

The Marriage Mirror Action Deck

Positive Listening Skills

that Erase Negative Habits

Small Changes. Deep Connection.

be present

*“Being heard is so close to being loved
that to the average person,
they are almost indistinguishable.”*

-David Augsburger

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak,
and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19)*

POSITIVE LISTENING SKILLS

- 1** When communicating with my partner, I will be aware of when my partner is upset.
- 2** Even when I am excited or upset, I will focus on my partner and listen.
- 3** When my partner speaks, I will give my partner my undivided attention.
- 4** I will pay more attention to what my partner means than to how the message is conveyed.
- 5** I will ask questions to clarify what I don't understand.
- 6** I will listen for my partner's main ideas and not get lost in the details.
- 7** I will listen for something of value in what my partner says even if I don't agree with everything my partner says.

POSITIVE LISTENING SKILLS

- 8** I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.
- 9** I will communicate an understanding of my partner's thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.
- 10** I will not change the subject until either my partner is finished, or we agree to change the subject.
- 11** When my partner criticizes me, I will recognize & admit to anything that is true.
- 12** In conversation with my partner, I will listen more than I speak.
- 13** I will observe my partner's facial expressions (without staring) while they speak.
- 14** I will notice the nonverbal messages given by my partner's body language and physical cues.

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

1 When communicating with my partner, I will be aware of when my partner is upset.

 **HINT:** Underlying emotions are predominantly conveyed through nonverbal cues (i.e. facial expression, tone of voice, posture). Look and listen. Only after you truly see and validate someone's feelings can you thoughtfully consider the real meaning behind their words.

 **HOW:** Study non-verbal cues (e.g. brow furrowing, pitch changes). Practice "scanning" posture/expression 3x daily to check the emotional climate.

 **RESULT:** I accurately name the specific emotion (e.g., frustrated vs. lonely). I notice physical tension (e.g. tight jaw, shoulders) before they speak.

 **SOUL:** "We want people to feel with us more than to act for us" (George Elliot).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

1 Supporting my partner as they notice my feelings

 Notice when they stop what they're doing to notice your facial expression, tone or body language. Notice them asking "Are you okay?" based on their observation.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I "caught ya" noticing I was upset before I even said a word. It made me feel so seen.*

 *I wanted to let you know how much it meant to me that you noticed I was upset today before I even said anything. Feeling "seen" by you makes this home a safe place for me.*

 *I noticed you checking in on me when I looked [emotion], and it made me feel [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

2 Even when I am excited or upset, I will focus on my partner and listen.

 **HINT:** When you feel strong emotions rising, take an internal pause for emotional regulation (i.e. deep breaths with slow exhales, mental counting). Make eye contact and focus on the words your partner is saying, not the emotions you are feeling. Self-control is key to collaborative solutions and shared hope.

 **HOW:** Calm my system with 30 seconds of "Box Breathing". Use a physical anchor (touching my ring/sitting on hands) to stay grounded.

 **RESULT:** My heart rate stays low. My voice remains steady. I accurately summarize their point before I share mine, regardless of disagreement.

 **SOUL:** "Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city" (Proverbs 16:32 NLT). "I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them" (Oscar Wilde).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

2 Supporting my partner's focus while they are upset

 Notice them leaning in and staying quiet even if they are clearly emotional.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I noticed how you stayed focused on me even though things got heated. I really appreciate you staying present.*

 *I know things got tense earlier, but I was so impressed by how you stayed focused on me instead of getting defensive. It made me feel like our relationship is more important to you than being right.*

 *I really appreciate how you stayed focused on me even though you were [emotion]. It made me feel [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

3 When my partner speaks, I will give my partner my undivided attention.

 **HINT:** Giving the gift of your undivided attention is the quickest and most powerful way to let your partner know you care. Focused attention avoids all kinds of misunderstandings. So, look at your partner, not your phone, not the T.V., and certainly not the time!

 **HOW:** Eliminate distractions: turn screens off and set phones down immediately. Create a "phone-free" zone.

 **RESULT:** When my partner is talking, my phone is face down or in another room. My body is squared toward them; no multi-tasking.

