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UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

LONG DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO  
FACILITATE SUCCESS  
BY  
SYLVIA FUERBRINGER

A Final Project submitted to the  
Campus Alberta Applied Psychology: Counselling Initiative  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF COUNSELLING

Alberta

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## DEDICATION


To those courageous couples everywhere who are challenging and redefining our notion of relationships.

CAMPUS ALBERTA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY:  
COUNSELLING INITIATIVE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE PAGE

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled Long Distance Relationships: Communication Strategies to Facilitate Success submitted by Sylvia Fuerbringer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counseling.

  
Dr. Bryan Hiebert  
Project Supervisor

2007-11-14


Date

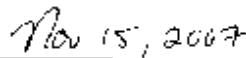
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*SECOND READER SIGNATURE PAGE*

**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled **Long Distance Relationships: Communication Strategies to Facilitate Success** submitted by **Sylvia Fuerbringer** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Counselling**.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Shelly Russell-Mayhew**  
Second Reader

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## ABSTRACT

This project explores the ever-increasing phenomenon known as long distance relationships (LDRs). It addresses and debunks common myths and misconceptions. Normalization takes place through recognition of prevalence and an examination of what others are doing. Based on the research, the single most important factor relative to success in LDRs is communication. Thus, the basic tenets of communication are examined. A self-help manual offers pragmatic suggestions on how to enhance communication. It is hoped that the manual will be an effective psychoeducational tool aimed at increasing the level of satisfaction of couples and a beneficial resource that provides various skill-building exercises in communication. The manual describes a process for reviewing current patterns and provides guidelines for building a more nurturing style if needed.

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Absence diminishes mediocre passions and increases great ones, as the wind blows out candles and fans fires. – Francois, Duc de La Rochefoucauld

### General Introduction

Inevitably, everybody will know about them, everybody will know someone in one and everybody will have an opinion about whether or not they work. Long-distance relationships (LDRs), long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs), living apart together relationships (LATs), commuter couples, dual career marriages, geographically separated relationships (GSRs), cyber romances—call them what you like, one thing we know for sure is that as our world continues to change so will the nature of our relationships. This project examines some of the available literature on LDRs as well as relationship theories in an attempt to answer some basic questions such as: How prevalent are these types of relationships? What myths abound around them? Who decides (or how do we define) what an LDR is? How do LDRs differ from geographically close relationships (GCRs)? And, what factors contribute to their success or to their demise? This project explored these and other questions and included the development of an effective psychoeducational resource for people involved in LDRs.

### Project Rationale

A review of the literature shows that it is highly unusual to find a couple who are never separated and the reasons for this are as diverse and varied as the people themselves (Aylor, 2003; Edwards, 2001; Guldner, 2003; Knox, 2002; Maines, 1993; Marris, 1995; Milan & Peters, 2003; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). For instance, dual career marriages can become conflicted due to tempting job offers, corporate relocations, and shifting job

markets (Marris). Maines stated that commuter marriages are one way to satisfy the needs of both parties in a marriage when one desires to move to another job (or has been relocated by his or her employer) and the other does not. Knox reports that long distance dating relationships research grew from spouses being separated due to their careers. Dainton and Aylor (2001) inform us that among college students the numbers involved in distance romantic relationships range from 25 to 40%.

Knox (2002) suggested that educational pursuits and taking care of elderly parents also contribute to the separation of couples. Milan and Peters (2003) inform our understanding of distance relationships by looking at living apart together (LAT) relationships. An LAT is defined as “unmarried couples who live in separate residences while maintaining an intimate relationship” (Milan & Peters, p. 2). These authors state that, due to increases in separation and divorce, changes in family responsibilities, and higher standards of living and life expectancies, many choose to be in an LAT. According to one 2002 survey, the majority of individuals aged 30 or more and in LATs were either working or looking for work. In fact, 87% of those aged 30 to 39 were already in the labour force, as were 90% of those in their forties. Of those aged 50 and over, 54% were in the labour force while 36% were already retired. For the participants in their twenties, 62% were working while 33% were students (Milan & Peters).

Furthermore, LATs serve many varied purposes for people at different ages and stages in their lives. For example, younger people are choosing to get married at older ages due to uncertainty in job prospects and the pursuit of higher education, and something called the “crowded nest” where grown children either do not leave or they return to their parental

home (Milan & Peters, 2003). Deciding whether to bring another adult into a household where there are children could be another compelling reason to engage in an LAT. Thus, being involved in an LAT may serve young people's immediate relationship needs (Milan & Peters). In contrast, older people may not wish to marry their dating partners for different reasons. Examples include preference for maintaining their own homes, financial benefits, and cultural and familial expectations about remarrying after divorce or widowhood (Milan & Peters). Given the great variety of possible distance relationships, just how common are they?

#### *Prevalence of LDRs*

In 1993, approximately 1.0 million couples in America were involved in LDRs—the majority of which were professional, affluent, and had fewer children than other dual-career couples (Maines, 1993). By 2001, the American Census Bureau estimated that approximately 2.4 million married couples had a spouse who was either living or working in a different city (Edwards, 2001). It is interesting to note that this figure does not include couples separated because of schooling, military duty, or business purposes. In 1998, the American Employee Relocation Council showed that approximately 10% of all job relocations resulted in LDRs and that 52% of employers anticipated an increase in job transfers (Aylor, 2003). Similarly, in 2003, Guldner stated that approximately 700,000 to one million people were involved in geographically separated marriages and another one to one-and-a-half million were involved in LDDR. Lastly, Canadian researchers Milan and Peters (2003) reported that 8% of the population over 20 years of age (or 1 in 12) were involved in LAT relationships, with the largest proportion, 56%, in the 20- to 29-year age range and 44% aged 30 and over. Of this

44%, about 19% were in their thirties, 14% were in their forties, and 11% were aged 50 and over. While these are but a few of the most common types of distance relationships, new ones keep popping up. Given the great variety and numbers of distance relationships, just how “normal” are they?

### *Comparison of LDRs and GCRs*

In the largest (and most detailed) study completed to date on LDRs, Guldner (2003) compared couples in LDRs with those in GCRs on four distinct measures: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and trust. The results showed no significant difference between the two groups and, in fact, the author suggested that the probability of success within an LDR is just as great as in other relationships. Not surprisingly, other researchers concurred with these findings (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Stafford & Reske, 1990). On the other hand, research shows that when it comes to difficulties within an LDR relationship, women are more likely to blame the relationship, while men tend to focus on external factors (Guldner). When it comes to LDRs, laying blame on the distance for the breakdown of the relationship more often than not facilitates an amicable break-up (Guldner), but it also leads many people to the firm (albeit faulty) belief that LDRs simply do not work (Guldner; The Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships, 2004). In the same way, research also shows that separated couples do not have more affairs than their geographically closer counterparts. They do, however, tend to be somewhat more suspicious (Guldner; The Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships). As a result, one of the best ways to prevent this specific concern is to keep the lines of communication open (Aylor, 2003; Guldner).

