
COMMUNICATION

Communication Killers

12 phrases and patterns that destroy connection. Identify them. Eliminate them.

Boundary Agreement Resource Library

Dr. Hines Inc. | boundaryagreement.com

This guide is a coaching resource, not therapy or counseling.

Words Are Weapons

You can undo a week of connection with one sentence. These phrases and patterns are so common that most couples do not realize how much damage they are doing. Read each one. If you recognize yourself, that is not shame. That is awareness. Awareness is where change starts.

'You always...' / 'You never...'

Absolute statements trigger defensiveness instantly. Nobody 'always' or 'never' does anything. Replace with: 'I have noticed that lately...' or 'It feels like...'

'Fine.' / 'Whatever.'

This is emotional withdrawal disguised as compliance. It ends the conversation without resolving anything. Replace with: 'I need a minute to think about this' or 'I am frustrated and I need to cool down before I respond.'

'If you really loved me, you would...'

Emotional blackmail. It weaponizes love to get compliance. Replace with: 'It would mean a lot to me if...'. State the need without questioning their love.

'My mom/friend/coworker thinks...'

Bringing third parties into your argument. Your partner now has to defend against a committee. Replace with: Own your own feelings. 'I feel...' not 'Everyone thinks...'

'Here we go again.'

Dismissive, condescending, and guaranteed to escalate. Replace with: 'I know we have talked about this before. Can we try a different approach?'

'I'm not going to talk about this.'

Stonewalling. It leaves the other person hanging with no resolution. Replace with: 'I am not ready to talk about this right now. Can we revisit it tonight?'

'Calm down.'

Has anyone in the history of humanity calmed down after being told to calm down? No. Replace with: 'I can see this is really important to you. Help me understand.'

The eye roll.

Not a word, but deadlier than most. It communicates contempt. Replace with: Nothing. Just stop doing it.

'I guess I'm just a terrible husband/wife.'

Weaponized self-pity. It shifts the focus from their valid concern to your feelings. Replace with: Listen to the concern. Respond to the concern.

Sarcasm during conflict.

Sarcasm is hostility wearing a smile. It is not humor when your partner is hurting. Replace with: Direct, honest communication.

Bringing up the past.

The argument is about today. Not 2019. Not what happened at Thanksgiving. Today. Replace with: 'Let's focus on what is happening right now.'

The silent treatment.

Silence as punishment is emotional abuse. It communicates: 'You do not deserve my words.' Replace with: 'I need space, but I am not punishing you. I will come back to this conversation.'

EXERCISE: The Pattern Check

Be honest. Circle the ones you do.

Which of these 12 do I use most often?

Which one does my partner use most often?

What triggers me to use them?

What would I say instead if I paused for 6 seconds?

Am I willing to let my partner call me out when I use them?
