



# **Dare to CARE**

## **Guide to Partner Communication**



**NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER**  
PREVENTION AND PROTECTION START HERE





# INTRODUCTION

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The Dare to CARE guide is about finding the courage to communicate to your partner about your intimacy concerns, such as whether sex is even possible, if it will be painful or awkward, or if they still find you desirable.

The Dare to CARE guide seeks to help you effectively communicate your intimacy concerns so your partner has a better understanding of what you are going through. The guide encourages you to be open and honest about your intimacy concerns, as communicating effectively will help you learn to work together as a team to reclaim, revitalize, and renegotiate (if necessary) physical intimacy.

It covers four ways to help you communicate to your partner what you are going through: capture your intimacy concerns by listing them out; add a meeting with your partner to your schedule; relate your concerns to your partner; and engage your partner for feedback.

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# CAPTURE YOUR INTIMACY CONCERNS

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## Objectives:

- ☐ Consider the impact of your wound, illness, or injury on your ability or desire to be intimate
- ☐ Document your concerns
- ☐ Keep your list clear and concise

Take the time to capture your concerns. List what you are experiencing, how it impacts your ability or desire to be intimate, and what your concern is. State your concerns simply and address them one at a time.

Use the lists on the next page to help you get started.

Make sure your concerns are simple, clear, concise, and make sense. To do this, read them aloud to yourself. If upon hearing your concerns, something strikes you as odd or out of place, continue revising them. The more you process your concerns, the easier it will be to relate them to your partner.

Next, schedule a time to meet with your partner.

## **PHYSICAL WOUNDS** (amputation, severe neck or shoulder injury, mobility concerns, pain, etc.)

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## **PSYCHOLOGICAL WOUNDS** (body image, smell or sound triggers, anger, anxiety, depression, etc.)

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## **ILLNESSES** (nausea, fatigue, chemotherapy, surgery, etc.)

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## **MEDICATIONS** (anti-depressants, pain killers, etc.)

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# ADD A MEETING WITH YOUR PARTNER TO YOUR SCHEDULE

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## Objectives:

- ☐ Be prepared with your concerns
- ☐ Schedule a time to talk with your partner
- ☐ Make a commitment to keep the meeting

Make time to talk. It can be easy to find excuses to avoid difficult conversations, such as being too busy, or not knowing when it would be a good time. Remove the guess work and enter it in your calendar; come prepared with your concerns. Commit to communicate.

Choose the right time and place:

- ▶ Be prepared: Ensure you have thought through what you want to say, and how to say it.
- ▶ Keep it low-stress: Ensure you are fed, well-rested, and have adequate time in your schedule.
- ▶ Eliminate distractions: Ensure you can focus on each other; turn off the TV; have someone watch your children, or wait until they are sleeping. <sup>1</sup>

Remember, there may not be a perfect time to talk, but do what you can to make it better by being prepared, keeping it low-stress, and eliminating distractions.

Next, relate your concerns to your partner.

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1. What I Meant Was... : Improving Communication Skills for Everyday Talk. *Military OneSource*. August 19, 2013. Available at: <https://www.militaryonesourceeap.org/achievesolutions/en/militaryonesource/Content.do?contentId=8386>. Accessed June 02, 2014.

# NOTES

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# RELATE YOUR CONCERNS TO YOUR PARTNER

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## Objectives:

- ☐ Explain why you scheduled the meeting
- ☐ Use your list from the capture section to talk to your partner
- ☐ Gauge your partner's understanding

One of the great advantages of being a couple is that you don't have to go through this alone. Sit down with your partner and acknowledge that your wound, illness, or injury affects both of you. Tell him or her that you created a list of your intimacy concerns and that you would like to talk through that now.

When you share your concerns, be open and honest. It may be uncomfortable to express in detail what you are going through. But, you must trust that you and your partner are a team, and that communication can help you both work through the impact that these differences have had on your ability or desire to be intimate.

Once you have stated your concerns, encourage your partner to repeat in his or her own words what you just said. Remember, people have different communication styles, so try to focus on whether they appear to grasp your fundamental concern. If not, consider how you can restate it in a different way or try to add clarification.

Next, you are going to engage your partner for feedback.



# NOTES

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# ENGAGE YOUR PARTNER FOR FEEDBACK

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## Objectives:

- ☐ Allow your partner time to digest your concerns
- ☐ Initiate dialogue by asking questions
- ☐ Actively listen to your partner's questions or concerns

Now that you have shared your concerns and are confident that your partner understands them, allow your partner time to consider what you have said. When they appear ready to continue, engage your partner for feedback by asking questions like:

- ▶ Is there anything more specific you would like to know?
- ▶ Is there anything you didn't understand?
- ▶ Do you have any concerns about what others may think? <sup>2</sup>

Show your partner that you are open to discussion about your intimacy concerns by actively listening to your partner's questions; pay attention, offer words of affirmation, such as "I understand". Answer your spouse's questions openly and honestly.

Try not to get defensive, jump to conclusions, or try to find quick solutions. Instead, continue communication by asking and answering questions. Remember that you are a team; you are working together to improve your emotional and physical intimacy.

Reestablishing trust and intimacy can take some time and will certainly require ongoing openness and patience. Remember to communicate with each other and to reach out for support when you need it. Enjoy each other's company and continue to grow your loving relationship.

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2. Reestablishing Intimacy After a Severe Injury. *Military OneSource*. Available at: [http://www.militaryonesource.mil/wounded-warrior?content\\_id=268954](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/wounded-warrior?content_id=268954). Accessed June 02, 2014.

# NOTES

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## NEXT STEPS

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Based on the outcome of your conversation with your partner, determine whether you need to schedule a visit with your doctor, counselor, or chaplain. For example, if you have questions about physical ways to adapt to being intimate, or adjusting your medication, talk to your doctor. If you have other concerns related to relationships and intimacy, schedule time with a counselor or chaplain.

**Counseling:**

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/#>

<http://www.chaplain.navy.mil/>







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