### *Societal Norms*

According to Guldner (2003), the current societal norm is GCRs, with the effect that there are few role models for those involved in LDRs to follow.

A complete lack of norms to guide expectations can lead to trouble. Therapists routinely see couples whose difficulties stem from one or both partners failing to meet the expectations of the other. This is hard enough when in a relationship with relatively clear expectations, let alone in an LDR. (Guldner, 2003, p. 96)

Furthermore, the shared expectations unique to LDRs are strongly rooted in personal value judgements about the “importance of intimacy versus autonomy” (Guldner, 2003, p. 56). As a result, simply knowing what others are doing can provide a framework for supporting those involved in LDRs (Guldner; The Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships, 2004).

### Project Overview

While the aforementioned statistics and myths may not be surprising for some, the dearth of information and assistance for people involved in LDRs might be (Guldner, 2003; Van Horn et al., 1997). In fact, Van Horn et al. were only able to identify 15 studies on distance relationships. Additionally, these same researchers inform us that there is a need for a wide-ranging theoretical model that will explain how distance impacts romantic relationships. Given the numbers of people involved in LDRs, further understanding of both coping strategies and processes that foster the success of LDRs seems warranted. Therefore, supporting people through LDRs is a worthy endeavour. Any work toward enhancing the understanding of these relationships would “offer a more complete and potentially predictive



view [of them]” (Scott, 2002, p. ix). As a result, a manual was developed as part of this project.

The manual focuses on issues that people in LDRs face and makes four primary contributions.

1. It highlights the fact that the continuance and success of an LDR are inherently individual phenomenon (in other words, this type of relationship has just as much chance of succeeding as other relationships and is more a function of levels of commitment and communication than of distance).
2. It contributes to growing public awareness of this type of relationship.
3. It debunks the myth that LDRs are abnormal, prone to infidelity, and riddled with divorce (Scott, 2002).
4. It provides practical coping strategies and processes to foster success for couples in LDR relationships.

#### *Sources Searched for Literature Review*

A comprehensive literature review was carried out to explore which elements of LDRs contribute to their success, which elements contribute to their maintenance, and which elements contribute to their demise. A systematic electronic search included references from a wide variety of disciplines: psychology—counselling, industrial and social; sociology; education; philosophy; nursing; motivational speakers; relationship experts; and business as well as current and classical works by well-known experts in the fields of LDRs and communication.

As effective communication leads to improved relationships among LDR couples, a literature review was carried out on communication to supplement the LDR literature available because LDR studies emphasize the importance of communication and relationship variables such as satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment and trust (Edwards, 2001; Guldner, 2003; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Holt & Stone, 1988; Knox, 2002). The review was carried out specific to communication in intimate relationships with an eye to using this information as a springboard for communication over distance mediums in LDRs.

### *Search Parameters*

The project was designed to highlight the various aspects of LDRs and the supportive framework included (but was not limited to) the following areas: 1) prevalence and reasons for LDRs, 2) advantages and disadvantages, 3) variety and defining characteristics, 4) debunking of current myths, 5) gender differences in both relational satisfaction and communication, 6) relationship and communication theories, and 7) known strategies for successful maintenance—particularly communication. Emphasis was placed on communication, as Guldner (2003) stated that “communication style plays a more important role in LDRs than in other relationships” (pp. 54-55). With this supportive framework in place for the manual, various relationship-enhancing communication skills exercises were devised.

### *Steps Taken to Create the Manual*

The manual is psychoeducational in nature and includes current statistics to aid in the recognition and prevalence of LDRs. Guldner (2003) stated that “numbers should simply help...[couples] understand the social context in which...[their] own relationship takes

place” (p. 97). Additionally, true/false sheets contain some of the most common myths surrounding LDRs. The importance of gender differences and communication in LDRs is addressed. Couples are invited to complete a Relationship Vision as well as other exercises to help them identify their personal needs, beliefs, values, and communication styles. The manual also contains a list of helpful resources aimed at assisting those in LDRs to succeed. These resources are supported by research and those that are not are incorporated for interest’s sake and prefaced with a cautionary note to use a reasonable amount of prudence.

Also, it is clear that “each culture imposes slightly different rules on... potential marriage partners, prohibiting intimate same-sex relationships, severely sanctioning the termination of marriages...[and that] specific behaviors utilized to accomplish interpersonal goals may differ greatly” (Knapp, 1984, p. xii). As a result, the concepts presented in this manual are intended for present-day Western culture. It is beyond the scope of this project to adequately address extensions to other cultural settings and, therefore, no generalizations should be made. Future explorations could well fill this void.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW OF LDRs

Long distance relationships are like wind to a fire; it puts out the small ones,  
but inflames the big ones. – Anonymous

### Relationship Theories

In order to possess insight into romantic relationships it is important to have answers to some very basic questions. For example: How do relationships develop? What maintains them? What role does distance play? What impact does culture have? And, what communication variables are applicable?

#### *Propinquity Effect*

Social psychologists inform our understanding of relationships by addressing a major antecedent of attraction—namely, the propinquity effect. In its simplest form this effect states: “The people who, by chance, are the ones you see and interact with the most often are the most likely to become your friends and lovers” (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 1994, p. 373). Propinquity (or proximity) is an integral component of how we form and maintain relationships (Rohlfing, 1995). Researchers have found that people choose their mates based on how close they are sitting to them in a classroom and whether they live in the same neighbourhood or work in the same workplace (Aronson et al.). The explanation offered is that the propinquity effect is based on familiarity. In this case, “familiarity breeds not contempt but attraction and liking” (Aronson et al., p. 376). In fact, increased exposure usually results in increased liking. According to these researchers, the power of propinquity affects a broad age range: from toddlers to adults to the elderly. It appears that increased exposure to a stimulus results in increased liking. Sir Peter Ustinov (1977) said, “Contrary to

popular belief, I do not believe that friends are necessarily the people you like best, they are merely the people who got there first” (as cited in Aronson et al., p. 373).

In the same way, David Aronson, Co-Director of the Institute for Relationship Assessment and Development, informs us that proximity is the single most important variable in relationships (Edwards, 2001). Partners can stay apart for approximately a year, but after that time it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the relationship (Edwards). This is in contrast to Guldner’s (2003) findings, reported earlier, that LDRs and GCRs did not differ on measures of: satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, and trust.

These results compared favourably with earlier studies. For example, Lydon, Pierce, and O’Regan (1997) noted that moral commitment increased meaning, investment, and survival of relationships, while enthusiastic commitment was positively related to satisfaction. However, although moral commitment was predictive of the survival of the relationship and positively correlated with increased investment, it also was predictive of negative affect and illness when relationships end.

