

# How to Get Your Partner to Work on Your Relationship with You

In every relationship, there comes a time when we need to grow, adapt, and work through challenges together. However, getting your partner to actively participate in this journey can sometimes be a delicate matter, and it can be hard to get them on board. Let's explore why people might be reluctant to engage in relationship work and discuss practical strategies to encourage your partner to join you in building a stronger, healthier connection.

## Pro Tip #1: Do Your Own Work First!

You are excited about working on your relationship and see all the possibilities. As you'll learn in my "Communication That Connects" program, if you want to have a great relationship, it's essential that you really and truly understand and respect your partner's point of view, too. But let's all agree, this can be hard!

I get it: When I'm excited about doing something and my husband is reluctant, I too have a tendency to do a "hard sell" and start talking about ALL the reasons why whatever I'm campaigning for is A GREAT IDEA. But, especially for situations where people may have a lot of, shall we say, feelings attached to the thing in question, it's a wiser move to slow our rolls and practice the elements of "Communication that Connects" in order to create understanding (and not conflict).

My advice to get your partner on board is counter-intuitive, but it works: If your partner is completely unwilling to entertain the idea of working on your relationship with you, and it feels impossible to even talk about... don't. Instead, work through the free two-part training, "Communication That Connects," so that you can learn and start practicing the types of communication that will give you a better chance of being heard.

Then, move on to the other ideas I have for you.

## Pro Tip #2: Incorporate the Six Pillars of Communication That Connects

1. **Communication System:** Start by having sensitivity for the communication system, and do some self-reflection around whether you're currently engaging in "pursuing" behaviors that may be pushing your partner away.

2. **Emotional Safety:** Practice emotional safety by avoiding doing things that would lead your partner to feel criticized or shamed for not wanting to participate in growth work with you.
3. **Emotional Intelligence:** Focus on being aware of your own feelings and managing them well, and then getting curious about what your partner might be feeling or needing from you related to this issue.
4. **Mindset Management:** What's your mindset around this? Are there negative stories involved? More importantly, what's your partner's mindset?
5. **Love and Respect:** It's vital that you seek to understand your partner's perspective and help them feel heard, valued, and understood. Ask open-ended questions, validate their feelings, and find common ground.
6. **Practice Healthy Communication Skills:** We all have good intentions, but in the moment, especially when we're... passionate... we don't always come across in ways that feel good to other people. Learning specific, evidence-based strategies for HOW to communicate constructively in these moments will help you have more positive experiences and get better results.

If you're reading this and thinking, "Wait, what? Six pillars?" Please watch the "Communication That Connects" two-part training for more detail.

## Pro Tip #3: Embody Empathy and Understanding

It's so tempting to try and "convince" other people why our perspective is right and theirs is... well, wrong. (Yes, I can be guilty of this too). However, taking that stance is the type of well-intentioned but unhelpful communication strategy that will usually lead to an unproductive conflict. Instead, practice understanding your partner's perspective with love and respect. Helping them feel heard and understood by you will help them become much more receptive to your ideas.

### Generating Empathy

#### 1. Belief Systems About Compatibility

**Self-Limiting Myth:** If people are compatible, relationships should be easy. If there are issues and problems, it's due to incompatibility. Nothing can be done!

**Reality:** Even the most compatible couples need to grow together. Compatibility doesn't eliminate the need for effort and growth in a relationship. However, nobody teaches us this! Our model for how relationships work is that they either do (like magic!) or they don't.

We do not get visibility into what strong couples are actually doing behind the scenes to grow together. Nobody tells us that this *actually* works by growing into the kind of person who knows how to communicate to connect, and by practicing love, respect, and

acceptance. I can assure you, when it comes to enduring, happy relationships, this is 100x more important than “compatibility.”

Help your partner change this mindset by highlighting the strengths and positives in your relationship, as well as the opportunities for growth. Do you have examples of other couples you know and respect who are compatible, solid couples, and who have also worked to improve their relationship? Or couples who are wildly different in every way and yet still have a fantastic time together? Invite them over for dinner!

