

HOW TO STOP ANNOYING YOUR BOYFRIEND

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A psychologist once had a client who said that the four most dreaded words he ever heard were when his ex-girlfriend said, “We need to talk.” According to the client, these words usually meant that he would need to listen to her “constructive criticism” to help him improve. His story was similar to the tales of many others, whose frustrations form the basis of some of the considerations below.

Express less criticism and more gratitude.

Criticism is often an ineffective way of asking for attention, respect, or love. Rather than focusing on what you want but do not receive, focus instead on what you already have. Giving genuine gratitude is one way of increasing your awareness of that which you already have.

Catch him doing good. Rather than catching him doing the wrong thing, catch him doing what you want. Eventually, he’ll do more of what is being rewarded. Just be sure you do not reward him for jumping on you when he hears the cookie jar opening, because that’s the behavior you’ll be rewarding.

Avoid doing most of the chasing. Instead of playing the chasing game, which annoys many guys, let him do some of the chasing. How? Make yourself less available. How? Get a life—which not only makes you more interesting but enriches life for you. If he doesn’t follow, then be quick to let him go.

Remember that nagging works. Nagging and needling work, but not how you think they do. *Reactance theory* predicts that a target behavior will increase if a person’s personal freedom is challenged. Nagging others can exacerbate rather than diminish a problematic behavior. If you don’t know what *exacerbate* means, get a dictionary.

Limit your own talking. You can’t talk and listen at the same time. If you are thinking about what you are going to say next, then you are not really listening. Good communication is said to be about 99% listening and 1% talking.

Don’t interrupt or change the subject. A pause—even a long one—doesn’t mean your boyfriend has finished saying everything that he has to say. Many guys are not very good with words, particularly when it comes to relational constructs, so they need time to formulate their thoughts and put them into words.

Practice silence. The word *listen* has the same letters as the word *silent*. One of the best ways to listen is to be silent. If you practice silence when you are on your own, then you can become better being silent when others are talking. Silence does not mean becoming a doormat, but rather becoming comfortable with the pauses that create good communication. 13

Respond rather than react. Rather than emotionally reacting to something your boyfriend says or does, put in a pause so you can respond in a reasonable way. It is better to pause than to say something prematurely that cannot be retracted. The tongue can do more damage than any part of the body.

Respond to ideas, not to the person. Don’t allow irritation to rise from minor things that he says. Instead, base your response to others on your inner principles, not on external personalities. In other words, put principles before personalities.

Get the facts, ma’am. Rather than jumping to conclusions, avoid making assumptions about what he is going to say. Impulsive assumptions are sometimes associated with emotional reasoning. Don’t mentally try to complete his sentences. In other words, listen and learn.

Don't argue mentally. Don't allow yourself to become annoyed or irritated with everything that he says. Try finding points of agreement to see if you can understand his perspective better. If you can understand his perspective, he will be more likely to understand yours. If he is not capable of perspective-taking, then don't waste your time with him.

Use "I" rather than "you" language. Questions that begin with the word "you" may be perceived by your boyfriend as accusations or indictments. Rather than making "you" statements, which place blame on your partner, consider making "I" statements, which place responsibility on you.

Avoid the psychology of victimology. Stop blaming your boyfriend for your feelings. In other words, don't invest in the mentality of victimology, which places you in the role of being a victim. Instead, focus on what you can do to make things better. If you are being abused, then leave and seek safety. Practice zero tolerance and don't wait for the second time.

Don't take it personally. When your feelings are hurt by your boyfriend's thoughtless comment, decide whether or not you want to turn it into a battle. In reality, his comment may reflect more about him than it does about you. Although you need to consider your own part in any interaction, your boyfriend's comment may not even be about you. Remember to use QTIP: Quit taking it personally.

Leave him wanting more. Good dog trainers and good preachers have one thing in common: They leave their packs and flocks wanting more.

Always end on a positive note. Good dog trainers and good preachers have one more thing in common: They end on a positive note.

Peer Reviewer Comments

Prior to publication, this article was sent out to peer-reviewers, consisting of happily married young men who dated extensively before getting under contract with the love of their life. While protecting their anonymity, I would also like to express my gratitude for their reviews. Reviewer comments are listed below:

1. "I like the one about silence and limiting talking. I realize the points are addressing more of an active listening skill, but it blends into the idea that silence is not always bad." [Reviewer #1]
2. "All the points you list are valid and could be constructive not only personal relationships but in professional relationships and performance. I wish some of my co-workers would use some of these practices!" [Reviewer #1]
3. "Under the 'Practice Silence' you may want to incorporate 'Practice Open Silence'—meaning asking open ended questions and using listening/silence as a way to drive the male side of the conversation. Giving women direction on how to structure conversations with men may need a little more detail, so I would add: Using the common practice of Open Silence will allow you to ask your questions that generate answers that have meaning. Rather than the simple questions that give 'yes' or 'no' answers, ask questions that drive your man's emotion. 'Tell me about your day' or 'What were you thinking when _____ happened?' These types of open-ended questions are a great way to uncover more details that will lead to more meaningful conversations and open communication. Men are guarded until they are able to have the comfortable platform to talk about themselves. This structure will leave you, the Open Silent listener, more satisfied and whole—with a better understanding of your partner. [Reviewer #2]

References

Doverspike, W. F. (2006). How to improve your listening skills.
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Disclaimer: This article was written at the request of some of my dog training friends who like to have fun. This article is a counterpart to a previous one titled “How to Train Your Man Using Professional Dog Training Principles” (Doverspike, 2008). ☺

Dedication: This article was uploaded on Valentine’s Day in honor of those men and women who never nag.

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