In another study, Guldner and Swensen (1995) compared the relationship quality of 194 undergraduate students in premarital LDRs with 190 undergraduate students in proximal relationships. Results indicated no significant differences in self-reported levels of intimacy, satisfaction, trust, or degree of relationship progress. Thus, the amount of time spent together did not itself seem to play a key role in relationship maintenance. This could also mean that many people believe that LDRs do not work; however, the research indicates otherwise (Aylor, 2003; Guldner, 2003; Guldner & Swensen; Holt & Stone, 1988).

### *Uncertainty Reduction Theory*

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) also speaks to relationships. While URT is generally deemed to be a theory of relational development, it is also relevant to established relationships (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Mietzner & Li-Wen, 2005). Specifically, people in established relationships are more likely to experience uncertainty around their relationship, which is quite distinct from general uncertainty, or to experience uncertainty about their partner (Dainton & Aylor; Mietzner & Li-Wen). Relational uncertainty speaks to insecurity and doubt around the future outlook of a relationship which is damaging to relational stability (Dainton & Aylor).

URT suggests that interpersonal relationships cannot be sustained unless relational uncertainty is managed (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). This management is achieved as the relational partners constantly update their knowledge of each other, themselves, and their relationship, because these are main sources of relational uncertainty (Dainton & Aylor). Knobloch and Solomon suggested that there are two sources of relational uncertainty: intrinsic factors (such as unbalanced levels of commitment between the partners) and extrinsic factors (such as geographic distance). Le and Agnew (2001) draw from theoretical models of both emotional and interdependence theories. They investigated association among need fulfillment, relative dependence, and emotional experience. They discovered that, inside romantic relationships, the fulfillment of relationship needs was significantly predictive of the emotional experience, with the connection at times restrained by the distance of the relationship (local versus long distance).

Dainton and Aylor (2001) studied both the source and the content of relational uncertainty for couples in GCRs and LDRs. Their results showed that individuals in GCRs and those in LDRs with some face-to-face contact experienced about the same amount of relational uncertainty. Furthermore, those involved in LDRs with no face-to-face contact were significantly less certain of their relationships compared to those in LDRs with some face-to-face contact (Dainton & Aylor; Mietzner & Li-Wen, 2005).

Several important links can be made between uncertainty and communication (University of Twente, n.d.). These are found in some of the axioms in URT:

1. Human communication is a means of gaining knowledge and creating understanding (Moncrieff, 2001).
2. Anxiety occurs when people feel uncertain about another person and the direction of the relationship (Wright, 2000).
3. People can increase or decrease their uncertainty about others through communication (Abbuhl, Oboyle, & Mattler, 1999).
4. The most important purpose in conversing is to make sense out of each other's interpersonal world (Mattler, 1999).
5. People increase their chances of being able to predict and control their relationships through the process of reducing uncertainty (Moncrieff).

Persons from cultures with a high acceptance of uncertainty (most Anglo-American cultures) are less likely to deem uncertainty a motivator for performing relational maintenance (Dainton, 2003; Hofstede, n.d.). The lower the tolerance for uncertainty the higher the uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede). Weak uncertainty avoidance is related to higher

tolerance for ambiguity, taking more risks, and lower levels of stress in the face of an unknown future (Hofstede). Other cultural considerations in romantic relationships include differing expectations regarding roles and behaviour, which will be interpreted by cultural norms (Hofstede). In sum, one of the main limitations of uncertainty reduction theory is that it may not be a strong contender for obtaining a cross-cultural understanding of relationships (Dainton).

### *Social Exchange Theory*

Social exchange approaches propose that people enter into and stay in relationships contingent upon the rewards and costs of doing so (Dainton, 2003). Two prominent social exchange theories in relational maintenance research are interdependence theory and equity theory. Both theories focus on voluntary relationships and make the assumption that people sustain relationships through “conscious acts of reinforcement, testing, and strategic development” (Dainton, p. 311).

Interdependence theory states that, for the most part, people behave in routinized ways and certain relationship issues and consequences are considered only when these routines break down (Dainton, 2003). A major focus of this theory is on two concepts: comparison level (individual expectations in the relationship) and comparison level of alternatives (how one’s partner compares to perceived alternatives (Dainton). On the other hand, equity theory states that satisfaction within a relationship is greatest when give and take is reasonably equal. In other words, there needs to be a balance between contributions and benefits. This behaviour is reinforced by social norms (a sense of fairness) and the relationship will be out



of balance if one partner is getting too much and the other is not getting enough (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton).

In effect, social exchange theories explain both intentional and unintentional relational maintenance. While social exchange theories offer some explanation of relational maintenance through either cost-reward ratios or the equity of the partners involved, “neither equality nor equity are consistently linked to either relational satisfaction or stability in other cultures” (Dainton, 2003, p. 312). As a result, social exchange theories might well be limited to a Western notion of relationships.

### *Bowen Family Systems Theory*

In the Bowen Theory emphasis is placed on both the development of the individual level of self within the family of origin and the effect it has on marital relationships (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2004). LDR research (Guldner, 2003; Skowron, 2000) shows that an essential component in these types of relationships is maintaining a balance between independence and interrelatedness.

*Differentiation of self.* Members of families are tied to the family system through their thinking, feeling, and behaviours (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2000). Families, like other social groups, can exert tremendous influence on their members to conform (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2004). The differences between the individual and the group reflect the level of differentiation of self (Bowen Theory, 2004).

One of the features of a mature family is that its members are encouraged to grow as individuals (Bradshaw, 1995). In other words, they are encouraged to develop a solid sense of self-identity while remaining a part of the family system (Bradshaw). In a study involving

118 couples, Skowron (2000) found that an essential component of marital satisfaction was the couples' ability to be intimately connected while maintaining their individuality.

Differentiation of self takes place on both the intrapsychic level and in the interpersonal realm (Skowron, 2000). The abilities to differentiate between feeling and intellect, to self-soothe anxiety, and to not be overwhelmed by others' anxieties are all manifestations of intrapsychic processes (Skowron). Interpersonally, differentiation of self means that it is possible to be both near and separate, to experience intimacy and autonomy at the same time (Skowron). Put another way, it is possible to have independence without fearing abandonment or feeling smothered and also to experience the feelings of interconnectedness without feeling the need to be separate (Skowron).

In sum, then, perhaps the essence of romantic relationships can be captured as follows:

When trying to understand relational, contextual, and cultural variations in maintaining relationships through communication, our present theories are limited in their applicability and scope when functioning alone. As scholars of interpersonal relationships (and people who appreciate and are frustrated by our own web of interpersonal relationships) there is much yet to be learned. (Dainton, 2003, p. 318)

#### Defining Characteristics of LDRs

Researchers have identified a variety of reasons as to how and why LDRs work or do not work. As previously mentioned, proximity seems to play an integral part in relationships. In a study conducted by Holt and Stone (1988), a needs analysis of participants revealed that they experienced reduced intimacy and satisfaction in their relationships when the distance

and time apart were substantial. In this particular study, distance and time were operationalized as being over 250 miles apart for more than 6 months. In fact, these researchers stated that “a short time apart (less than 6 months), at the greater distance (over 250 miles) was not as detrimental as spending a greater time apart (over 6 months) at the same distance” (Holt & Stone, p. 140). This may support the idea that spending time face-to-face can make up for the distance. However, other researchers (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989) suggested that partners who do not see each other frequently are unable to feel as close as those who spend a lot of time together. This is so even when the reasons for the separation are considered good.

