

Nine Steps to Telling the Truth

1) Make the decision to be truthful. Recognize and appreciate that telling the truth will be challenging and remember that it will be worth the effort, when you and your partner develop more openness with each other.

2) Decide what you want to happen. Knowing what you want helps to formulate your approach and what you will say.

3) Explore your own avoidance. It's important to try to understand what led to your deception. For example, maybe you refrained from discussing something because you feared hurting your partner's feelings. Examine any ambivalence you may feel. You can also ask yourself, "Is there a part of me that doesn't want to change?" Understanding your doubts will help clarify your resolve.

4) Set a time and place. You want to create a situation conducive to your partner hearing your message and sensing the compassion you bring to it. With significant or surprising truths, the setting is important. Choose a time and place that's comfortable and where you're not going to be interrupted. For example, don't plan to discuss private, sensitive topics in a restaurant or other public setting.

5) Don't be passive aggressive. In choosing a setting, make sure you don't mislead your partner about what's coming. An example would be bringing your partner to a romantic dinner to announce that the marriage is over.

6) Plan what you will do or say. Do enough preparation, either mentally or by writing it down, so that you aren't impulsive. You can ask yourself, "My partner will probably get defensive. When am I most likely to cave in? When am I most likely to counterattack?"

7) Start the conversation. Give a warning that you're going to say some things that may be difficult to hear. Ask your partner to listen to you all the way through, assuring them that you'll respond afterward. You also can alert them to what they might feel about the topic so they are less likely to be caught off guard. If your partner isn't ready to talk, ask when would be a good time.

8) Take responsibility for what you've done. It's important to do the following things:

- Acknowledge that what you say might seem like a 180-degree turn.
- Resist demanding an immediate response.
- Avoid defensive patterns, such as blaming your partner or making up excuses.
- Be open. You must be receptive to knowing more about yourself than when you started. That's what will allow you to become a good truth teller.
- Take responsibility for what had stopped you from revealing the truth earlier.
- Describe your own struggles with telling the truth. This helps your partner understand what's happened in the context of your relationship. It will help him or her to see that your sentiments haven't simply appeared out of nowhere.
- Be sensitive to your partner's reaction but don't use every hint of distress as a reason to bail out too soon.

9) An option: do it in writing. The process of writing can clarify what you want to communicate. It can be helpful whether you read the composition to your partner or simply use the exercise to prepare yourself for the discussion. When you commit your thoughts to paper, explain the ambivalence you feel about telling the truth. Self-disclosure softens the impact. Writing can also help your own understanding because you can practice formulating your thoughts. If you explain what you've experienced, your partner will have more to hold on to as he or she tries to understand what's going on.