

Five Ways Wives Can Get Their Husbands to Open Up

Men and women communicate differently. This is a fact of life we must accept if we hope to make our relationships better. Women, however, need the men in their lives to open up, share their feelings, and create a level playing field upon which relationships will grow. (This also works if you're a man married to a man or a woman married to a woman—basically, this is all about getting the less-emotionally-available partner to open up.)

These five steps are helpful, but they are not instant fixes. You will not solve all your problems today, but you will feel better taking a step in the right direction.

1. Stop Asking

You want your partner, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, significant other—whoever it is—to open up, but you can't ask constantly. Pestering someone makes them want to respond less. Anyone who has kids knows what we mean. Your kid needs to vacuum the living room. If you ask them every five minutes, they are less likely to do it.

Even if you NEVER change your tone, it sounds like you are nagging more and more with every request. Some people even say things like, "don't yell at me." You aren't yelling, but the cumulative effect of your requests grows louder and louder in their mind. Instead of barking back, "I'm not yelling," remember that asking over and over again isn't helping.

Talk about your feelings when it feels natural. (As a sidenote, saying, "we need to talk," isn't much better. It just feels...ominous.)

2. Don't Rebuke the Behavior You Want to See

As soon as your partner shares any emotional background or feelings with you, you can't sigh and say, "finally, you're sharing something with me." You wouldn't say that to a kid in math class who has a hard time with an equation. As soon as they get it right, would you groan in front of the whole class, "you finally figured it out, Johnny?" No. That's rude.

Be encouraging. "Thank you for sharing that with me." "That explains a lot." "I really appreciate you explaining that." Encouragement brings about more sharing. It won't happen overnight, but your partner feels like they can share safely without feeling like a failure for trying.

3. Put Yourself in Their Shoes

If you aren't the kind of person who shares their feelings often, there must be a reason. Have you met your partner's parents or family? That might tell you something. If your husband's father is the stoic, tough type—what did you think you were getting when you married him? He just needs a little encouragement (like in step two.)

You know some of their traumas, hangups, and other issues. You can, often, easily tie those issues to what you experience in your relationship.

4. Listen Between the Lines

When your spouse shares even tiny details with you, there's a good chance the reason behind their thinking is obvious. If your spouse sucks at giving gifts, did you ever consider they might not have had anyone celebrate their birthday, give them thoughtful gifts, or accept their gifts with any cheer? Maybe they grew up with very little. Maybe holidays or birthdays coincide with traumatic events in their life. You can see how this works. (Of course, you might have a partner who is truly thoughtless, selfish, or rude, but *most* people have a good reason they slip up in certain areas. You don't even need to ask—you likely already knew these things about them and simply didn't realize it.)

If you feel comfortable asking (some situations are better handled with silence,) you might ask if their feelings relate to an event from long ago. If they don't want to talk about it, you know, at the very least, that there is more going on than "they suck at giving gifts" or whatever the issue is.

5. Consider Therapy

You are not a licensed therapist. Therapists spend thousands of hours working with clients, listening, sharing coping mechanisms, and unpacking trauma. You can go to couples counseling, or you might recommend therapy for your spouse—not because they're broken, but because they might feel more comfortable sharing these painful details in a private setting without the fear of judgment. Your relationship is a commitment, and you can work on it for years to come. Therapy is a good first step that makes the two of you stronger.

Invest In Your Relationship Wisely

Invest in your relationship instead of expecting your partner to suddenly be a Chatty Cathy and give you all the answers you need right now today. (Privately, these are things you need to work on before you get married, move in together, get serious, or otherwise.) As the partner who doesn't share their feelings, I know how you feel. It's terrifying to be known intimately by anyone—especially if you have anxiety or a history of trauma. Take everything one step at a time and your life will get better with each passing day—and so will your relationships.

(PS—If your partner is verbally or physically abusive, seek help and get out as soon as you can. You can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1.800.799.SAFE or chat live on their website thehotline.org.)