Jesswein (1984) claimed that distance could be an impetus for partners to communicate more effectively and in this way actually strengthen the relationship in the long run. This was confirmed by Edwards (2001). Perhaps when all is said and done, the most important aspect is that “it may be too simplistic to use the ‘number of miles separated’ criterion when categorizing...relationships as long-distance or geographically-close. It appears that it’s not ‘distance that makes the heart grow fonder’ but simply the perception of distance” (Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994, p. 219).

#### Gender Differences

Some studies (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Rubin, Peplau, & Hill, 1981; Wood, 1986) propose that men have more negative reactions to LDRs than do women. Other studies, however, report differing results (Guldner, 1992; Helgeson, 1994). In fact, when asked specifically about various psychological symptoms, men and women reported about the same level of difficulty. As a result, these findings (Guldner, 2003; Helgeson) suggest that

regardless of a tendency toward underestimation of difficulties by men, they may indeed suffer more than women. The way separation is viewed also depends to some degree on gender (Wood). In fact, men and women in distance relationships have shown that they have differing needs, differing stresses during separation, and differing ways of coping (Jesswein, 1984; Mietzner, 2005; Wood).

While the levels of difficulty may be similar, there are differences in the patterns of their reaction (e.g., level of stress) and their ways of coping (Jesswein, 1984; Mietzner, 2005; Wood, 1986). Research shows that during times of stress, women tend to turn to friends and family for comfort, while men tend to turn their energies inward and rely on themselves (Guldner, 2003). Reevy and Maslach (2001) suggested that, rather than sex (i.e., male versus female), people who possess traits such as actively providing, seeking out, and receiving social support benefit from the experience of social support. Research clearly shows (Guldner; Helgeson, 1994) that men and women react quite differently to stress and that, in general, men report that they have more difficulty dealing with separation than do women. There is a widespread idea that men endure separation better than women, but this may be due to the tendency of men to under report difficulties associated with separation (Guldner, Wood). In a similar vein, women appear to have greater degrees of loneliness but this may be due to a greater tendency of women to report such difficulties. Thus, it may be the case that men and women both experience high degrees of loneliness, or even that men may experience greater degrees of loneliness than women, but due to social restraints do not provide accurate reports of their experience (Guldner, Wood).

In one study of gender it was found that men had a greater tendency than women to focus on external circumstances (Wood, 1986). When it came to LDRs, she found that men viewed the distance as a fixed obstacle that prohibited continuance of a relationship and that they had little recognition of the impact on their relationships of their personal responsibility and recognition of strategies for managing the effect of distance. While men tended to blame the failure of the relationship on things like too much time apart, women tended to see difficulties as stemming from interpersonal problems within the relationship (Aylor, 2003; Guldner, 2003).

LDR research (Guldner, 2003; Vormbrock, 1993) shows that sexual intimacy is more important to men than to women. It would appear that men have a desire to use their sexuality to feel intimate whereas women have a preference for intimacy prior to desiring sex. This focus on sexuality leads to an idealized and romanticized concept of love for men, which can lead to unrealistic/perfectionist expectations (Guldner). What this implies is that when couples have been separated for a long period of time, the reunion time is more of a letdown for men than it is for women. Nonetheless, a disappointing reunion is not a sure sign that the LDR will not work.

Sometimes the state of the relationship is rated by the most recent reunion. The genders tend to differ on what they view as constructive use of time. Research shows (Guldner, 2003) that men have a preference for doing things with their partners, while women prefer to share their emotions and ideas. The priority will probably go to talking when time is limited (Guldner; Swets (1992) because face-to-face contact maintains emotional trust. The key to intimacy in an LDR is through communication: “for it is only through the exchange of

meaning and the sharing of feelings that deep understanding and psychological closeness can be achieved” (Swets, p. 127).

### Maintenance Processes for LDRs

Canary and Stafford (1994) proposed that the quality of a relationship would diminish if there were little supportive behaviours to maintain it. If this is so, how can couples involved in LDRs preserve their relationships? Fortunately, various researchers propose that it is not the quantity of maintenance activities but the quality that is most important for successful distance relationships (Aylor, 2003; Guldner, 2003; Johnson, 2001). The following are some maintenance processes for LDRs.

1. Normalization of this type of relationship through an awareness of the prevalence of LDRs.
2. Development of individual support systems for each of the separated partners.
3. Expansion of ways to communicate through activities such as writing letters, sending gifts, e-mails, audiotapes, and videotapes.
4. Negotiation of relational expectations and laying relationship ground rules prior to any separation (e.g. Will we date other people? How often will we spend time with friends? How will we communicate with each other?).
5. Judicious use of face-to-face time by attending to affection and other needs.
6. Being as open and honest as possible with each other.
7. Development and preservation of trust.
8. Stress the positive aspects of LDRs.

## LDRs—A Communicative Event

One theme running through the above literature review involves people's ability to communicate effectively with their partner. Unquestionably, communication "plays a more important role in LDRs than in other relationships" (Guldner, 2003, p. 54). In 1984, Jesswein carried out a study on six married couples and found that most of them had little understanding of the costs involved—emotional or otherwise—of entering into an LDR relationship. It was only after they were well established in the lifestyle (i.e., 6 months of separation with two or more reunions) that they began to get a better idea of what was involved. Because there were few external supports for their lifestyle choice, they had to rely mainly on each other. As a result, compromises had to be made, relationships had to be redefined, incompatible needs and values had to be worked through, and the relationship had to be transformed at some level to accommodate the inherent conflict in the lifestyle. The study found that as a result of the physical separation, the couples communicated more effectively, had more respect for the individuality of their spouse, and experienced an enhancement of their emotional bond (Jesswein).

According to Guldner (2003), the reduction in quantity of communication only serves to amplify the need for increased quality. Specifically, the lack of face-to-face interaction makes it more difficult to interpret intentions because there are no visual cues as to the others' emotions, opinions, and so on. As a result, this requires that each person become a master at communication (Guldner). In addition, those in LDRs report having fewer arguments than those in geographically close relationships—probably as a result of being able to leave the situation or not wanting to spoil the time they have together—however,

dysfunction in interactions will continue until the issues are discussed and worked through (Guldner; Stafford & Reske, 1990). Researchers therefore recommend that couples in LDRs not postpone their realistic assessments of one another (Stafford & Reske), that they have more contact than usual, and that they work through issues as they arise (Guldner).



