

The Speaker-Listener Technique

A Powerful Tool for Respectful Communication

When disrespect enters your marriage, it creates a toxic cycle that destroys connection and trust. The Speaker-Listener Technique breaks this pattern by creating a structured way to communicate that forces both partners to slow down, listen, and treat each other with dignity—even during conflict.

How It Works

Setup: Sit facing each other with a small object (TV remote, small pillow, or pen) that serves as the "speaker token." The person holding it is the only one allowed to talk. This simple tool prevents interruptions and creates respect.

Speaker's Rules

- Speak for yourself, not about your partner's motives
- Keep statements brief (2-3 sentences maximum)
- Express your feelings, not just complaints
- No name-calling or character attacks

Listener's Rules

- No interrupting, no matter what is said
- No defending yourself while listening
- Focus completely on understanding their perspective
- Summarize what you heard before taking the token

The Five-Step Process

1. One person takes the token and shares their concern
2. The listener summarizes: *"What I heard you say is..."*
3. Speaker confirms accuracy or clarifies the message
4. Switch roles—pass the token to your partner
5. Continue until both people feel fully heard

Example in Action

SPEAKER:	"I felt disrespected when you rolled your eyes during my story at dinner. It made me feel like my experiences don't matter to you."
LISTENER:	"I hear you saying that my eye-rolling made you feel like I don't value what you have to say. Is that right?"
SPEAKER:	"Yes, exactly. Thank you for hearing me."

Why This Works

The token forces you to slow down and actually listen instead of preparing your defense. It prevents disrespectful people from steamrolling conversations and stops hurt partners from shutting down. The physical object creates a clear structure that's hard to ignore, making respect non-negotiable.

Making It Stick

Start small: Practice during minor disagreements first, not major blowups

Schedule it: Set aside 20 minutes weekly to use this for any issues

Be consistent: Use it every time things get heated until it becomes your new normal

Seek help if needed: If your spouse refuses to participate or continues abuse, professional counseling may be necessary