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The Communication Mistakes Most Couples Make

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featuring Couples Therapist
Jenn Mann



163 - Communication Mistakes Most Couples Make with Couples Therapist Dr. Jenn Mann

Amy Morin:

Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength. Every Monday, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips could inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life. And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week. Now let's dive into today's episode!

You've likely heard that communication is the key to any good relationship, but not all communication is created equal. There are healthy ways to communicate and some not-so-healthy ways to communicate. Good communication skills aren't something that you either have or you don't. These skills need to be constantly sharpened, and there's always room for improvement. After all, you might communicate well about topics that you're comfortable talking about, but maybe when you're in a bad mood, your healthy communication skills go out the window. Or there are likely certain topics you can discuss easily and other topics you just can't talk about without feeling like you're going to blow up or feeling like you need to run away.

The things you talk about, the subjects you avoid, and the way you express yourself reveal a lot about you and the health of your relationship. Becoming a better communicator can greatly improve your relationships and your overall well-being. So today we're taking a close look at the communication mistakes most couples make. And here to help us do that is Dr. Jenn Mann. She's a licensed marriage and family therapist who's known for being the host of VH1's longstanding hit show, *Couples Therapy*.

She's also the author of several best-selling books, including *The Relationship Fix: Dr. Jenn's Guide to Improving Communication, Connection, and Intimacy*. Some of the things she talks about are why couples actually get divorced, how to know when to get professional help, and the steps you can take to improve your communication.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for The Therapist's Take. It's the part of the show where I'll break down Dr. Jenn's strategies and talk about how you can apply them to your own life. So here's Dr. Jenn Mann on how to avoid the most common communication mistakes most couples make.

Amy Morin:

Dr. Jenn, welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*!

Dr. Jenn:

Thank you so much for having me. Excited to be here.

Amy Morin:

I'm excited to speak to a relationship expert. We talk so much about relationships on our website, how it affects your mental health, and we really haven't had that many people on our show yet to talk about relationships, even though they affect so many people, so I'm excited to talk to you. Your book, *The Relationship Fix* is a good one.

Dr. Jenn:

Thank you.

Amy Morin:

Before we dive into that though, I'm curious, do you just do couples therapy in your office?

Dr. Jenn:

No, I actually don't. The majority of my practice is individuals, and then I ended up getting the show *VH1 Couples Therapy with Dr. Jenn*, and I did get a lot more of an influx of couples, and before we started filming, you were saying to me your feelings about doing couples therapy.

Amy Morin:

Yeah. So once upon a time I was a therapist in rural Maine, and it wasn't like we could specialize in teenagers with OCD or anything like that. The only other therapist in the area was my sister. So people had an option. You see me or you see my sister. And that was pretty much it. So I was happy to see people of all ages and to work on a lot of things. But the one area I really disliked

was couples therapy. I felt like by the time people came to therapy, they were already interested in getting divorced or breaking up, and I felt like they were just asking for my permission. Like, "Really, we can't get along. Right? Can you just verify that we should break up or we should get divorced?" Or sometimes I almost felt like a referee. What's your thoughts on doing couples therapy?

Dr. Jenn:

It's funny. When I was an intern many decades ago, I really did not like doing couples therapy, and then as the years went on, I then grew to really love doing couples therapy, and one of the things that I love about couples therapy is it requires very different skills than individual therapy.

Amy Morin:

Yes.

Dr. Jenn:

When you do couples therapy, you have to be way more aggressive. You have to be willing to go out on a limb. You have to be willing to make predictions. You have to be willing to call people out in a much more intense way, which actually is very conducive to my personality. So I really grew to love it, and getting to do couples therapy on my show was especially fun, because I also had resources as a therapist that I would have million years, where I could say, "You know what? You're clearly not over your, your high school boyfriend." And I can say to the producers, "Get the high school boyfriend in here. We need you to a session with him immediately." And they would scour the country for the high school boyfriend and we could work through it. So it kind of spoiled me a little bit when it comes to you doing therapy, but at the same time, it was just such a great experience and it made me love it in my practice as well.

Amy Morin:

Interesting. Yeah. I could see how having those resources would be interesting, because I saw a lot of individuals and maybe somebody was struggling with depression or anxiety, and often we'd bring the partner into work on how they could support the person or something like that. And that was always fun to do. But when it was just straight up a couple coming in and neither one was an individual therapy and they were like, "Hey, we have this problem." Sometimes it was tough to know where to start. What are the biggest problems people tend to have when they come see you?