### CHAPTER THREE – LITERATURE REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION

Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him. How he manages his survival, how he develops intimacy, how productive he is, how he makes sense, how he connects with his own divinity—all are largely dependent on his communication skills (Satir, 1972, p. 30).

This chapter does not give an exhaustive review of communication theory; rather, it emphasizes ideas, values, and attitudes that research has shown to be conducive to effective person-to-person communication. In turn, this information is applied to communication between persons in LDRs.

#### What is Communication?

The word communication has its roots in the Latin word “communicare” which means to share (Hills, 1986). It refers to both behaviour and a process. Specifically, communicating can be viewed as the behaviour of one person, while communication can be viewed as a process that is created between two or more persons (Rossiter & Pearce, 1977).

“Communication is like a film camera equipped with sounds. It works only in the present, right here, right now, between you and me” (Satir, 1972, p. 31) and consists of passing information back and forth—giving and receiving—and using that information to make meaning. Most times, the term communicate is used to describe some sort of conflict or interpersonal problem: “We can’t seem to communicate.” “I wish we could communicate better with each other.” “We have no communication!” and so on (Athos & Gabarro, 1978).

Most people will agree that in order for relationships to be functional and satisfactory they require work. In essence, communication is “basic to how interpersonal relationships develop, grow, or fail” (Athos & Gabarro, 1978, p. 3). Communication in the context of this project document refers to an accurate two-way exchange of information between two or more people.

In the case of couples involved in LDRs, they need to spend time together and expend effort on their communicative processes (Guldner, 2003). To this end, what exactly can LDR couples do to improve their communication?

### Models of Communication

What is communication and what makes it problematic? Is it an exchange of ideas? Is it the manner by which we transmit our message to another person? Is it a way to make ourselves understood? What does it consist of? Are the players senders, receivers, encoders, and decoders? Radford (2005) suggested that all of the aforementioned characteristics of communication are true and prevalent in all industrialized cultures.

#### *Transmission Model of Communication*

This transmission view of communication is not problematic in and of itself, as it provides for structure and conformity. The problem lies in “how successfully one can exploit it” (Radford, 2005, p. 3).

To make Words serviceable to the end of Communication, it is necessary...that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same Idea, they stand for in the Mind of the speaker. Without this, Men fill one another’s Heads with noise and sounds; but

convey not hereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another their Ideas,  
which is the end of Discourse and Language. (Locke, 1690/1975, p. 478)

### *Transactional Analysis Model of Communication*

Transactional analysis (TA) was originally developed by Eric Berne in the 1950s and has an extensive theoretical foundation (Stewart & Joines, 1991). TA provides a model for communication analysis and assists in defining patterns of transactions—communication exchanges—between people (Stewart & Joines). This is accomplished by subdividing a person's personality into three separate and distinct concepts or ego states, namely Parent, Adult, and Child (PAC) (Berne, 1973; Harris, 1973; James & Jongeward, 1976; Stewart & Joines).

*Transactions.* Transactions can be classified into three basic categories: complementary, crossed, and ulterior (Harris, 1973; James & Jongeward, 1976; Jongeward & James, 1973; Stewart & Joines, 1991). A complementary transaction takes place when two people appear to be on the same wavelength. A crossed transaction occurs when the conversation appears to be shut off. An ulterior transaction is evident when people do not talk straight—in other words, they say one thing but mean another (Jongeward & James). In LDRs, a crossed transaction may occur when a partner changes the subject content as a way of dealing with a situation where they perceive they have little or no control of the outcome. Similarly, in LDRs, an ulterior transaction may occur when a partner, in order to foster a sense of connectedness while apart, may say one thing but feel another.

*Communication Rules.* Stewart and Joines (1991) cite three fundamental rules of communication.

1. “So long as transactions remain complementary, communication can continue indefinitely” (p. 62).
2. “When a transaction is crossed, a break in communication results and one or both individuals will need to shift ego-states in order for the communication to be re-established” (p. 65).
3. “The behavioural outcome of an ulterior transaction is determined at the psychological and not at the social level” (p. 67).

Rules 1 and 2 speak to the social level of conversation, while Rule 3 addresses the psychological level of communication (Stewart & Joines, 1991). What Rule 3 is actually stating is that if we want to gain insight into behaviour we must pay close attention to the psychological stage of communication (Stewart & Joines); the psychological level of conversation takes place with nonverbals and the social level of conversation takes place with words. In communication we must pay careful attention to both nonverbal clues and words (Stewart & Joines).

In sum, then, since people in LDRs often do not communicate in person, non-verbal communication patterns are not available and reliance is solely on words (spoken or written). Complementary transactions (i.e., getting the expected response) and a shift to the Adult ego state foster good communication patterns.

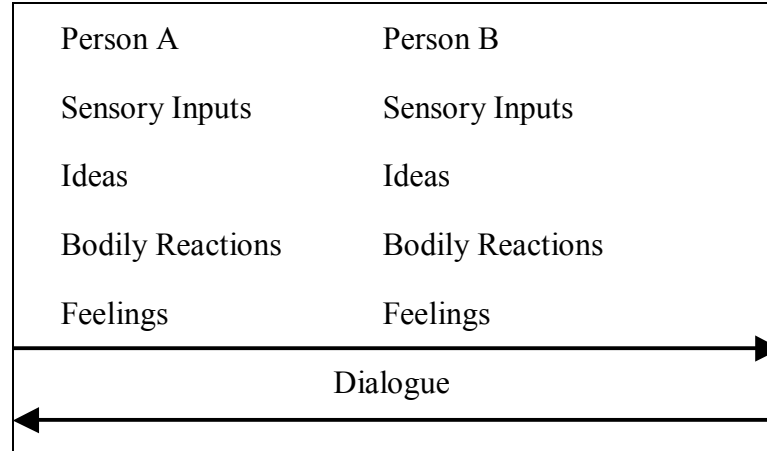
## Factors Influencing Accurate Communication

There are many reasons why couples have problems communicating and, according to VanPelt (1989), little was known about the connection between communication processes and the effects on marriage relationships until after 1970. One major reason for lack of skill in the realm of communication is that communication is learned (Satir, 1972; Swets, 1992). Another could be that the skills are not taught and that we tend to communicate the way we do because we learned it from our same sex parent (Korn & Nicotera, 1993). It is estimated that by the age of 5 the average person will have had over “a billion experiences in sharing communication” (Satir, p. 31). However, what was taught and learned is not necessarily effective or satisfying (VanPelt). Even more importantly, because communication is learned, it can be changed if desired (Satir), and it appears that the skill of intimacy can be learned as well (Durana, 1997). A second reason we are unable to communicate effectively is fear of rejection, which can block “open sharing of thoughts and feelings” (VanPelt, p. 21). This fear can be justified, as it is not unusual to be rebuffed when honesty prevails. Honesty is a foundation block for LDRs; however, because face-to-face communication in the relationship is limited there is a tendency between partners to avoid discussing honest feelings such as a sense of abandonment, rejection, loneliness, hopelessness or everyday issues and frustrations. Rather, the couple tend to communicate positive feelings to enhance a sense of closeness that distance does not allow for. Additionally, this fosters a belief that the relationship is OK but in reality problems result when honest communication is not expressed. For this reason, an awareness of communication skills for LDR couples is beneficial.

