

Talking does not solve all problems.

One of the most consistent errors made by couples and parents is believing that they can talk their way out of most problems. People tend to believe that conflicts will be resolved by talking, that talking is necessary to understand another person, and that explaining oneself is necessary to get someone to co-operate with you.

When it comes to on-going perpetual problems in particular, nothing could be further from the truth. *Talking does not solve all problems.* In fact people often conclude that if a problem is not resolved by talking then *more talking* is required!

As the song goes “Everybody’s talking at me, can’t hear a word their saying”. We have talk on radio, TV, in pubs, and at home. There is talk, talk, talk, everywhere we go. As verbal beings we rely almost exclusively on talking as the means of communication and influence – particularly at home.

Talking unfortunately often involves increasing attempts to get another person to give in along with an increasing consolidation of one own opinion. You can understand then why talking often makes things worse rather than better.

Teenagers often excel at using talking as a means of preventing solutions. Many defiant teens are exceptionally good at talking their parents into cul-de-sacs, around-in-circles or into-the-ground. Many parents find it impossible to extricate themselves from these endless discussions because they operate according to the myth that *you have to talk things out* or that *talking is communicating* or that *good communication involves talking* or that *compromise is always best*. These kinds of beliefs are not always helpful.

For example, a mother says to her teenage son who is going over to a friend’s house “I will pick you up at 10:00 to come home”. Her son responds with “Why?”

Now at this point if the mother answers the question she is on a slippery slope because to answer the question is to implicitly agree with her son that she has to justify her position verbally. Most parents cannot resist and walk into the trap of *using talking as a way of trying to have influence or exert authority*. While it is essential at times, it’s not always helpful.

Talking implies that things are open for discussion and as long as a teenager keeps the talking going I think a betting man would back him or her as an odds-on winner.

This also happens between parents and toddlers when the adult gets locked into trying to talk their toddlers into co-operation and seeking their toddler’s verbal agreement to their demands or requests.

“Sean, I want you to put those toys back into the box now, OK?” is, for example, a typical question put to the little child by a mother. The little fellow, of course only hears the “OK?” and that the parent is seeking is his verbal agreement to her instruction. The child of course continues on doing what he was doing and responds to the question with a very simple “No!” The parent reacts then in an even less effective way by actually repeating the exact same question, only in a louder voice.

“JOHNNY, I WANT YOU TO PUT THOSE TOYS BACK IN THE BOX, OK?” shouts the parent, to which the toddler responds, as you would expect, with an equally loud retort; “NO!”

This is a perfect everyday example of how the myth of trying to use talking to solve a simple problem backfires entirely.

All of this applies just as much to couples. Couples can use talking as a way of avoiding problems. I am sure you are very familiar with the experience of having long in-depth conversations with your partner to realise, after it all, that you are right back where you started and feeling even more hopeless than before.

For example, one party may seek to passively confuse the other person through endless discussions, or a couple may use talking as a substitute for clear honest communication, or a couple may use talking to make a simple problem more complicated.

Talking very often creates the illusion of problem-solving.

So what can couples or parents do about a perpetual problem other than talking.

1. Try to communicate in brief polite **telegrams rather than in long repetitive paragraphs**.
2. Try to communicate through **action** rather than words.
3. Don't always give-in. Hold onto your **integrity**. “We agree to differ” is often better than trying to force an artificial compromise.

Talking is often a poor substitute for being able to be a separate, strong and free-standing person. You are often much better off separating yourself from an ongoing argument by not compromising and holding onto your position with integrity.

We are attracted to the belief that we can argue our way toward having our needs met because it lets us off the hook of having to be an independent person and tolerating the accusation of being cold or cruel. Integrity means you are able to hold onto your position but doing so in a way that respects the other person.

Stop trying to communicate more, try to communicate less but with more clarity.

To quote Elvis; “A little less conversation and a little more action” is often the necessary recipe for success!