The Speaker-Listener Technique

A simple way to take turns when a conversation matters.

BEFORE YOU START

- [ ] We both want to have this conversation now.
- [ ] We agreed on how long. Fifteen minutes is plenty.
- [ ] We picked one topic, and only one.
- [ ] We chose our "floor": any small object, or a timer.

WHEN YOU HOLD THE FLOOR

Speaker

1. **Speak for yourself.**
   Your feelings and your view. No guessing at theirs.
2. **Keep it short.**
   A few sentences, then stop.
3. **Pause to be heard.**
   Let your partner say it back before you go on.

WHEN YOUR PARTNER HOLDS THE FLOOR

Listener

1. **Say back what you heard.**
   In your own words, without adding to it.
2. **Hold your reply.**
   No rebutting, fixing or defending. Your turn is coming.
3. **Check that you got it.**
   If not, let them say it again.

FOR BOTH OF YOU

Sharing the floor

1. **The floor is the turn.**
   Whoever holds it speaks. The other listens.
2. **Pass it often.**
   Trade places every few minutes.
3. **Understand first.**
   Solving the problem is a separate conversation.

SPEAKER, TRY

"I feel ___ when ___."

"What I want you to understand is ___."

LISTENER, TRY

"What I'm hearing is ___."

"Did I get that right? Is there more?"

If it gets heated, either of you can call a pause at any time. Agree on when you will come back to it.

Adapted from the Speaker-Listener Technique in Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, *Fighting for Your Marriage* (Jossey-Bass, 1994).

This is a communication exercise for two willing people. It is not therapy or a substitute for professional care.