Dr. Jenn:

Well, there are a lot of different things that happen, but to me, the basis of most relationships is the connection, and when that connection has disintegrated, when it has been harmed, most people don't know how to get it back on their own so they need the help of a professional. And especially when there are resentments that have been unresolved, that have not gotten work through, and we're also in a culture in a world that makes it very easy to not talk through things. It's way easier to go look at your phone, to look at Instagram, to turn on the TV, to take on extra assignments at work, to go shopping, to do something with your friends, to do a million different things to avoid dealing with the pain, to avoid dealing with resolving the issue, to avoid dealing with uncomfortable conversations we need to have.

Dr. Jenn:

And I also think that most people aren't given the skills. There really should be a life skills class in elementary school or high school that not only teaches about how to balance a checkbook, but also how to communicate when you've been triggered.

Amy Morin:

Yes.

Dr. Jenn:

How to talk to your partner when they really upset you. And most people don't have those skills and most of us get triggered and can be impulsive and can say things that we should never say when we are in a relationship and we are upset.

Amy Morin:

And in your book, the statistic that stood out to me, you say 69 percent of the conflicts between a couple actually never get resolved.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah.

Amy Morin:

And is that part of why people lose their connection?

Dr. Jenn:

I think it's part of it, and we kind of have to make peace with there are some things that are not going to change about our partners, and there are some things for our partners that they would really love to change about us that are not going to change. And we need to kind of make peace with that. And then at the same time, there are also a lot of things that can be changed. In my

relationship with my partner, Eric, one of our core values for us is that we both believe that we have a responsibility, not just to ourselves, but to each other, to work on ourselves and work on the relationship.

Dr. Jenn:

And I think that it's a philosophy that more people need to adapt, because it's something that changes the dynamic of the relation, because when you look at it in that system, then you're less defensive. It you're less, "Oh, well, you're trying to change me." Instead it's, "Okay. You know what? Maybe I could be better at this. Maybe I am doing something that is harmful to our bond and to the relationship," and then you're more inspired to work on it.

Amy Morin:

And do you find when couples are actually arguing about household chores, does that actually disintegrate the relationship? Sometimes those small things of who's going to do the dishes tends to lead to a breakdown in the relationship.

Dr. Jenn:

It does, because to me, a lot of the time the issue of the communication and the bond is what does the harm more than the chores or not doing the chores. And I think that most people get caught up in the details of being right or the specifics, or, "You said you were going to do these dishes," or, "You didn't do these dishes," as opposed to, "How are we communicating with each other? Is this effective?" Because that's the other thing. Okay, sure. You can yell at your partner. You can berate them for not doing the dishes, but is that going to actually change the outcome? No, it's actually the least likely thing that is going to change the outcome. There are way better ways to communicate and to approach that person, and especially if you have berated, you've yelled, you've screamed, you've stonewalled, you've done a whole list of things and none of them have worked, well, don't keep doing the same thing. It's time to do something different.

Amy Morin:

And even if you do yell long enough or loud enough that you get your partner to do the dishes, maybe you think, "Well, that worked, because it got him to do the dishes," but at the same time, what damage did it cause?

Dr. Jenn:

Exactly, exactly. And it does do damage. It does damage when it comes to the bond and also the of trust and the feeling of safety and security in the relationship.

Amy Morin:

And one of the things you talked about in your book, too, is the silent treatment.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah.

Amy Morin:

I know a lot of people use the silent treatment thinking, "Well, it's better than yelling," but you also talk about the damage that doing the silent treatment does in a relationship.

Dr. Jenn:

John Gottman, who is a researcher who studies couples, and he is able to predict divorce with something like 97 percent accuracy, and he talks about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the biggest one is stonewalling, and that it is pretty much a guarantee. And stonewalling for people who don't know that term, what it means is either ignoring your partner or saying the same thing over and over again. Like your partner says, "Hey, would you mind doing the dishes?" And you say, "I'll do them next week." And they say, "Hey, could you please do them today?" Say, "I'll do them next week." You just say the same thing over and over again. And it's stonewalling instead of actually engaging in a conversation with your partner and responding to them.

