

Catholic Couples Communication

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Why didn't you tell me? Kevin never listens to me By Crystal Sullivan

It always starts the same way. My husband Kevin will turn to me and say, "Why didn't you tell me _____ (fill in the blank)?" I respond, "I did tell you!" Kevin will assure me that I did not tell him anything close to the fact, because he certainly would remember if I had. To try to bring him back to the moment, I give him all kinds of details about the conversation. I remind him that I told him on a Saturday, that he was wearing his striped shirt, drinking a cup of coffee, and that the temperature outside was 25 degrees. He looks at me as if I am insane, and insists that I never told him and that I just make this stuff up to drive him crazy.

Sound familiar? Even though Kevin and I have been active in marriage ministry for years, we seem to have a problem with communication. Not all kinds of communication. We are really good at sharing our thoughts, feelings, and needs. We can describe the intensity of our desire for alone time, the frustration of being unappreciated at work, or the excitement over an upcoming vacation. Piece of cake!

No, our problem appears when I start getting dressed for our date to go to dinner with friends, just as he settles into the recliner to watch a basketball game. He will swear on a stack of bibles that I never mentioned to him that we had made plans for the evening. Our problem comes when the credit card bill comes, and the price for the new couch was over the budgeted amount (well, maybe I didn't mention that one in a loud voice).

Being dedicated to our marriage, we've tried all kinds of techniques to help us improve our communication. I changed from handwritten notes in our family calendar to using a computer-generated calendar. Turns out, he never looks at the calendar. We attempt to communicate face to face, rather than through notes scribbled on the back of an envelope or left on a voicemail box. That helps, but without remembering the conversation, we still have no "proof." We speak slowly and clearly. One of us, maybe both of us, is starting to have a bit of a hearing problem.

All of these changes have helped keep the misunderstandings to a minimum, and so we keep trying. Nevertheless, come Thursday night when I am arranging the chairs around the room to prepare for our prayer group, Kevin's face and tone of voice express confusion. "What are you doing?" Slowly, carefully, I respond, "You remember Kevin! We are hosting the Prayer Group tonight because the Millers are out of town." Patiently, Kevin responds, "It's no big deal. But why didn't you tell me?"

Crystal Sullivan is the former editor of First Years and Forever, the monthly e-newsletter of the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. She and Kevin have been married for twenty-four years and are actively involved in ministry to both engaged and married couples. They are the parents of two adult children. Originally appeared in the Summer 2008 issue of Catholic Couples. Used with permission of the Family Ministries Office,
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