 **SOUL:** "One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say" (Bryant H. McGill). "You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time" (M. Scott Peck).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

3 Supporting my partner's undivided attention

 Look for them turning their whole body toward you, putting down their phone, turning off the TV, or closing a laptop when you start talking.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *Thank you for putting everything down to listen to me. I felt like your top priority.*

 *Thank you for giving me your full attention tonight. In a world full of distractions, having you truly 'dialed in' to me is the best gift you could give me.*

 *When you gave me your full attention while I talked about [topic], I felt so [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

4 I will pay more attention to what my partner means than to how the message is conveyed.

 **HINT:** Evaluate the heart of your partner's message, not their public speaking skills. Understanding the "what" is more important than the "how".

 **HOW:** Adopt a "Heart-Translator" mindset. Mentally ask: "If their heart was speaking perfectly, what would it be trying to say?" Focus on the need being expressed.

 **RESULT:** I respond to the heart-need (e.g., "I see you're overwhelmed") instead of the tone (e.g., "Why are you yelling?"; "Don't snap at me").

 **SOUL:** "The most basic of all human needs is to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them" (Ralph Nichols).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

4 Supporting my partner as they listen for my meaning

 Notice them moving past how you said something and focusing on the "heart" of your message.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I caught you listening to my heart instead of reacting to my tone. Thank you for being so patient with me.*

 *I know my tone wasn't perfect earlier, so thank you for looking past my frustration and hearing what I actually meant. Your patience is a huge blessing to me.*

 *Thank you for hearing what I meant about [topic] even if I didn't say it perfectly. It made me feel [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

5 I will ask questions to clarify what I don't understand.

 **HINT:** Asking clarifying questions demonstrates genuine interest, helps you better understand your partner's perspective, and creates a safe space for open, honest communication without judgment.

 **HOW:** Memorize three "Curiosity Starters" (e.g., "Help me understand..."). Wait for a thought to finish before asking a follow-up.

 **RESULT:** I use phrases like "What did you mean by...?". I don't move to my point until I receive confirmation that their point is understood.

 **SOUL:** "The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge" (Thomas Berger).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

5 Supporting my partner's clarifying questions

 Listen for them asking "What did you mean by...?" "Can you help me understand...?"

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I loved that you asked questions to understand me better. It makes me feel valued.*

 *I loved the way you asked questions to understand my perspective today. It makes me feel like my thoughts actually matter to you.*

 *I loved that you asked me [question]; it made me feel like you were curious about me.*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

6 I will listen for my partner's main ideas and not get lost in the details.

 **HINT:** Details? They're the rabbit trails that lead you astray. Especially when time is ticking or decisions are urgent, ditch the distractions. Focus on the main event – your partner's core message, even if it's lurking beneath the surface. Practice summarizing key points to ensure understanding.

 **HOW:** Practice "filtering": ask myself mid-story, "What is the ONE thing they really want me to know or feel?"

 **RESULT:** I summarize the "big picture" in one sentence. I let minor inaccuracies go; "the feeling is the fact".

 **SOUL:** "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out" (Proverbs 18:15 NIV).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

6 Supporting my partner as they find my main ideas

 Notice them nodding and summarizing the "big picture" of what you just shared.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *Thanks for catching the big picture of what I was saying and not getting hung up on the small stuff.*

 *Thank you for sticking with the big picture of what I was sharing. It's easy to talk to you when I know you're focused on understanding my heart.*

 *Hearing you pull out the main idea of [story] made me feel so [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

7 I will listen for something of value in what my partner says even if I don't agree with everything my partner says.

 **HINT:** Do not let disagreements become walls; build bridges instead. Within every differing perspective lies a nugget of value. Seek it out, appreciate it, and watch your potential battleground transform into a shared space. Facilitate the conversation further by finding common ground.

 **HOW:** Hunt for the "1% Truth": find one specific point I can genuinely agree with before moving to my contrary opinion.