Amy Morin:

And you say a lot of these habits are learned from childhood, from the way that we grew up with our parents.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. We typically learn a lot of our bad communication habits from what we observed growing up, from what we observed in our household, and we tend to take them on. And also we tend to think whatever happened in our household is normal, is what everyone does, and that's not necessarily the case. And also it isn't necessarily best practice of how to communicate in a relationship.

Amy Morin:

Yes. So let's say you become somebody who feels like you're just two people that live under the same roof and you don't have that connection. How do you start to get it back?

Dr. Jenn:

Well, first, you have to have a conversation with your partner and call it out and say, "Hey," and hopefully you can do it in a loving way. "Hey, I love you. We share a life together." Maybe you have kids together. Maybe whatever it is. "We're married. We have a family together. And I really notice that we've drifted apart, and I would love to be closer. I love you and I care about you. And I feel like we just don't have enough of time together or a connection. Let's spend 20 minutes a day just sitting and talking." And that face to face time, it is one of the most valuable things that you can do in a relationship. You put down your phone, you turn it off. You don't watch TV, you don't have distractions, and you make eye contact and sit down and talk.

Dr. Jenn:

And sometimes people say, "Well, things have gone so far that I don't even know where to start. I don't know what to talk about." If you don't know what to talk about, there was a fascinating study done by a guy named Arthur Aron, and Arthur Aron looked at emotional connections between people. And he did a study where he took, in his case, he worked at a university and he had a group of heterosexual men and heterosexual women. He paired them one man and one woman who did not know each other. He gave them 36 questions. And I have a copy of the 36 questions in my book. And he had them ask each other these questions.

Dr. Jenn:

And these questions are not what you would expect. They are not these incredible deep, meaningful, poignant questions. They are questions that go from just interesting questions where you might learn something to deeper questions, but not invasive questions. They would be like, "Oh, that's uncomfortable you're asking me that." And they kind of increase slowly in sort of the level of intimacy. A writer who did the interview with another person described, and I hate the description as a vegan, but it makes a lot of sense. It was kind of like the frog in the pot of boiling water, that the heat got turned up so gradually that you don't even know that it got turned up when it comes to [inaudible 00:14:26] .

Dr. Jenn:

And what they found was that in this study, that a number of the couples fell in love with each other and one couple even married. And that woman named Mandy, and I'm going to pronounce her last name wrong, but I quoted her in my book. She did a New York Times article. She was a professor at a school. She did the 36 questions with another professor. They fell in love and moved in together and lived happily ever after. And so I think it really speaks to the importance of asking each other questions, of engaging, of making eye contact. And by the way, in the study, they also did a four minute eye gaze afterwards, which a lot of people cringe when you say, because the idea of just sitting and looking to each other's eyes for four minutes is really intense. But I do think that there is something very magical about eye to eye contact. And

I think it's very important, and most people don't realize because we spend all day looking at our phones.

Amy Morin:

Yeah. How do you think that social media and the invention of smartphones has impacted relationships?

Dr. Jenn:

I think that, on one hand, it's been great in terms of allowing us to keep in contact with our partners and our loved ones when we are not there, that we can FaceTime, especially during a pandemic. I think that it has been a vital important tool that we have these phones and that we can have a sense of community on social media. But on the flip side, I think it has completely taken massive chunks of our day to day life and removed it from our relationship that needs to be put back. And we need to be mindful about how much time we spend sitting and talking with our partners, how much time we are investing in our relationships and our families, and how distracted we are and how mindful we are.

Amy Morin:

Right. We've all seen two people at a restaurant together and both them are just staring at their phones and not having any conversation. We've probably all been guilty of being those people sometimes, too.

Dr. Jenn:

100 percent. We all have.

Amy Morin:

So what about for people, because I run into a lot of couples who will say, "Well, we heard that you should still go on dates. So we go on dates, but actually don't enjoy it." Is there hope for couples like that, who say, "I do it, but it feels more like a chore"?

Dr. Jenn:

Well, I think you have to look at what's going on that it feels like a chore, and if you're not connecting, I think you go back to the 36 questions. You go back to what is it that's holding me back? What is the block that I have? And typically when I hear that, the reason why it's not enjoyable is that you're holding on to so much resentment that hasn't been resolved, and it may be time for you to get into therapy. And I always recommend that everybody have one year of weekly individual therapy, and that all couples do at least six months of weekly couples therapy. It doesn't have to be at the same time.

