

We Need to Talk! How to Have and Handle the Difficult Conversations With Your Partner

by Sheri Meyers, Psy.D

Author: [Chatting or Cheating: How to Detect Infidelity, Rebuild Love, and Affair-Proof Your Relationship](#)

The signs are there. Something is off. You suspect your partner is keeping a secret, avoiding the truth, up to no good, and/or not being forthright with you in some way. He seems distracted and keeps putting you off, freezing you out, avoiding your questions, delaying the conversation or turning it around and making you feel defensive and paranoid for even asking. Your mind starts filling in the blanks, suspecting the worse. *Why is he avoiding me? Why won't he hear me out? What's going on? Is he lying? Is there someone else? What's he hiding? Does he want to break up? What the heck is going on here?*

You might be feeling hurt, angry, scared or even betrayed and unsure how to proceed. Your natural impulse is to immediately take action, confront your partner, have it out or let them have it.

However, a word to the wise, *stop, pause and take a deep breath!* And now, another one.

Here's why: If your partner IS avoiding having a conversation with you for any reason, when first confronted your partner will probably clam up, deny, and deceive to protect themselves from the imagined fallout. Typically, your partner's deceptive or avoidant reaction is driven by one of our most basic emotions: FEAR – the fear of being embarrassed, punished, hurt, abandoned or rejected if the truth is known. They fear losing control, losing your respect and/or being forced to change.



Dr. Sheri's Touchy Subject B-Prepared Tip #1

When you first bring up a really tough or touchy subject, your partner will probably do anything they can to avoid, distract, deny, and discontinue the dialogue.

Your partner wants to avoid:

Hurting you.

An argument or confrontation.

Confessing.

You taking control of the situation by leaving or making them change.

Having to tell the painful truth.

Losing respect, love, security and family.



Dr. Sheri's Touchy Subject B-Prepared Tip #2

Don't make any random accusations in the heat of the moment. Stop, pause and breathe.

So what do I do now?

As a [licensed relationship therapist](#) and author of the book, "[Chatting or Cheating: How to Detect Infidelity, Rebuild Love, and Affair-Proof Your Relationship](#)" I've helped countless couples for the last 25 years overcome some of their most complex relationship and infidelity challenges including how to successfully address and move through their toughest and touchiest issues.

Here's my best advice: **If your goal is to get to the truth and successfully and effectively communicate through any and all touchy subjects, make sure you have the 3 P's covered before talking to your partner.**



The **3 P's** - Plan, Purpose & Preparation

Have a Plan.

Be Prepared.

Know Your Purpose.

Here's what you need to know and do:

1. Have a plan.

"If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else." —Yogi Berra

Where are you going to talk? Make a plan to talk to your partner without interruptions. Set aside time and a place where you can actually talk to your partner. If there's a lot of activity and distractions going on, it's probably NOT a good time. If you either one of you only has a few minutes, it's NOT a good time to have the talk. Make sure you have a plan in place so that you can have the time to talk with peace and at ease.

Most importantly, have a plan for how you're going to stay *calm, cool and collected*. It is very important to remain calm, no matter how anxious you may be feeling. **Remaining calm, cool, and collected** is key to getting to the truth. So, have a plan for how you'll deal with your irritation, fear and frustration if these emotions come up for you. The more calmly you deal with what your partner tells you, the more your partner will open up and tell you.

2. Be prepared.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." —Benjamin Franklin

To prepare means to prepare yourself for how you are going to stay *calm, cool and collected* (i.e. in control, composed and rational) no matter how your partner initially responds. The truth is, at first, your partner may not handle this conversation well. In fact, don't be surprised (and even be prepared) that your partner may get defensive, deny any and all 'wrongdoing', try to dismiss everything you say, distract from the conversation by changing the subject, or turn it around and make you wrong. Your partner wants to avoid being forced to change the status quo, or own any wrongdoing and have to suffer the consequences. Consequently, your partner's defensive or offensive comeback can easily push your buttons and activate your fear responses. When one person's fear activates the other, most conversations immediately take a wrong and counterproductive turn. The difference between having an effective, successful, loving outcome or one that pushes your buttons and pushes your

partner away will be YOUR ability to **remain calm within yourself, no matter how difficult the conversation. This is the essence of preparation.**

3. Know your purpose.

The next thing is to keep remembering is what the real purpose of having this conversation is all about. Often we think that the purpose is *"I just want to get myself heard", "I just want to find out and know what's going on."*

But really the purpose should be *how do I calmly get this out, have it heard, as well as, stay open and curious so that I can truly hear my partner?* How can **we can hold hands and successfully get through this conversation without alienating or aggravating each other?**

Remember, the purpose is to get the truth by getting your partner to open up and talk about what's going on. Once you know what's really going on, you can both work at a solution.

To do this, you must approach your partner in a rational, non-threatening way that alleviates your partner's fear instead of aggravating it. The intention is to get your partner to respond in a way that is forthright and honest.

Keep affirming to yourself... *"I feel calm. I am safe. I can handle this. I want the secretiveness to stop. I'm in charge here and I'm going to get to the bottom of this."*

Your purpose is to get to the truth.



