

How to Talk About Money So Your Spouse Will Listen



When starting the dialogue with your spouse about finances make sure to be particularly sensitive, since money pushes a lot of emotional buttons in people, including fear, anxiety, guilt, and anger. The role of money in marriage ranges from enjoyment and security to status and domination, so strive to understand how both you and your partner view it. Does one of you come from a family of “old” money? Is one person more organized than the other? Do you both view giving to charity with the same level of importance? Does one of you like to spend while the other prefers to save? Distance yourself from the many myths that have penetrated into the world of money, such as lack of financial resources is the leading cause of divorce (perhaps not talking about the subject is the cause); money solves all problems (rich people have problems, too); the economy is so crummy that we’ll never get ahead (lots of people are finding ways to deal with a bad economy); there are only two ways to handle money – the right way and the wrong way (there are plenty of different approaches, so you don’t need to get locked into just one). Don’t start with conclusions about how much you can afford and what should be cut from the budget. Begin with open-ended questions such as:

- What is important about money to you?
- What did your mother/father teach you about money – by actions and words?
- Did your parents do something with their money that you respected? Disliked?
- How do you feel when you have a lot of money? How about when you’re feeling broke?
- How much money do you want to have?
- What would you do if you got a \$5,000 inheritance from a distant uncle? How about a \$500,000 windfall?

By creating an atmosphere of open communication, you will get into the habit of conversing with your spouse respectfully and in a non-combative way. Realize that your marriage is more important than any item that money can buy. Talking clearly, and more importantly, listening closely, both you and your spouse will feel at ease, and better able to explore your objectives together. Of course, make the structure of the discussion conducive to accomplishing your goal of managing your finances. Do this by meeting regularly, perhaps quarterly. Schedule a time when you are not tired, stressed, or in the middle of something else. Shut your cell phone for these conversations, and have a standard agenda (i.e., how did our spending go last month, what do we have lined up for this month, what are our concerns). Try having bigger, long-term planning discussions every six to twelve months to review your longer-term goals, to strengthen your commitment to building a solid base, and to make sure that you’re both on the same page regarding how you want to handle your money.