Dr. Jenn:

And a lot of the time people say, "Well, that's very expensive." But what most people don't realize is that there are mental health clinics all around this country. In order to be a licensed therapist, we have to do 3000 hours under supervision that we don't get paid for. So you can get great clinical judgment, great therapy at a mental health clinic, because not only do you get the therapist that you're working with, but you get their supervisor who has at least two years of experience overseeing your case. So you basically get two therapists at whatever price you can afford. And I think it's important that people know that, because it's kind of one of these lesser known facts that really prevents of people from getting into therapy.

Amy Morin:

Absolutely. I think money can be a huge barrier for people. But when you look at where are your priorities? Where is your money going? That maybe it could be going to this? And what do you think about online couples therapy? It was something that we tested on our website and I have to say, originally, I was like, "I'm not so sure about this," but I thought it was better than I expected.

Dr. Jenn:

Oh look, I think it's fantastic. And I think that one thing that the pandemic has really shown us is that telemedicine is not only viable, but it is a great option. And most therapists that I know have switched from in person to virtual, and plan to stay that way forever.

Amy Morin:

Yeah, me too.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. And I can tell you, look, I have. I had an office in Beverly Hills for 30 years, almost, and I recently gave up my office because everything that I'm doing is all virtual. And I've done couples therapy. I've done family therapy with multiple members of a family, some in different locations. It really has made therapy possible that might not have been possible before.

Amy Morin:

Interesting. How about forgiveness? Because that's something you also talk about in your book, is how important it is to forgive our partners.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. And not in the traditional sense. I think that a lot of people practice what I call cheap forgiveness, which is where people say, "Well, I have this responsibility, somehow. I should forgive my partner. And so I'm just going to, okay." That the other person apologizes, "Okay, I forgive you." But forgiveness is a process. And typically we need to see four things, and I call it the four RS. And those four things that are needed in apology to really have there be healing, the first is remorse. The other person needs to give a heartfelt apology that really shows a deep understanding of the pain they caused and what that felt like. And just, "I'm sorry," doesn't do it. Those are just words, but verbalizing an understanding of the pain that was caused is important.

Dr. Jenn:

The second is to take responsibility. The second R is responsibility. And that is to own what you did wrong, to own your part in the conflict, to own what you did, and to convey that to the other person. The third is recognition, and this is where a lot of people go wrong. Recognition is actually sitting and listening to the other person share their pain and recognizing what that experience was like for them. Because a lot of the time, especially if you did something wrong and you feel guilty, it can be really hard to hear the pain that was caused for the other person. And it's kind of easy to be like, "Oh, oh, you know what? Stop harping on that." Or, "Aren't you over that by now?" Or, "Enough already, it's been however many days, weeks, years," whatever it is. But if your partner's still talking about it, it means that they haven't gotten the experience of feeling heard and understood by you. So we tend to obsess and repeat until we feel that it has truly landed.

Dr. Jenn:

And then the fourth is remedy, and this is really important. And a lot of the time I will talk to someone who, for example, let's say someone calls into my radio show and says, "My partner has cheated and he came to me and he apologized and he cried and he felt terrible and I forgave him. And now I'm worried that he's cheating again." And my first question is, "Oh, well, what plan did you two make to prevent this from happening again? What did you do to deal with the underlying issue or the pattern or the habit that got you there?" And inevitably the answer is, "Well, no, he apologized and he cried. And so I forgave him." But there needs to be a remedy. There needs to be a plan of action to prevent this from happening again.

Dr. Jenn:

And if it's, "Oh, the person had inappropriate boundaries with an ex on Facebook." Okay, well then transparency on Facebook is a fair remedy, or therapy to explore why they were acting out and reaching out to another person, or better communication between the two of you, maybe a nightly check in where you see where both of you're at and how the connection and the

relationship is doing. But without that aspect of it, it's very hard to forgive and also to trust that it's not going to happen again.

Amy Morin:

Yeah. Let's talk about trust for a minute, because that's a big one that I've seen over the years, is people saying, "My partner wants to check my cell phone and then I become more secretive."

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah.

Amy Morin:

Or, "How do I know that this person's being honest? So I'm checking up them." How do you handle trust in a relationship, or lack thereof?