### *The Communication Process*

With the exception of things such as deafness or blindness, almost everyone will bring the same basic elements to their communication process (Satir, 1972). These consist of their body, their values, their expectations, their sense organs, their ability to talk, and their brain (Satir). The body gives nonverbal messages through actions such as moving the head or using the hands in conjunction with spoken words to give emphasis or show force, and may be used to check out the accuracy of the spoken word and whether the two are incongruent (Hills, 1986; Morgan, 1981). For example, a person may nod his head while saying “no” and in this way is betraying his true feelings by his nonverbal signals. Similarly, it is also possible to check out another person’s emotional state by the way they hold themselves. Specifically, are they tense or relaxed (Hills; Morgan)? Values are representative of the “shoulds” and “oughts” for self and others and expectations are in the present gleaned from the past (Satir). Our sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin) enable us to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, and in this way, take in information about the other and send out information about ourselves. Our ability to talk facilitates the exchange of information and our brains hold a storehouse of past experiences and knowledge (Satir). All of these things work together to give us a picture of communication.

Figure 1. Illustration of communication between two individuals.



Note: Adapted from *Peoplemaking*, by V. Satir, 1972. Copyright 1972 Science and Behavior Books.

The process goes something like this. We face each other. We use our senses to determine how we look, sound, smell, and maybe even feel to each other (if touch takes place). Our brains decipher this information and make meaning of it by including our past experiences with our family of origin, authority figures, and book learning. Our bodies respond to what our brains report and we feel either comfortable or uncomfortable with one another. All of this takes place in a fraction of a second. What we tell ourselves about each other influences our feelings about each other and ourselves even before a single word has been spoken. Unless we check out our guesses we can become ensnared in communication traps or ruptures (Satir, 1972). Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) described communication as being “deeply entangled with the emotional lives and concrete circumstances of real people, who come to experience in their own bodies the ‘authenticity’ of particular discourses with a power to which most of us can attest” (p. 176). When LDR couples do not have the opportunity to be physically together and non-verbal communication is not available, partners need to rely on verbal cues, perception checking, and clarification of their partners’ intended meaning to enhance effective communication.

### *Gender Differences in Communication*

Men and women appear to have somewhat different intimacy needs (VanPelt, 1989). Gaining an understanding of how one partner sees things different from the other can facilitate effective communication (Davis, Paleg, & Fanning, 2004). It is through a process of more effective communication that both partners' needs have a better chance of being met. Additionally, a more supportive and intimate relationship should emerge (Davis et al.).

Deborah Tannen (1991, 1992) identified some key differences in communication styles between men and women. According to Tannen, women view the world through a lens of intimacy and connection. Communication is used as both a means of exchanging information and, more importantly, a means of creating intimacy. Men, on the other hand, view the world through a lens of status and independence. Communication is used to challenge and ward off challenges (Tannen, 1991). Parrott and Parrott (1996) informed our understanding of these gender differences by stating that the number one goal of men in conversation is to get to it—no fluff and bunny trails—“What’s for dinner?” “Who called?”—men prefer a form of report talk. Conversely, the number one goal for women is rapport talk—“I just wanted to be sure of you.” Leaning in or holding hands can accomplish this, as these are physical signs of an emotional bond and connectedness.

Notwithstanding this, Burlison (2003) offered up an alternative view of gender-as-culture inasmuch as “research indicates that both men and women seek intimacy from their close relationships...[and] see empathy and trust as core features” (p. 6). Even more importantly:



Research has examined the meanings and provisions people associate with key aspects of relationships and, although some small sex differences are regularly found, the functions men and women see these relationships performing are much more similar than different, with emotional support occupying a prominent, if not pre-eminent, place. (Burlison, 2003, p. 7)

### *Nonverbal Communication*

According to Parrott and Parrott (1996), up to 90% of communication is nonverbal. An implicit assumption in any discussion of communication is that “people are communicating all the time, even when they haven’t uttered a word. Our facial expressions, posture, and use of space and time are ‘saying’ things to others, whether or not we intend them to” (Athos & Gabarro, 1978, p. 5). Research has shown that, in face-to-face conversations, only “7 percent of a message depends on words, 23 percent on the tone of the voice, and 70 percent on nonverbal body language!” (VanPelt, 1989, p. 59). In other words, our words account for much less of what we are actually saying than our bodies (how we say it) (Carkhuff, 1987a; Gottman, 1980; Parrott & Parrott).

Research also indicates that husbands and wives can read each others’ nonverbal communication with an incredible amount of accuracy and that couples who use nonverbal communication to send messages have fewer complaints about their marriage (Parrott & Parrott, 1996). For example, it is generally accepted that eye contact reveals genuine interest in the other and research has shown that our pupils dilate, which indicates pleasure (Parrott & Parrott). As a result, your eyes will give nonverbal clues as to the sincerity of your interest. Nonverbal communication is critically important in helping you understand and in being

understood (Parrott & Parrott; VanPelt, 1989). The importance of displaying genuine interest in the other can perhaps best be illustrated by the sage words of Alfred Adler: “It is the individual who is not interested in his fellow men who has the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. It is from among such individuals that all human failures spring” (as cited in Carnegie, 1981, p. 83).

*Function of nonverbal behaviour and cautions.* What function does nonverbal behaviour serve in communication? According to Hill (1986), it either supports or denies verbal communication, it can be used in lieu of verbal communication, and it reveals emotions and attitudes. However, a word of caution needs to be added here.

No position, expression, or movement can be considered in isolation.

Communication is a ‘multichannel system’—body language is but one channel...[and] meanings are within the person...to assume we know what a gesture ‘means’ is overstepping the bounds of usefulness, for meanings drawn from body cues are ambiguous and, oftentimes, multiple. (Athos & Gabarro, 1978, p. 35)

#### *Divorce Prediction Based on Verbal and Nonverbal Communication*

Since the 1980s, Dr. John Gottman has been able to predict—with rather remarkable accuracy—which couples he observed would make it and which would get a divorce (Carrere & Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Silver, 1999). Gottman observed more than 3,000 married couples (Gottman Institute, 2004a) in his “love lab” (near the University of Washington) (Gottman Institute, 2004b) and predicted which couples would still be together 15 years later. His prediction accuracy rate ranged from 95% after an hour of observation to 90% after 15 minutes of observation. After only 3 minutes of observation, he was still able to predict with

quite significant accuracy who would be together and who would be divorced (Carrere & Gottman; Gottman & Silver; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Gottman's divorce prediction test was reworked by a group of psychologists with an 80% accuracy rate on the predictions of which couples would make it (Gladwell, 2005).