## **2. Desire to Avoid Conflict and Problems**

**Self-Limiting Myth:** Conflict is bad and scary! Addressing issues will lead to arguments and bad feelings. Better to leave things alone, lest we make it worse!

**Reality:** When people have not yet learned how to have constructive, productive conflict... it actually does feel really bad! It doesn't end well! Especially if someone has grown up in a high-conflict home where parents eventually got divorced, they don't have a model for anything good coming out of “fighting.” Why should they? Better to keep the lid on that pot.

People need to learn how to have constructive conflict. They also need to be taught that constructive conflict is not just healthy, it's the lifeblood of a thriving partnership. Everyone has differences! Avoiding problems can cause them to fester, leading to greater conflict over time. Constructive communication can prevent small issues from becoming major ones. If you can't have constructive conflicts (if they are unproductive, or do degenerate into fights) it's important for your partner to know that the goal is for this to feel better than it does right now, not to do more of the same.

Talk about how you understand that a lot of the time they don't feel heard or respected, and that they have frustrations in the relationship. Talk about your desire for the relationship to feel better for them too, and how improving your communication and having more constructive conversations is how strong couples achieve that outcome.

What's important to your partner? What do they want? Do they legitimately not know how to have constructive conflict? (Do you??) Let's legitimize that, and talk about the possibilities for your shared future if you both work on this. If you don't know how your partner feels, just that they're “avoidant,” dig deep into “Communication That Connects” to see if you can work unilaterally to improve the emotional safety enough to find out.

## **3. Lack of Understanding About Relationship Growth**

**Self-Limiting Myth:** Healthy relationships don't require work to stay good.

**Reality:** All relationships need to evolve and adapt, but nobody teaches us how to do this. We fall in love, get married, and... wing it! Healthy communication, emotional intimacy, and knowing how to navigate the ups and downs is not an innate ability. We invest so much into our education, our careers, and coaching for everything from fitness to finances — getting coached on relationships is exactly the same!

Healthy humility is the key here: Every phase of life brings new challenges, and people grow and change over time. There are always new things to address. Learning how to work through issues collaboratively is crucial for a lasting partnership.

The reality is that your partner may have no idea that's how this works. They may have zero role models or personal relationships with anyone who has been open with them about actively working on their relationship in order to create and maintain love for the long haul.

If this is the case, tap into your partner's values around personal development in other aspects of their lives. Were they involved in athletics where they had a positive relationship with a coach or mentor? Do they have a value around education? Have they pursued continuing education or invested in developing skills and abilities in other areas of their life? Cooking classes, dog training — anything counts. This is exactly the same principle.

#### **4. Belief That Therapy Is for Couples on the Brink of Divorce**

**Self-Limiting Myth:** Only couples facing divorce need therapy, things aren't *that* bad for us, so we don't need to take such drastic measures.

**Reality:** Your partner probably knows a few people who have gotten divorced, and is possibly aware that one of the last things they did as a couple prior to throwing in the towel was... going to marriage counseling! Therefore (emotional logic) marriage counseling is associated with divorce.

Lots of couples go to marriage counseling and are strengthened for it, but this work is quiet. People don't talk about it. The truth is that the strongest, happiest, healthiest couples are the ones that take proactive steps to improve their relationships before things get bad. They are usually working hard, behind the scenes to make their good relationship great. They know what I'm about to tell you: If you wait to actively work on your relationship after it's really in distress, it's likely to fail.

You can absolutely wait too long. Couples who wait until they're on the brink of divorce before they talk to a marriage counselor are setting themselves up for failure, ironically by telling themselves it's only something couples in dire situations do. Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy! Working on your relationship is much easier and more productive while you two still like each other — trust me.

## **5. But It's Expensive**

### **Self-Limiting Myth:**

"Going to work with a relationship professional is going to be expensive. Insurance should cover it, but it doesn't. We can't afford this!"

### **Empowering Reality:**

Working on your relationship is dirt cheap in comparison to many things we all spend tons of money on without batting an eye. A new couch, a season ski pass, or a weekend on the coast typically cost more than a course of highly effective couples counseling with an expert — and far more if you engage in a program like "Communication That Connects."

