

RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES THROUGH POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

LESSON 5

Purpose To teach participants how to prevent and resolve difficulties in marriage through loving communication.

Preparation

1. As you prepare yourself to teach, look for ways to follow the principles under “Your Responsibilities as a Teacher” (pages ix–xi in this manual).
2. Read the lesson’s bold headings. These headings give an overview of the doctrines and principles in the lesson. As part of your preparation, ponder ways to help participants apply these doctrines and principles. Seek the guidance of the Spirit in deciding what you should emphasize to meet participants’ needs.

**Suggested Lesson
Development**

Every married couple will have some differences of opinion.

Have participants read the following statement by Elder Joe J. Christensen of the Seventy (page 20 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*):

“Occasionally we hear something like, ‘Why, we have been married for fifty years, and we have never had a difference of opinion.’ If that is literally the case, then one of the partners is overly dominated by the other or, as someone said, is a stranger to the truth. Any intelligent couple will have differences of opinion. Our challenge is to be sure that we know how to resolve them. That is part of the process of making a good marriage better” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 86; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 65).

Explain that this lesson discusses specific principles that can help a husband and wife prevent and resolve difficulties in their relationship.

Husbands and wives should look for the admirable qualities in one another.

Point out that when husbands and wives look for the admirable qualities in one another, they are better able to prevent difficulties. They are also able to work together to resolve difficulties that arise. Share the following story:

One woman repeatedly went to her bishop to express grievances against her husband. Finally the bishop asked her, “Why did you marry this man you consider so insensitive and intolerable?” The woman thought for a moment and said, “Well, I suppose he had some good qualities, but I can’t remember any. He must have changed.” The bishop asked her to go home and pray that her heart would be softened so that she would begin to remember the characteristics that she had once admired in her husband. She found that, with time, she was able to recognize and focus on her husband’s admirable qualities. Before, she had been so consumed with seeing his faults that she had failed to see his good qualities.

- In what ways have you seen the value of looking for the admirable qualities in others? How can looking for the admirable qualities in one another help husbands and wives strengthen their marriage?

Remind participants that although each person is unique, we are all children of God. Invite a participant to read the following statement from “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (page viii in this manual and page iv in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*):

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”

- How can remembering this truth help husbands and wives in their efforts to understand one another?

Explain that as husbands and wives seek to see all that is beautiful and divine in one another, they find more joy in one another’s companionship and are better able to help each other fulfill their divine potential.

While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of “the kind of respect that regards one’s companion as the most precious friend on earth.” He said: “Companionship in marriage is prone to become commonplace and even dull. I know of no more certain way to keep it on a lofty and inspiring plane than for a man occasionally to reflect upon the fact that the helpmeet who stands at his side is a daughter of God, engaged with [God] in the great creative process of bringing to pass His eternal purposes. I know of no more effective way for a woman to keep ever radiant the love for her husband than for her to look for and emphasize the godly qualities that are a part of every son of our Father and that can be evoked when there is respect and admiration and encouragement. The very processes of such actions will cultivate a constantly rewarding appreciation for one another” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 81–82; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 71–72).

Positive communication helps prevent and resolve difficulties.

Explain that in addition to recognizing the admirable qualities in each other, husbands and wives should strive to communicate well with each other. Communication is essential in building love and unity and in resolving difficulties that may arise.

Write the following principles on the chalkboard:

Listen to each other.
 Discuss challenges openly and calmly.
 Communicate in loving, positive ways.

Explain that these principles can help married couples improve their communication. Use the following material to conduct a discussion about each of the principles:

Listen to each other.

Share the following counsel from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“Husbands and wives, learn to listen, and listen to learn from one another. . . . Taking time to talk is essential to keep lines of communication intact. If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time! Yet less important appointments are often given priority, leaving only leftover moments for listening to precious partners” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 28; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 23).

- What benefits can come to a husband and wife when they listen carefully and lovingly to each other? (Answers may include those listed below.)
 - a. They learn more about each other’s true feelings and motivations.
 - b. They seek to understand before making judgments or offering advice.
 - c. Each person is more likely to feel valued and loved.
 - d. Each person is less likely to be defensive and more likely to communicate openly.
- What can get in the way of couples really listening to each other? (Answers may include busy schedules, failure to take time to listen, and lack of interest in each other’s responsibilities.)
- What can marriage partners do to become better listeners? (In addition to asking for participants’ ideas, consider sharing those listed below.)
 - a. Take time to talk together. Eliminate distractions, giving all attention to one another.
 - b. Listen to understand. Do not interrupt the person who is talking. If necessary, ask questions such as “Can you tell me more about that?” or “How did you feel when that happened?” or “I’m not sure I understand. Are you saying that . . . ?”
 - c. Avoid getting angry or offended. Remember that in many cases, more than one opinion can be right.

Discuss challenges openly and calmly.

- Why is it important that spouses talk openly to each other about the challenges they face in their marriage?

Point out that discussions about challenges should be conducted in a respectful way, without loud arguments or contention. While serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

“We seldom get into trouble when we speak softly. It is only when we raise our voices that the sparks fly and tiny molehills become great mountains of contention. . . . The voice of heaven is a still small voice; likewise, the voice of domestic peace is a quiet voice” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 82; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 72).

President David O. McKay said, “Let husband or wife never speak in loud tones to each other, ‘Unless the house is on fire’” (*Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay [1971], 294).

Communicate in loving, positive ways.

- In what ways do expressions of appreciation, support, and affection influence a marriage? How does negative communication—such as criticism, nagging, and fault-finding—affect a marriage?

Have participants read the following counsel from Elder Joe J. Christensen (page 19 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*):

“Avoid ‘ceaseless pinpricking.’ Don’t be too critical of each other’s faults. Recognize that none of us is perfect. We all have a long way to go to become as Christlike as our leaders have urged us to become.

“ ‘Ceaseless pinpricking,’ as President Spencer W. Kimball called it, can deflate almost any marriage. . . . Generally each of us is painfully aware of our weaknesses, and we don’t need frequent reminders. Few people have ever changed for the better as a result of constant criticism or nagging. If we are not careful, some of what we offer as *constructive* criticism is actually *destructive*” (see Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 85; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 64–65; see also Spencer W. Kimball, “Marriage and Divorce,” *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year* [1977], 148).

- What can result from constant complaints or criticism?
- One form of criticizing is the practice of comparing a person’s weaknesses to the strengths of others. How can this practice affect a marriage?
- What experiences have you had that show the value of complimenting and encouraging others rather than constantly criticizing them? In what ways can positive expressions strengthen marriages?

One woman explained that her husband often compliments her on her talents as a wife and homemaker, not only when they are at home but also when they are with friends. He never mentions her weaknesses. Instead, he chooses to focus on her strengths. She said that his comments give her hope and motivation to improve.

Conclusion

Share the following counsel from Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“In family discussions, differences should not be ignored, but should be weighed and evaluated calmly. One’s point or opinion usually is not as important as a healthy, continuing relationship. Courtesy and respect in listening and responding during discussions are basic in proper dialogue. . . . How important it is to know how to disagree with another’s point of view without being disagreeable” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1976, 79; or *Ensign*, May 1976, 52).

Briefly review the principles you have discussed. Encourage participants to apply these principles in their lives. Bear your testimony as prompted by the Spirit.

Refer to pages 18–20 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*. Encourage participants to review the doctrines and principles in this lesson by (1) following at least one of the suggestions in “Ideas for Application” and (2) reading the article “Marriage and the Great Plan of Happiness,” by Elder Joe J. Christensen. Emphasize that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.