Gottman (1993) claims that he does not have to focus on everything the couples say but he does watch out for what he calls the Four Horseman: defensiveness, stonewalling, criticism, and contempt. Of the Four Horseman, Gottman identified contempt—as displayed by classic eye rolling—as the most serious sign of trouble in the couples he studied (Gladwell, 2005; Gottman). Eye rolling is one way to display contempt, but there are others. According to Parrott and Parrott (1996), other nonverbal signs of contempt include leaning away from one's partner, crossing one's arms, holding one's body in a rigid fashion, and tilting one's head backwards, which literally has the partner looking down her or his nose at the other partner “as if sniffing something unpleasant” (p. 24). Gottman saw no gender differences in the use of contempt, but did state that women are more apt to be critical and that men are more apt to stonewall (Gladwell, 2005).

### *Respect and Tone of Voice*

Another example showing the power of nonverbal communication comes from the work of medical researcher Wendy Levinson (Levinson, Roter, Mullooly, Dull, & Frankel, 1997). She recorded hundreds of conversations between patients and their doctors. Of this group of doctors, approximately half had never been sued for malpractice and half had been sued at least twice. To what did Levinson attribute this difference? She discovered that the doctors who had never been sued spent approximately 3 minutes more with their patients,

practiced orienting comments, such as “First I’ll examine you, and then we will talk the problem over” (Gladwell, p. 42); used active listening skills; and were more likely to laugh with their patients.

Psychologist Nalini Ambady and her team, LaPlante, Nguyen, Rosenthal, and Chaumeton (2002), took Levinson’s tapes and chose two patient-doctor conversations leaving only garble with intonation, pitch, and rhythm, but no content. If tone of voice was found to be dominant, they predicted that the doctor would be sued. If, on the other hand, it was found to be concerned, they predicted the doctor would not be sued. By using only the tone of voice accurate predictions were made of who would and would not be sued. What did Ambady attribute this to? “In the end it comes down to a matter of respect, and the simplest way that respect is communicated is through tone of voice” (Gladwell, 2005, p. 43) (Ladner Hawes, 1984).

According to VanPelt (1989), research suggests that 23% of the message in face-to-face conversations depends on the tone of the voice. If couples have no awareness of how they sound, they will probably have no awareness of the effect their tone of voice has on others.

In sum, then, to enhance meaningful interaction, persons in LDRs will need to develop a pattern of communication that takes into consideration two distinct ways of interacting: in person communication and distance communication. Specifically, in in-person communication, nonverbal cues, tone of voice, and time committed to communication is needed to foster meaningful interaction. During times of physical absence, the need for

clarifying meaning and emotions takes on greater importance, as nonverbal cues are most times not available.

### Ways to Stay Connected in an LDR

Social psychologists inform our understanding of LDRs based on the research of romantic relationships (Guldner, 2003). They suggest that, while it is essential for couples to share their feelings with each other, this must be done in a framework of sharing the mundane, day-to-day details of their lives in order for them to feel connected (Guldner). Following are some common ways to stay connected in an LDR:

#### *Telephone*

Although this is the fastest way of communicating with one's partner, there are nonetheless several drawbacks to be considered, namely expense, timing, and availability (Guldner, 2003; Kauffman, 2000). Due to different time zones across varied geographical locations, it is sometimes necessary to call during prime time, which can be quite expensive (Guldner; Kauffman). The timing and availability drawbacks are influenced by busy schedules that can make it difficult to coordinate times that each person may be available. The easiest way to solve these difficulties is for each person to have access to and use e-mail (Guldner; Kauffman). Having said this, however, it is important to note that over recent years there has been quite a push in telephone "plans" that make long distance calls much more reasonably priced. For example, many hotels now offer free telephone calls to anywhere in North America for the length of the occupant's stay. Also, the minutes in many cell phone "packages" allow for long distance calls anywhere in Canada for very reasonable prices.

### *E-mail*

In 2001, 1 in 3 people in North American and Europe were Internet users, compared with a 1 in 35 world average. By 2002, in excess of 600 million people had access to the Internet worldwide and the main reason for using it was to communicate with others via e-mail to maintain interpersonal relationships (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). While e-mail helps close the gap when distance makes both in-person and telephone communication difficult (Kauffman, 2000), it is not without its critics. For example, several scholars have contended that “Internet communication is an impoverished and sterile form of social exchange compared to traditional face-to-face interactions, and will therefore produce negative outcomes (loneliness and depression) for its users as well as weaken neighbourhood and community ties” (Bargh & McKenna, p. 575). Norris (2004) speaks to a sociological theory among writers known as *Gemeinschaft*, or personal communications, and ponders the effects of social isolation brought about by the use of the Internet.

In contrast, others believe that the Internet can enhance social connectivity in certain relationships where this might otherwise be a problem, such as LDRs (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Aylor (2003) stated that using a computer to communicate could positively impact the level of trust for those who have no periodic face-to-face contact, but not for those who do. Nevertheless, the implicit assumptions and biases of both relationship and communication research literature with regard to what constitutes necessary and essential processes in effective communication (i.e., the importance of face-to-face interactions, physical proximity, and nonverbal communication) beg the question of “whether it is the presence of

physical features that makes face-to-face interaction what it is, or is it instead the immediacy of responses (compared to e-mail)?" (Bargh & McKenna).

Baker (2002) informed our understanding of online relationships for couples who met in cyberspace and identified four factors that differentiate which couples will be successful and those that will not: 1) where they meet, 2) what they will do to be together, 3) when they interact, and 4) how they communicate. From a study of 68 couples conducted in 2002, eight couples were chosen to be representative of the sample and the following information was garnered:

People who first met in places based upon common interests, who communicated for long periods of time before meeting offline without too much intimacy, who worked through barriers to becoming closer, and who negotiated conflict well tended to stay together. (Baker, 2002, p. 363)

According to Guldner (2003), e-mail has two distinct advantages compared to other kinds of communication: lower cost and faster transmission. Bargh and McKenna (2004) agree that communication via the Internet is a way to instantly overcome great distance and add another advantage—the ability to be interactive. There is no doubt that this form of communication will revolutionize virtually every facet of our lives as it deals with the core of our humanity: communication between persons (Bargh & McKenna).

As with recent updates in telephone technology and long distance rates, there are also many newer technological advances connected to the internet: online chat rooms—where you can have live texting; internet telephone; MSN and SMS.ca; videoconferencing; Cu-See me; Apples' iChat – where couples can talk and even see each other. There are some fabulous

ways in which existing technology can contribute to long distance relating. See Appendix 1 for some specific examples.