The most expensive marriage counselor in the history of the world will never cost as much as you'd pay the real estate agent to sell your house as part of the divorce proceedings — much less the attorneys.

### **Time to Change Your Perspective:**

- What's truly valuable in your life?
- What really matters to you? New skis? Or the long-term trajectory of your marriage and family?

### **Questions to Consider:**

- How much does marriage counseling cost?
- Can you use insurance for marriage counseling?

## **7. I'm Going To Be Blamed and/or Judged**

### **Self-Limiting Myth:**

"I am going to get in a little room with a marriage counselor, and they and my partner are going to gang up on me, tell me this is all my fault, or accuse me of being in the wrong. I'm going to have to talk about deep, dark things that I'd like to move past. It's going to be uncomfortable and awkward and intense, and I do not want to do this!"

### **Empowering Reality:**

Your partner might be right! Especially if you make the mistake that most people do, which is attempting "couples counseling" with a run-of-the-mill therapist who does not have specialized education, training, and expertise as a licensed marriage and family therapist. They know how to do clinical mental health treatment, not systemic relational

work. They will often seek to identify “who’s the problem” and then laser in on that person, to the detriment of the relationship growth work.

In contrast, an experienced, qualified LMFT would never “take sides” and knows how to help both of you feel heard and understood. Particularly if you get connected with one who practices positive, strengths-based, and solution-focused relationship coaching, the work itself can feel very empowering and productive. It helps you both get what you want!

## **Considering Couples Therapy or Marriage Counseling?**

Knowledge is power. Be sure to read this article before making a move:

Enrolling in a structured, evidence-based program like “Communication That Connects” is even better. It’s easy, fun, illuminating, and powerful — but in an emotionally safe way that allows people to be open to learning and practicing new relationship skills, without the drama.

## **Pro Tip #4: Get Curious!**

The common culprits I shared — the self-limiting mindsets and false beliefs that will often lead people to avoid working on their relationship constructively — may or may not be true for your partner.

### **Steps to Take:**

- Use your healthy communication skills to respectfully ask open-ended questions.
- Create an emotionally safe environment that helps your partner open up and share what’s really going on.
- Listen for the purpose of understanding, be receptive, and respectfully ask them if they’re willing to hear your point of view.
- Share your perspective on the value of working on your relationship, developing your communication skills, and intentionally doing the things that will help you both be better partners for each other.
- Remind them that nobody learns how to do this until they engage in personal development work, like the Communication That Connects program.

## **Pro Tip #5: Practice Personal Empowerment**

If you’re with someone who refuses to engage in meaningful conversations, consistently rejects growth opportunities, fails to take any responsibility for their outcomes, and will not be receptive to your point of view... you may have a different problem.

**Therapist Joke:** “How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb?” “Only one... but the lightbulb has to want to change.”

**Reality Check:**

- None of us can make other people do their own growth work. We can support growth, plant seeds, and offer different narratives.
- At the end of the day, the only people we can control are ourselves.
- You are not a hostage in this relationship. Focus on your own growth work, develop healthy communication and relationship skills, and become happier and more satisfied with everything in your life because of it.
- As you grow, you may also find that you're less able or willing to continue participating in negative communication patterns. You will be different.

**Potential Outcomes:**

- Your partner may respond differently to you than they have in the past.
- Your partner may observe you growing and evolving in positive ways, and want the same for themselves. This may motivate them to grow with you.
- It might not. That's okay: You'll be learning, growing, evolving, and in an empowered place to make excellent decisions about the types of relationships that are worth continuing to invest in, versus the ones that aren't.

**Final Thoughts:**

You get to do your work, which will absolutely benefit you and your relationship experiences whether or not your partner decides to participate. They don't get to obstruct your journey of growth: You are your own hero!

I hope these ideas help you broach positive, compassionate, courageous conversations with your partner that launch a new chapter in your relationship and help you grow together. But either way, you are here to do the work and develop yourself. Your future is bright, my friend!

With love and respect,  
Dr. Lisa Marie Bobby