information or clarification ("What do you need from me right now?").

Non-Effective Listening Skills

Focus on your feelings about what your partner is saying.

Listen to the words only and do not pay attention to body language and sincerity.

Feel defensive and rehearse in your mind how to respond.

Judge, label and make assumptions about what is being said.

What do you notice about your listening habits when communicating with your partner?

What do you notice about your partner's listening habits when communicating with you?

How can you be a better listener?

In which situations can you be a better listener for your partner?

Listening

Active listening skills are often overlooked in a relationship, but can be one of the most critical aspects of communication and understanding between you and your partner. Active listening involves an awareness of what your partner is saying to you or asking you to do. Your active listening skills ensure that you understand the true meaning of the request or statement.

Blocks to Listening

Inadequate listening – It is easy to get distracted from what your partner is saying. This includes such things as being too involved with your own thoughts or preoccupied with your own needs. Perhaps you are thinking about your own problems or are too eager to help the other person. Possibly the social and cultural differences between you and your partner are too great.

Judging – Listening with the intent of judging your partner can hinder your ability to really hear what is being said. You may find that you are judging what your partner is saying as good or bad, right or wrong. You may not be listening with empathy. It is important to set your judgments aside about your partner until you can develop a better understanding of what your partner is saying and hear your partner's point of view on the issue.

Daydreaming – Everyone's attention wanders from time to time. If you find yourself having a difficult time listening to your partner, it is probably a sign that you are avoiding certain topics of conversation or that you are bored with what your partner is talking about.

Rehearsing – Any time you ask yourself the question "How should I respond to what my partner is saying?" or start rehearsing the way you will answer, you distract yourself from what the other person is saying. As you improve your active listening skills, the words just come naturally. It is best to listen intently to your partner and to focus on the themes and core messages related to their words, and allow your intuition to provide you with a response.

Filtering – Listening to certain parts of the conversation, but not all, can cause trouble. You'll only get a portion of the facts and you will base responses or actions on just part of what you needed to hear.

Distractions – Your attention is sidetracked by something internal to you (hunger, headache, worry) or external to you (traffic, whispering, other people). Concentrating on the conversation and staying in the present will help.

Non-Assertive Partner Situations

Identify those situations in which you need to be more assertive with your partner. By becoming more aware of those situations in which you are not assertive, you can practice your assertiveness training skills. For each of the situations listed below, describe how you show a lack of assertiveness.

Situations in which you might lack assertiveness	If you do lack assertiveness in this area, why aren't you assertive?
Saying "No" to your partner	<i>Ex: It hurts my partner's feelings and I don't want to do that.</i>
Asking my partner for favors	
Disagreeing with your partner's opinions	
Taking charge of a situation	
Social situations with your partner	
Asking for something you want from your partner	
Stating your opinion if it is different from your partner's opinion	
Asking for help from your partner	
Sexual situations with your partner	
Asking for time by yourself	

Partner Communication Skills Scale Profile Interpretation

Communication is the essence of social interaction and often determines how successful you are in your relationship with your partner. This assessment will help you explore how effective you are in five critical components of effective communication. See the profile interpretation materials below.

TOTAL SCALES SCORES	RESULT	INDICATIONS
Scores from 16 to 20	High	You use effective communication skills a great deal of the time. Continue to use these effective communication skills when interacting with your partner. You will enjoy completing the exercises in this chapter.
Scores from 10 to 15	Moderate	Most of the time, you use effective communication skills. Continue to use the communication skills you are already using when interacting with your partner, and complete the exercises contained in this chapter for even more effective communication.
Scores from 5 to 9	Low	You are often not using effective communication skills with your partner. Complete the exercises contained in this chapter to assist you in discovering more effective communication skills with your partner.

Regardless of your score on the assessment, the following exercises have been designed to help you increase your communication skills.

Messages

To communicate effectively, it is necessary that you send clear messages to your partner and that your messages are completely understood. Miscommunication is probably the cause of many of your arguments and fights. By learning some specific skills you can ensure that the arguments between you and your partner are kept to a minimum. To be more effective in verbal communication with your partner, consider these guidelines to make certain your message is heard and accepted by your partner.

