

Feeling Unheard in a Relationship

When you keep explaining but still don't feel understood

Feeling unheard can be one of the loneliest experiences inside a relationship. You may be talking, explaining and trying to find different words, yet come away with the sense that the other person has heard the sentences without understanding what they mean to you. Over time, this can create frustration, sadness, resentment or a temptation to stop trying altogether.

Being heard is not the same as having somebody agree with everything you say. It is the experience of knowing that your feelings, needs and perspective have been taken seriously. Two people can disagree and still leave a conversation feeling respected. Difficulties often develop when disagreement begins to feel like dismissal, correction, criticism or proof that one person's experience matters less.

Why can this happen?

People listen through their own experiences. A person may hear criticism where reassurance was intended, hear a request as a demand, or rush into problem-solving when their partner simply needs emotional acknowledgement. Stress, exhaustion, trauma, attachment experiences, cultural expectations and previous relationship experiences can all affect what happens in a conversation.

Neurodivergence can add another layer. Autism may affect interpretation of implied meaning, tone or unspoken expectations. ADHD can affect working memory, attention and the ability to hold several parts of an emotional conversation in mind at once. Processing differences can mean one person needs much longer to formulate a response. None of this means either person cares less; it may mean the relationship needs a more explicit way of communicating.

Sometimes the most important sentence is not another explanation. It is: "Can you tell me what you think I am trying to say?"

Signs you may be feeling unheard

You may notice yourself repeating the same point, over-explaining, becoming louder because you feel your message is not landing, rehearsing conversations before having them, giving up halfway through, communicating mainly by text because speaking feels too difficult, or becoming distressed when the other person immediately explains their own position. You might also start questioning whether your feelings are reasonable because they repeatedly seem to be misunderstood.

What listening can look like

Listening does not require an immediate answer. It can mean allowing somebody to finish, checking what you understood, asking a genuine question, acknowledging the feeling underneath the words and resisting the urge to defend yourself before you have understood the other person's experience. A response such as "I can see why that affected you" does not necessarily mean "I agree that I intended to hurt you." It means the impact has been recognised.

Finding a Different Way to Talk

When a pattern has become established, trying harder in exactly the same way often produces more of the same frustration. Instead, change the structure of the conversation. Choose a time when neither person is already overloaded. Agree to discuss one issue. Give each person uninterrupted time. If verbal processing is difficult, allow notes beforehand. If somebody needs processing time, agree when you will return to the conversation rather than demanding an immediate response.

A listening exercise

Speak	One person describes one concern for a few minutes without bringing in several unrelated issues.
Reflect	The listener explains what they think they heard, without arguing with it.
Check	The speaker says what was understood correctly and what was missed.
Explore	Ask one curious question: "What part of this matters most to you?"
Swap	Change roles so both people have the experience of speaking and being heard.
Agree	Choose one small, realistic change rather than trying to solve the whole relationship in one conversation.

Questions for reflection

When do I feel most unheard? What do I wish the other person understood about me? Do I need empathy, reassurance, practical change, an apology or simply space to finish what I am saying? What happens in my body when I feel dismissed? How do I behave when I believe the other person is not listening? Am I also able to hear their experience when it differs from mine? What would feeling genuinely heard look like in practice?

When the issue is not simply misunderstanding

There is an important difference between struggling to communicate and somebody deliberately silencing, intimidating or controlling another person. Repeatedly mocking feelings, using threats, monitoring communications, isolating somebody, controlling money, frightening them into silence or punishing them for expressing a different view can be signs of abuse or coercive control. In these circumstances, communication exercises are not a substitute for specialist safety advice and support.

Getting additional support

Relationship counselling or couples therapy can sometimes help people slow recurring patterns down and hear what is happening underneath them. Individual therapy may also be valuable when past experiences, trauma, rejection, attachment difficulties or confidence affect how conversations are experienced. Neurodivergent couples may benefit particularly from support that understands autism and ADHD rather than treating differences in communication as deliberate behaviour.

Books to explore

Hold Me Tight by Sue Johnson explores emotional connection and recurring relationship cycles.

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg provides a framework for expressing feelings and needs with less blame. **The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work** by John Gottman and

Nan Silver discusses relationship research and practical exercises. No book will fit every relationship, so

use these as sources of ideas rather than rules.

You deserve room in a relationship to have an experience, a feeling and a voice. Equally, healthy communication makes room for two experiences to exist at once. Understanding does not require identical perspectives; sometimes it begins when both people become curious about the difference.

This Support Hub resource is educational and reflective rather than individual clinical advice. Where there is fear, abuse, coercive control or immediate danger, seek appropriate specialist or emergency support.