 **RESULT:** I find one point to validate (e.g., "I agree the house is cluttered,") even if I disagree it's my fault.

 **SOUL:** "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking" (George S. Patton).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

7 Supporting my partner as they find value in my words.

 Notice when they acknowledge something you said that they agree with.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I noticed you found something to agree with even though we see this differently. It makes me feel like we're a team.*

 *Even though we don't see eye-to-eye on this, the way you looked for something of value in what I said made me feel respected and loved.*

 *Even though we disagree on [topic], it meant a lot when you validated [point].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

8 I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.

 **HINT:** Interrupting is disrupting and corrupting. Waiting shows respect, avoids misunderstandings, and captures the full message. Give your partner space to finish and yourself time to reflect. Try passing an object or setting a timer (e.g. 2-5 minutes) to signal who listens; no interruptions allowed.

 **HOW:** Press my tongue to the roof of my mouth or sip water while they speak. Take a deep breath and count to 3 in my head before I reply. Practice "STOP": Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed.

 **RESULT:** There is a clear 2-second gap after they finish. My partner never has to say "Let me finish".

 **SOUL:** "The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply" (Stephen R. Covey). "The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause" (Mark Twain).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

8 Supporting my partner as they wait without interrupting

 Notice them taking a breath and pausing after you finish before they respond.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I "caught ya" waiting for me to finish and taking a second to think before responding. It felt so respectful.*

 *I noticed how you paused and really thought about what I said before responding. That moment of silence felt like a moment of deep respect.*

 *I felt so [feeling] when you let me finish my whole thought about [topic].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

9 I will communicate an understanding of my partner's thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.

 **HINT:** Reflect back what you heard, using phrases like: "It sounds like you're feeling...", "What I'm hearing is..." Validate your partner's feelings first. By showing that you understand, you are showing respect, building trust, and making your partner more at ease and receptive to differing opinions.

 **HOW:** Use the 'WAIT' acronym (Why Am I Talking?) to check my motives and the 'Echo' technique to reflect my partner's heart and gain confirmation that I accurately understand their view.

 **RESULT:** I use the "Reflective Bridge": "So, you're saying [X]. That makes sense because [Y]. From my side, I see it as [Z]".

 **SOUL:** "When you listen generously to people, they can hear the truth inside themselves, often for the first time" (Rachel Naomi Remen).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

9 Supporting my partner's understanding of my heart.

 Listen for them stating your view, e.g. "It sounds like you feel..." before they give their own opinion.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *Thank you for mirroring my feelings before sharing your own. I felt completely understood.*

 *When you mirrored my feelings back to me today, I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders. Thank you for making sure I felt understood first.*

 *When you shared that you understood my view on [topic], I felt so much more [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

10 I will not change the subject until either my partner is finished, or we agree to change the subject.

 **HINT:** Imagine sharing your innermost feelings, only to have the channel changed abruptly. That is the sting of a premature topic shift. It cuts off the voice and silences the soul. However, lingering in your partner's emotional space shows genuine interest; you hear their heart and build a bridge of connection.

 **HOW:** Commit to "Topic Completion": if the subject shifts, say "Let's finish this first, then we can talk about that".

 **RESULT:** The original topic is resolved or "parked" by mutual agreement before moving on.

 **SOUL:** "The most precious gift we can offer anyone is our attention. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers" (Thich Nhat Hanh).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

10 Supporting my partner as they stay on the subject

 Notice them sticking to the current topic until you both agree you are finished.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I appreciate you sticking with the topic until we finished. It makes me feel like our issues actually get resolved.*

 *I really appreciate that we stayed on one topic until we both felt finished. It gives me so much peace knowing we can actually resolve things together.*

 *Thank you for staying focused on [topic] with me; it helped me feel like [feeling/result].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

11 When my partner criticizes me, I will recognize & admit to anything that is true.

 **HINT:** When stones of criticism are thrown, what if you catch the single diamond of truth? What if you face the perceived attack, not with a shield, but with strategic openness? You're not conceding defeat; you're claiming the power to transform, demonstrating self-awareness and a willingness to grow.

 **HOW:** View criticism as "Free Coaching". Practice "Clean Ownership": find the "Core Truth" and admit it without a "but".

 **RESULT:** I say, "You're right about that". I name the behavior (e.g., "I was late/ insensitive") and I see how it affected them.