Dr. Jenn:

Well, I think that there are two different scenarios. One is where the trust has been broken and it has to be regained. And I think in situations like that, it's appropriate to temporarily be answering questions, be transparent with social media or email or phones or whatever it is. If trust has been broken, you need to win that back and temporarily, not forever, have a level of transparency so that person can feel safe again. Now, in a scenario where there hasn't been trust broken, but you just have a partner who has been maybe harmed by someone else in the past, or who just has trust issues, that's different. That partner has a responsibility to work on their trust issues in their own individual therapy, in their own work, spiritual, emotional, psychological, whatever it is that they need to do. And that's on them.

Amy Morin:

I don't know about you, but that's one of the biggest things that I would say, is people saying, "We don't trust each other." Or, "There are secrets." And then of course in the age of social media, it's easier for people to keep secrets.

Dr. Jenn:

Yep.

Amy Morin:

And people getting jealous or saying, "Why are you doing this on social media?" And spying on each other, those sorts of things.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. And I think it's also really important when it comes to social media to have clear boundaries. What is acceptable in our relationship and what is not? And the rules apply to both people. To say, "Hey, if an ex reaches out to you, I'd like you to let me know," and to be able to be transparent about that, I think is a fair expectations. And that tends to be a common thing that comes up, like, "Oh, someone slid into your DMs and you didn't mention it to your partner. Well, why didn't you mention to your partner?" Especially if you're in a monogamous, committed relationship, that seems relevant. Even if it's just like, "Oh wow, you're not going to believe it. Blast from the past. Hey, so, and so reached out to me." Much less someone you've been intimate with.

Amy Morin:

Right. And one of the other things you talk about is that we should have some non-negotiables. There should be some things where we say, "Okay, here's where I draw the line."

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. And I think that it is important to be very clear on what is important to you in a relationship and what are lines that you don't want to cross. And there are a lot of people nowadays who practice non-monogamy, which for some couples, that is exactly what they're looking for and that's what they want. And even within that, there need to be very clear boundaries of what is acceptable and what isn't. But if you are someone who wants a monogamous relationship, you're not going to be happy with someone who wants an open relationship. If you are someone who wants to have a child, you're not going to be happy with someone who does not want to have a child ever. And while I think it's negotiable how many you have, I think to deny yourself that experience that is important to you, if it is important to you, that shouldn't be a negotiable.

Amy Morin:

Another thing you talk about is addiction. That shouldn't be a negotiable.

Dr. Jenn:

Yeah. Look, if someone you are with has an addiction, and here's the important caveat, and is not dealing with it, is not in recovery, is not working a 12 step program, is not in therapy, refuses to deal with it, then absolutely, it becomes a non-negotiable. Someone who won't work on it and won't work on themselves and is in the throes of addiction, their addiction is their primary lover, their primary partner, and you will never be in a good, safe, healthy situation with someone who's in the throes of addiction and not dealing with it.

Amy Morin:

Something else I would see often is somebody has a mental health problem that maybe they didn't want to address.

Dr. Jenn:

Yep.

Amy Morin:

And people would say, if they were married, they might say, "Well, I'm in this for in sickness and in health, but I was really envisioning when you get old and get sick, but now you have depression or anxiety and you aren't taking care of it." What's your advice for somebody who maybe is in a relationship like that?

Dr. Jenn:

Well, look, I agree with for better or for worse. And if someone you are with is refusing to get help and is deteriorating and is taking your family down with them, at some point, there has to be a line where you say, "I can't do this anymore." Whereas an intervention of like, "I love you, but I can't stand by and watch you self destruct anymore. I can't do this." And also the effect that has on children who are in the house to see someone struggle depending on the mental illness and potentially do harm or act out or be violent or be verbally abusive, can really cross a line that becomes very dangerous and unsafe for everyone in the house.

Amy Morin:

And what do you say to people who say, "We stay together for the kids"?

Dr. Jenn:

I would say, I see more kids who have been harmed by parents who stay together in volatile relationships that are demonstrating a hostile, high conflict, or completely disconnected relationship, that if I've seen a lot of parents, co-parents, go their separate ways, divorce and go their separate ways and co-parent better together than when they were together. Now, that said, I think that divorce is a last option. You need to know you have explored everything. You've done individual therapy, couples therapy, anything that you can possibly do. I think that breaking down a marriage and divorcing someone is a major, major, serious move, and it is traumatic for everyone. And sometimes, it is the best of all of the bad options.

Amy Morin:

I agree. Absolutely. All right. One last question for you. For couples who maybe are dating, they're thinking about long term, but if they're not quite there yet, what advice do you have for them to figure out if they're actually compatible over their long term?