- **When you communicate verbally with your partner, take responsibility for your messages.** Use words like I, me and my, to communicate your message. In this way you “own” the messages you send to your partner. When you use words like “they” or “some people,” you put the responsibility of what you are communicating onto someone else. Take responsibility for your own words. Using “you” often sounds threatening, aggressive and blaming, whereas creating I-messages conveys comments in the least threatening and overbearing manner.
- **Maintain eye contact and speak directly to your partner.** When asking questions, avoid dead-ended questions that require a yes-no answer (“Did you cook dinner like I asked?”). Instead, rely on open-ended questions that allow your partner the opportunity to express what happened (“What did you do this afternoon?”).
- **Express your feelings.** Examples of how to express your feelings include such statements as “I feel angry when you get home so late from work without calling me” or “I get frustrated when you refuse to pay attention to the children.” In the boxes on the left-hand side of the table, list the situations that frustrate you most about your partner. In the right-hand column, express your feelings to that person, using the guidelines you just read about.

Now You Try

Situations That Frustrate Me	What I Would Like to Say to My Partner
<i>Ex: My partner doesn't call me when coming home late.</i>	<i>Ex: I would appreciate a phone call if you will be late. Then I will not feel concerned or will not worry.</i>

Disagreeing and Arguing

Disagreements are not always unhealthy in a relationship, but they can lead to arguments. What do you and your partner tend to disagree about most? Disagreements often arise from not truly understanding what is going on in your partner's mind. When you find yourself beginning an argument with your partner, try to understand what is really happening and what you and your partner are really arguing about. In the left-hand column of the table that follows, list the things that trigger most of the arguments between you and your partner. Then, in the right-hand column, try to get to the bottom of the issues and see what is really triggering most of your fights.

Triggers for arguments	What we are really arguing about
<i>Ex: Going to my partner's parents' home for dinner AGAIN!</i>	<i>Ex: We don't spend as much time with my parents!</i>

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to ask for what you need and want in your relationship. Assertive people are able to express their feelings, thoughts, desires, needs and wants calmly and directly to their partner in an honest manner. This takes practice.

Why do you have a difficult time asking your partner what you need and want?

What happens when you do?

My Complaints or Dissatisfactions

In the table below, list some of your concerns and ways your partner can satisfy them.

Complaints or Dissatisfactions about my Partner	How My Partner Can Make me Happier
<i>Ex: My partner does not show love, pride or affection when we are anywhere but home. I don't feel loved or attractive when we're in public.</i>	<i>Ex: My partner can put an arm around me, touch me, look at me with pride and love, tell people of my accomplishments, etc.</i>



Partner Communication Skills Scale Scoring Directions

The Partner Communications Skills Scale is designed to measure how well you are able to communicate with your partner. Five important aspects of communicating effectively include sending direct messages, having controlled arguments, being assertive when you need to be, listening actively to what your partner says, and criticizing and arguing fairly. These make up the five scales on the assessment.

Scoring the assessment is a very easy process. Look at the questions you just answered.

- For Items **1-10**, count the number of **T** answers you circled for yourself and for your partner. Put those scores on the lines underneath each column (**DIRECT MESSAGES**)
- For Items **11-20**, count the number of **F** answers you circled for yourself and for your partner. Put those scores on the lines underneath each column (**DISAGREEING AND ARGUING**)
- For Items **21-30**, count the number of **F** answers you circled for yourself and for your partner. Put those scores on the lines underneath each column (**BEING ASSERTIVE**)
- For Items **31-40**, count the number of **T** answers you circled for yourself and for your partner. Put those scores on the lines underneath each column (**ACTIVELY LISTENING**)
- For Items **41-50**, count the number of **F** answers you circled for yourself and for your partner. Put those scores on the lines underneath each column (**CRITICIZING AND FIGHTING**)

Now, transfer your totals to the spaces below:

Direct Messages	You = _____	Your Partner = _____
Disagreeing and Arguing	You = _____	Your Partner = _____
Being Assertive	You = _____	Your Partner = _____
Actively Listening	You = _____	Your Partner = _____
Criticizing and Fighting	You = _____	Your Partner = _____

What patterns do you notice?

How do these results raise your awareness of your relationship with your partner?

What are the most critical areas for you and your partner to work on?

SECTION I: PARTNER COMMUNICATION SKILLS SCALE

(Partner Communication Skills Scale *continued*)

When my partner and I argue we . . .