Dr. Sheri's Touchy Subject B-Prepared Tip #3

Be prepared.

DON'T be surprised by your partner's reaction.

DON'T lose your cool.

Do a personal check in and make sure that you have your plan in place, know your purpose and are emotionally prepared for the outcome of the discussion.

When the answer is *"Yes! I'm ready!"*

Here's what to do next:





Think Conversation NOT Confrontation

Confrontation: *conflict, battle, contest, crisis, dispute, encounter, fight, showdown, strife*

Conversation: *chat, comment, communicate, commune, conference, consult, converse, discuss, exchange, express, hear, observe, talk*

If you think of this as a confrontation and your partner as the sneaky, lying, cheating, betraying enemy, it will most likely activate a series of more aggressive, combative behaviors and responses (i.e. name-calling, attacking and blaming). This will not get you the truth you want. It will only cause your partner to react defensively, withdraw, counter attack, become hostile and deny.

Conversely, if you approach your partner in a way that alleviates fear, your partner will be more likely to respond in a way that is forthright and honest. That's what you want, right? That's why it's important to start the dialogue with your partner in a rational, conversational, calm, non-threatening way.

Keep reminding yourself that a proactive conversation is what you're after. Once you know what's really happening, mutually understanding each other's positions and desires, you can both work at a solution.

A good way to start the conversation is to talk about yourself and start each sentence with "I" instead of "you." This will help your partner be less reactive.

Second, phrase the problem in a non-judgmental way by stating, "*Something I discovered is upsetting me. I'm concerned (sad, hurt, frustrated) and I'd like to talk with you about it.*" This will maximize your chances of being heard and ultimately getting the truth.

Lastly, once your partner starts to open up, don't bombard him or her with questions. Studies show that people shut down, become defensive and lie when asked too many pointed questions (i.e. *Who were you with? Why did you lie? How could you do this to me?*).

Listen carefully to your partner's responses so you can accurately assess the situation and keep the conversation going. Give it time and your calm approach will break down your partner's barriers.



Dr Sheri's Touchy Subject B-Prepared Tip #4

It helps to think of having this conversation as a way to come together to understand and discuss what went wrong and what you can do about it now. To get to the TRUTH, keep insisting: *"I love you. I want our relationship to work. This has got to stop. This is what I need."*

If you can approach your partner with an expressed desire to have this dialogue for a good win/win outcome—to ultimately improve your relationship for both of you—the conversation will be far more fruitful. Most importantly, it will encourage your partner to tell the truth and want to work with you.





TOUCHY SUBJECT SUCCESS SUMMARY

- ✔ Be Prepared for denial, distraction and defense.
- ✔ Know your Purpose is to persevere to get to the truth.
- ✔ Make a Plan to stay calm and remain focused on getting your partner to open up and talk about what's going on.
- ✔ Approach your partner in a rational, non-threatening way.
- ✔ Think conversation NOT confrontation.
- ✔ Stay calm, cool and collected.
- ✔ Allow the conversation to develop into a discussion that helps you BOTH understand what's going on and what you can do about it now.

Let's face it. Healthy communication is vital to creating and maintaining a healthy relationship. I hope with these *heart-healthy* skills I shared about bringing up the touchy subjects, will encourage you to sit down with your beloved and have the kind of conversation and outcome that deepens your intimacy and increases your love tenfold.



With love, Straight from my Heart

Dr. Sheri

About the author:



[Sheri Meyers, Psy.D.](#), a Marriage & Family Therapist, is a highly-respected and sought-after love, intimacy and infidelity expert for network TV news including ABC, NBC, CBS, cable TV, and radio talk shows, magazines and blogs such as Huffington Post. For 11 years, Dr. Sheri hosted and produced the TV talk show, "*Straight from the Heart.*" (www.straightfromtheheart.com) With intelligence, compassion, and straight talk, Dr. Sheri has helped thousands of people face and overcome their most complex and life-wrenching relationship challenges with honesty, dignity, and love.

In her new book '[Chatting or Cheating](#)', Dr. Sheri shares her exclusive and unique insights and effective strategies that come from over 25 years of helping couples successfully recover, heal, and safely love again.

"One of the main reasons I wrote [Chatting or Cheating](#) was to help relationships succeed, instead of die a painful death as so many are these days. Especially now, with the rampant use and ease of technology, meeting, staying connected, and getting intimate with others is easier than ever. Let's face it, infidelity is on the rise. I wanted [Chatting or Cheating](#) to be an affair-aware 'wake up!' call' as well as, a personal relationship rescue and rehab manual that gives couples the step-by-step effective strategies and tools they need to facilitate their communication, regain trust and build a happier, healthier, more honest, and affair-proof relationship together."

If you're interested in learning more about why cheating happens, how to recognize the signs in your relationship and how to affair-proof and make your relationship stronger than ever, here are the [links](#) to where you can purchase the book on [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), or download as a [Kindle](#) or [Nook](#).

For free videos about communication, helpful articles about increasing love and improving your relationships, and to connect with Dr. Sheri directly, please visit her website: www.drsheri.com