 **SOUL:** "Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise" (Proverbs 19:20 NCV). "We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve" (Bill Gates). "A gentle answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1 NASB).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

12 In conversation with my partner, I will listen more than I speak.

 **HINT:** Want to know the most potent love potion? Active listening. It's a sincere demonstration of love, a magnetic force that pulls you closer, a promise whispered without words.

 **HOW:** Set a 10-minute timer for an uninterrupted "sharing block" focused entirely on my partner's heart. Ask 3 follow-up questions before making one "I" statement.

 **RESULT:** My partner does 60-70% of the talking. I am asking more questions than making statements.

 **SOUL:** "Love without demonstration is on life support" (Arthur K. Robertson). "Fools do not want to understand anything. They only want to tell others what they think" (Proverb 18:2 NCV).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

11 Supporting my partner as they admit to what is true

 Look for a sincere "You're right about that".

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *Thank you for owning that part of the problem. Your humility made it so much easier for me to relax.*

 *Your humility today was so beautiful. When you admitted to that small truth, it didn't make me think less of you—it actually made me trust you more.*

 *When you admitted [point] was true, it helped me feel [feeling] and close to you.*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

12 Supporting my partner as they listen more than speak

 Notice them giving you the "majority" of the talking time or consciously keeping their responses brief to give you more "air time".

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I noticed you gave me the floor today and really listened. It felt great to share my heart with you.*

 *I felt so cherished today because you gave me the space to talk while you just listened. Thank you for being my sounding board.*

 *I really felt [feeling, e.g., heard, respected, appreciated] today because you gave me so much space to share about [topic].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

13 I will observe my partner's facial expressions (without staring) while they speak.

 **HINT:** 6 basic facial expressions (anger, happiness, fear, surprise, disgust and sadness) are readily recognized across all cultures. The eyes have been called a “window to the soul” because they reveal the heart. Learning to read the transparent language of the face can improve your ability to connect with others.

 **HOW:** Study a "Faces of Emotion" chart. Position chairs to face each other directly. Practice "checking-in" on what I see (e.g., “I notice you look stressed; do you want to talk?”).

 **RESULT:** I notice when eyes soften, brows furrow or jaws tighten. I understand what they are feeling even if they aren't using words.

 **SOUL:** “The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said” (Peter F. Drucker). “To understand another person, you must first be willing to listen with your eyes” (Unknown). “The eye is the lamp of the body” (Jesus in Matthew 6:22 ESV).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

13 Supporting my partner's observation of my expressions

 Notice them gently watching your facial expressions while you speak.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I noticed you watching my eyes while I was sharing today. It gave me such a sense of safety to know you were looking for the heart behind my words.*

 *I noticed how you were tuned into my expressions while I talked today. It made me feel like you weren't just hearing words—you were seeing me.*

 *When I saw you noticing my reaction to [topic], it made me feel [feeling].*

MARRIAGE MIRROR SKILL CARD | LISTENING

14 I will notice the nonverbal messages given by my partner's body language and physical cues.

 **HINT:** Body posture provides insights into the emotional undercurrents of a conversation. Notice if they are leaning in (engaged), leaning away (unsafe), or crossing arms (defensive). Observe these nonverbal cues with a curious, non-judgmental approach and a desire to understand.

 **HOW:** Mirror positive body language (e.g., leaning in) to create rapport. If I notice "closed" cues, ask if they feel safe.

 **RESULT:** I notice when they cross their arms (defensive), lean away (unsafe), lean in (engaged), fidget or hold their breath.

 **SOUL:** “The body projects the thoughts of the mind and cannot be hidden” (Sigmund Freud). “The body speaks the truth even when the mouth is lying” (Martha Graham).

MARRIAGE MIRROR SUPPORT CARD | LISTENING

14 Supporting my partner's awareness of my body language

 Notice them reacting to your physical cues with a gentle “Are you okay?” or a supportive touch.

Partner Affirmation Examples

 *I was so encouraged when you noticed my [physical cue] earlier; your gentle check-in made me feel so seen and cared for.*

 *Thank you for noticing that I was feeling [feeling] just by looking at me today. It helps me feel like you are truly in tune with me.*

 *I really appreciated you noticing my [physical cue] and asking if I was okay. It made me feel [feeling, e.g. secure, connected, safe to open up to you.]*