COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNER

Close relationships keep us grounded and provide the encouragement and support we need to weather life's challenges. In fact, the social and emotional support you get from being in a strong, loving relationship is beneficial for your mental and physical health, and may even lengthen your life.

Open and honest communication is the key to building trust and respect, resolving conflicts, and gaining a better understanding of your partner's viewpoints. It's not a matter of "winning" an argument or proving that you're right if you disagree with your partner, but rather, to compromise and find solutions that work for both of you.

Try these tips to improve your communication skills:

- **Listen without interrupting.** This sounds easier than it is. Focus on what your partner is saying instead of on what you want to say next. Rephrase what you've heard to make sure you understand.

- **Be open to feedback and criticism.** Try not to get defensive and keep an open mind especially when the topic is a sensitive one.

- **Be mindful of yours, and your partner's, body language.** Be aware of nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, posture, eye contact, gestures, and personal space. When body language contradicts the person's words, we're more likely to believe the nonverbal cues.

- **Pick the right time and place.** Don't bring up a big problem if there isn't time to discuss it.

- **Use "I" statements.** Explain how you feel without accusing or attacking.

- **Apologize when you're wrong. No one is perfect.** Don't make excuses. Apologize if you've made a mistake and forgive your partner's mistakes.

- **Don't bring up the past.** Focus on what's happening now.

- **Be positive, empathic, and encouraging.** Assume only the best about your partner. Keep in mind, sometimes it's not what you say, but how you say it. As Maya Angelou wisely observed: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."