Dr. Jenn:

Oh, that's a great question. I think that time is your ally, and that a lot of the time people get in a rush and they want to make a quick decision. And especially, I think that in the last two years, one of the things that has hit home through the pandemic is that life is short, that we want to be loved and be in a great relationship. But in my experience, it takes about 18 months to get past the honeymoon stage and really know who you're, with because in the first 18 months, and sometimes it's six months, sometimes it's a year, but 18 months tends to be the sweet spot of when we start releasing all that serotonin and the endorphins and all the stuff that makes our brain go, "Ugh, this person is perfect for me. Everything about them is perfect. Oh my God, you like pizza? I like pizza too. I can't believe it. How do we find each other? This is amazing."

Dr. Jenn:

So really seeing how your relationship performs over time, because you want to get to the point in your relationship where you actually have conflict, where you have disagreements, because an important part of marriage is seeing how you work through conflict and disagreements. And how do you handle things, whether it is, "You know what? I want a vacation in this place. You want a vacation in that place." Or, "You know what? We don't agree about being flirtatious with other people," or religion, or politics that there are a lot of really important issues that don't tend to come out until you're further along in the relationship.

Amy Morin:

Yeah. My always struck by how much energy people put into, say, planning a wedding and talking about the details of the wedding, but then they never talk about, "How are we going to deal with the in-laws? How are we going to manage our money?"

Dr. Jenn:

Yep. Yep. So true. So true.

Amy Morin:

Well, Dr. Jenn, thank you so much for being on the show and sharing all of your wisdom with us. And I hope our audience goes out and picks up a copy of *The Relationship Fix*.

Dr. Jenn:

Thank you. I hope so, too. It it's like a year of therapy in a book.

Amy Morin:

It really is. It really is. So thank you. And those questions you talked about are included. So I hope our audience goes and checks those questions out.

Dr. Jenn:

Thanks so much.

Amy Morin:

Welcome to The Therapist's Take! This is a part of the show where I'll break down Dr. Jenn's mental strength-building strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of Dr. Jenn's strategies that I highly recommend.

Number one: don't stonewall your partner. Dr. Jenn talks about the dangers of stonewalling. Essentially, it involves anything that you do to stop further communication. It might be the silent treatment. Or it could be saying, "I'm fine," when you're not, or saying, "No, I'm not mad," when you're clearly upset. In reality, you can't *not* communicate. Your refusal to talk communicates other messages, like, "I actually don't care enough about you to try to work through this." It's damaging to a relationship and prevents you from solving problems together. It's one thing, though, to walk away from conflict so that you can calm down enough to have a healthy conversation. And it's okay to pause if the conversation isn't productive. But it's important to revisit the issue when you're both feeling okay.

Number two: never get too busy to communicate. Dr. Jenn says many couples don't take time to sit down and talk. And when they do, they're distracted by their phones or the TV. It's easy to get so caught up in your busy life that you end up only communicating about the business part of your relationship, like who's going to pick up the kids from soccer practice on Saturday. It's important to keep getting to know each other. Make time to talk about deeper issues, things that you probably talked about early on in your relationship. Talk about your goals, hopes, dreams, fears, and the things that you're working on to become better people. Deeper conversations can help you connect on a different level, but you need to make time for those things to happen. I also like that. Dr. Jenn suggests talking about your boundaries and expectations, like how you'll respond if an ex reaches out to you on social media. Secrets can destroy relationships, so it's important to be upfront and open.

And number three: don't offer cheap forgiveness. Dr. Jenn cautions against offering cheap forgiveness, something that we've probably all done before. We say we're not mad, or we claim that we've forgiven someone, when we haven't actually worked through our feelings. And then we bring it up later on or we get resentful about the other person's behavior. Whether your

partner lied to you, said something mean, or cheated, forgiveness takes work. Both of you need to be willing to work through the issue rather than pretend it's not a problem. You won't do either of you any good if you claim to forgive when you haven't. Be honest if you can't forgive the other person yet, and you might open the door to a helpful conversation.

So those are three of Dr. Jenn's communication mistakes that it's important to avoid. Don't stonewall your partner. Don't allow yourselves to get so busy that you don't talk. And don't offer cheap forgiveness. If you want more of Dr. Jenn's tips, pick up a copy of her book *The Relationship Fix*.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. Send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer (whose listening skills are one of his superpowers), Nick Valentin.