	You		Your Partner	
	T	F	T	F
41. respond to anger with anger	T	F	T	F
42. retaliate by insults with insults	T	F	T	F
43. tease each other too much	T	F	T	F
44. complain about the other a lot.	T	F	T	F
45. state our complaints in a heated way	T	F	T	F
46. frequently bring up each other's past failures	T	F	T	F
47. make harsh remarks	T	F	T	F
48. make physical attacks	T	F	T	F
49. lose control once we get started	T	F	T	F
50. criticize each other harshly	T	F	T	F

CRITICIZING AND FIGHTING TOTAL F = _____

(Partner Communication Skills Scale *continued*)

When my partner and I ask too much of each other we . . .	You		Your Partner	
	T	F	T	F
21. think it is selfish to put personal needs before each other's needs	T	F	T	F
22. fear disagreeing with each other	T	F	T	F
23. have a hard time standing up for ourselves.	T	F	T	F
24. wish we could be more assertive.	T	F	T	F
25. have trouble asking each other for what we need.	T	F	T	F
26. will not express opinions that are different from each other's . . .	T	F	T	F
27. do not like to make each other angry, so we go along	T	F	T	F
28. rarely question the other	T	F	T	F
29. hesitate to tell each other how we feel	T	F	T	F
30. always try to accommodate each other	T	F	T	F

BEING ASSERTIVE TOTAL F = _____

When my partner and I listen to each other we . . .	You		Your Partner	
	T	F	T	F
31. are good at reading the non-verbal cues the other provides	T	F	T	F
32. usually hear each other's words.	T	F	T	F
33. do not interrupt each other	T	F	T	F
34. ask for clarification if we do not understand something said . . .	T	F	T	F
35. note each other's emotional tone.	T	F	T	F
36. are careful to display positive body language	T	F	T	F
37. allow each other enough time to express a viewpoint.	T	F	T	F
38. try not to get defensive	T	F	T	F
39. try to remain optimistic	T	F	T	F
40. try to see the situation from each other's point of view.	T	F	T	F

ACTIVELY LISTENING TOTAL T = _____

Partner Communication Skills Scale

When my partner and I are talking to each other we . . .	You		Your Partner	
	T	F	T	F
1. deliver clear messages to each other	T	F	T	F
2. usually understand what the other is saying	T	F	T	F
3. will clarify each other's position on issues to ensure understanding	T	F	T	F
4. are straightforward in expressing our ideas	T	F	T	F
5. say things so the other does not have to be a mind reader	T	F	T	F
6. check to make sure the other hears and understands what we say	T	F	T	F
7. use "I" statements to take responsibility for what we are saying	T	F	T	F
8. will ask for feedback about the messages we communicate	T	F	T	F
9. make sure the other understands our nonverbal cues	T	F	T	F
10. talk for ourselves, not "everybody"	T	F	T	F
DIRECT MESSAGES TOTAL T = _____		_____		

When my partner and I disagree about something we . . .	You		Your Partner	
	T	F	T	F
11. blame the other	T	F	T	F
12. make threats like "I will leave you..."	T	F	T	F
13. use judgmental terms like "childish" and "helpless"	T	F	T	F
14. call our partner names using global labels like "crazy" and "lazy"	T	F	T	F
15. bring up old history	T	F	T	F
16. often make the other feel bad	T	F	T	F
17. use sarcastic and demeaning words, comments and gestures	T	F	T	F
18. often raise our voices, even though we may not be aware of it	T	F	T	F
19. send negative messages	T	F	T	F
20. become very defensive	T	F	T	F
DISAGREEING AND ARGUING TOTAL F = _____		_____		

Partner Communication Skills Scale Directions

Communication is the exchanging of thoughts, opinions and information. It is the way you relate with your partner. Communication involves talking and listening to your partner, asserting yourself when you need to and arguing appropriately. Whether you are sharing personal experiences or talking about what each of you would like for dinner, you are using communication skills. Open, honest and direct communication is critical in any healthy relationship.

The Partner Communications Skills Scale can help you explore how effective you are when you interact with your partner. This assessment contains 50 statements. Read each of the statements and decide how much you agree. **In each of the choices listed, circle the number of your response to the left side of the line and then circle the number that you feel is correct for your partner on the right side of the line.**

In the following example, the circled **F** to the left of the line indicates that the statement is FALSE for the person completing the scale and the circled **T** to the right of the line indicates that the person completing the scale felt the statement was TRUE for their partner.

	You		Your Partner
When my partner and I are talking to each other we . . .			
1. deliver clear messages to each other. T	(F)		(T) F

This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time thinking about your answers. Your initial response will likely be the most true for you. Be sure to respond to every statement.