



Safe Communication

**Tracy Henderson
Counseling**

Before two or more people can communicate effectively, they need to make sure both feel safe physically, emotionally, mentally, and in the environment. Furthermore, there is an additional variable of safety that is often overlooked and that involves inclusive safety.

Safety isn't just about avoiding harm, it's about creating the conditions where everyone involved can listen, share, and connect openly.

- **Physical or Felt safety** offers respect for each other's space and presence.
- **Emotional safety** involves the effort to speak with care, avoid shaming or blaming, and honor each other's experiences and perspectives.
- **Mental or Cognitive safety** means we give each other room to think, honor the neurodiversity that exists, encourage the expression of ideas, and provide the space to be heard without judgment.
- **Environmental or Contextual safety** looks like choosing the right time and place for intentional conversations, setting each other up to be free from distractions, mitigating external stressors when possible.
- **Inclusive safety** which is different for everyone although it may involve a number of unique circumstances that should be translated between partners.

When these forms of safety are in place, communication flows more easily, we can hear each other, respond thoughtfully, and build confidence that productive conversations can take place.

Without safety, even the best communication skills won't land.

So, as you talk, pause and check: Do you both feel safe right now - in your bodies, in your emotions, in your thoughts, and in space? If not, take a step back and create that safety first.

Explore Safety

Reflect on and identify what emotional safety looks, feels, and sounds like, both for yourself and those you are in connection with. By becoming more aware of emotional needs and patterns, you can shift unproductive communication cycles into more respectful, compassionate, and connected interactions.

Objective

- Be curious about what safety means for you.
- Consider others in your system (partner, children, colleagues, family, friends).
- Tune into your body and emotions as you reflect.
- Think of this as a personal compass to guide your boundaries, needs, and relational goals.

Common Topics

Communication often breaks down when we assume others know what we feel or want. Use these categories to guide deeper understanding:

- Responsibilities | Chores | Division of Labor
- Money | Finances
- Connection | Intimacy
- Activities | Shared Play or Leisure
- Children | Parenting Styles
- Electronics | Screen Time
- Food | Meals
- Religion | Spirituality | Culture
- Trauma and Triggers
- Boundaries | Limits
- Values | Beliefs

Exercise

When I Feel Safe: *"For me, emotional safety looks/feels/sounds like when..."*

Use these examples to build your own statements:

- I hear genuine compliments when I...
- I feel validated for my effort when I...
- I receive encouragement when I try something new...
- We set regular times to talk about difficult topics...
- We choose calm, neutral locations for serious conversations...
- The other person uses a soft tone of voice...
- There are no distractions (phones, TV, pets, etc.) ...
- Someone listens without trying to fix me...
- Someone simply sits with me in my emotions...
- My ideas are welcomed and explored...
- My needs are accommodated without judgment...
- I hear "Tell me more," "Help me understand," or "I'm curious"...
- Someone offers a comforting touch (a hug, handhold) ...
- We walk and talk, side by side...
- Someone trusts me with their vulnerability...
- We have follow-up conversations, not one offs...
- I know I won't be yelled at or cursed at...

When I Don't Feel Safe: *"For me, I become dysregulated and feel unsafe when..."*

Use the following examples to help you identify situations that activate your nervous system, defensiveness, or fear:

- I don't have time to decompress before a conversation...
 - I'm caught off guard by serious or emotional topics...
 - Difficult conversations about family, trauma, or past pain arise suddenly...
 - Someone tells me what I'm feeling...
 - Someone curses or uses hostile language...
 - Someone throws or hits things...
 - Voices get loud, fast, or intense...
 - Someone points aggressively at me...
 - Someone walks away or withdraws in conflict...
 - Someone shows no emotional engagement or empathy...
 - I'm forced to talk when I'm hungry, tired, or emotionally drained...
 - I'm asked to talk at a bad time or place for me...
 - I'm blamed or criticized instead of being heard...
 - A past trauma is triggered by someone's tone or behavior...
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Strategies for Building Safety

Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation

- Identify times when you feel most regulated and open to dialogue.
- Practice the "Pause" by taking a few breaths before responding when triggered.
- Use self-soothing techniques (e.g., grounding exercises, movement) before and during conversations.

Attuned Listening

- Practice active listening without interrupting or jumping to problem-solving.
- Reflect back what you heard: "So what I hear you saying is..."
- Ask clarifying questions: "Can you tell me more about what that felt like for you?"

Establish Guardrails

- Establish mutual "check-in" times for discussing hard topics.
- Agree on where, when, and how to bring up difficult topics.
- Use "I" statements to express needs and limits respectfully.

Conflict Repair

- When rupture occurs, practice repair strategies:
 - Acknowledge hurt: “I see how my words landed hard on you.”
 - Take responsibility: “I shouldn’t have said that in that tone.”
 - Offer repair: “Would now be a good time to reconnect?”

Co-Regulation Techniques

- Offer a hand to hold, a shoulder to lean on, or silence while staying present.
 - Sit in close proximity to show emotional availability without words.
 - Use simple phrases: “I’m here,” “You’re not alone,” “Let’s get through this together.”
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Your Turn: Personalize the Practice

What does safety look/feel/sound like for you?

Write your own sentences:

- “For me, I feel emotionally safe when...”
- “It helps me when others...”
- “I need others to avoid...”
- “I would like to create more safety by...”

What do you think creates safety for those you’re close to?

- Consider their unique needs.
 - Observe how they respond to tone, timing, attention, and gestures.
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Remember

Developing insight into what safety looks and feels like, both individually and within a relationship, is essential for building trust, openness, and meaningful connection.

Safety is not limited to the absence of conflict; it includes feeling emotionally respected, psychologically understood, physically at ease, and accepted for who you are.

As couples better understand their own needs, triggers, and protective patterns, they become more capable of communicating clearly, responding with empathy, and creating an environment where both partners can show up more honestly and authentically.