It is important to note that the suggestions for communication skills presented in this project are meant only as a first introduction to the complex and challenging world of effective communication. Additional in-person work is commonly very important, helpful, and often necessary in achieving high levels of effective communication.



## CHAPTER FOUR – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion

Research has also shown that relationships are influenced by individual differences and variability between relationships. Additionally, we must keep in mind that much research comes from participants' retrospective self-reports. Holt and Stone (1988) informed us that future research should include in-depth interviews with those in LDRs to gain further understanding of coping strategies and Dainton and Aylor (2001) suggested that further attention needs to be paid to processes that foster the success of LDRs. Given the numbers of people involved in LDRs, such recommendations seem warranted.

A great deal of what we know about LDRs has been gleaned from research conducted on college students, and these results do not necessarily generalize to the population at large. There are probably many idiosyncrasies yet to be discovered around LDRs.

### Additional Research Needs

Due to rapid changes in technology and peoples' changing wants and needs, distance relationships are becoming more and more common. All one has to do is log onto a computer and enter a chat room in order to become connected to innumerable possibilities. Personal ads abound everywhere. Individuals from all over the world are looking for a way to create companionship or enter into a romantic relationship. It is no longer so unusual to connect in this manner and research would be warranted into these areas. Additionally, because the workplace is changing, as are employer expectations, more and more couples find themselves separated for greater periods of time and by greater distances. For example, in Alberta, it is not at all unusual for couples to be separated due to the oil industry. Some workers go as far

as Russia or the Middle East to work for extended periods of time. As previously discussed, because not all LDRs are the same, research needs to address the variables of maintenance processes, unique challenges, relational characteristics of satisfaction and commitment, the importance of face-to-face contact, and communication channels used in LDRs. Additionally, cultural expectations, gender issues, and sexual orientation need to be investigated in greater detail.

### Conclusion

The information gleaned from the review gave an outline of which variables mattered most and those that did not seem to matter much in distance relationships. Perhaps the greatest revelation was that LDRs have the same chance of working as any other relationship and, given some sound coping strategies, they can even provide opportunities for individual needs to be met in a relationship that may not necessarily be available to couples that live together all the time. I believe that through a process of psychoeducational counselling, personal counselling, career counselling, and other forms of information gathering, couples can learn to complement each others' needs in a positive fashion in LDRs. I also believe that because our world is changing so rapidly, and by extension so are our relationships, supporting people through LDRs is a worthy endeavour.

While it is generally accepted that communication is an important factor in maintaining healthy proximal relationships, communication takes on even greater importance for distance relationships. Guldner (2003) noted that because the quantity of communication in LDRs is reduced, the quality would need to be increased. Additionally, because the majority of communication will take place via the Internet or telephone, there will be no visual cues

available to interpret intentions of the other. As a result, each person will be required to become a “master at communication” (Guldner, p. 55). The manual that was created as part of this project is aimed at helping couples increase the level and depth of satisfaction within their relationships through enhanced communication. This is achieved by reviewing individual patterns, gender differences, and effective ways of communicating. The exercises included are meant to help people become aware of their particular communication style and to rework that style if needed to one that better satisfies their needs and those of their partner.

Dainton (2003) concluded that “when trying to understand relational, contextual, and cultural variations in maintaining relationships through communication, our present theories are limited in their applicability and scope when functioning alone...there is much yet to be learned” (p. 313).

#### Implications

This project made an effort to inform couples about the multifaceted workings of distance relationships. After examination of existing literature and a summarization of key points and themes, the manual was developed and directed at those involved in LDRs. The purpose of the manual is to serve as a beneficial resource on how to successfully navigate through an LDR. Additionally, the manual attempts to debunk some of the most common myths surrounding LDRs and, in this way, to normalize them to some extent.

The provision of information is an inexpensive way of increasing awareness of LDRs. The hope is that increased awareness will: 1) increase harmony in relationships, 2) decrease potential divorces, 3) prevent broken homes, and 4) decrease physical and emotional health concerns. In this way, society as a whole would benefit.

The most obvious end user of this project is people who are involved in the LDR lifestyle. Relationships are about communication. Without awareness it can break down. Unquestionably, communication in LDRs takes on added significance (Guldner, 2003; Scott, 2002); therefore, quality resources can help alleviate that breakdown. This project and manual are one step towards understanding the pivotal role that effective communication plays in LDRs.

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APPENDIX 1

MANUAL

Long Distance Relationships:  
Communication Strategies to Facilitate Success

Sylvia Fuerbringer

November, 2007

## INTRODUCTION

### Long Distance Relationships

This manual will offer an overview of some of the common myths and misconceptions surrounding long distance relationships (LDRs) as well as provide a general snapshot of an LDR. The main purpose of presenting this information is to educate and make available useful information for those involved in or considering entering into an LDR and to help convey a heightened awareness of this type of relationship to the general public.

### Communication

The focus of this manual is on communication (i.e., interpersonal behaviour) in two-person intimate relationships. The manual does not give an exhaustive review of either relationship or communication theory; rather, it emphasizes ideas, values, and attitudes that research has shown to be conducive to effective and satisfying relationships. Additionally, in order to provide practical resources, a synthesis of suggestions, themes, et cetera from the Internet has also been provided. These concepts are examined through the use of various relationship-enhancing communication skill exercises and other training. The basic approach for skill development is humanistic and pragmatic and the ideas learned can be used in all interpersonal relationships.

### *Rationale*

The main purpose of the manual is to teach skills that will give the reader:

1. An increased awareness of both the process of communication and of what is taking place between yourself and others in your relationships.
2. An ability to gain a heightened understanding of others and their experiences.



3. A deepened insight into yourself and your needs and aspirations.
4. An increased understanding of relationships and how they are formed; evolve over time; and the unwritten contracts that place people into occupant roles.
5. Development of listening/responding skills that should increase the feelings of being understood and helped in the other.
6. A heightened awareness of the important aspects and dilemmas of interpersonal relationships.

It is important to note that the suggestions for communication skills presented in this manual are meant only as a first introduction to the complex and challenging world of effective communication. Additional in-person work is commonly very important, helpful, and often necessary in achieving high levels of effective communication.

### Long Distance Relationships True or False Quiz

1. Long distance relationships (LDRs) have at least a 50% greater chance of not making it than geographically close relationships (GCRs).  
T       F
2. The longer a couple has dated prior to being separated the better their chances of success in an LDR.  
T       F
3. The greater the distance the greater the chances that the relationship will not work.  
T       F
4. Separated couples are more likely to cheat on one another.  
T       F
5. Sharing your feelings is much more important than sharing the mundane day-to-day events of your life.  
T       F
6. It is imperative to visit each other at least once a month in order for your relationship to be successful.  
T       F
7. Persons in successful LDRs need high levels of self-esteem.  
T       F
8. People involved in LDRs are lonely and miserable.  
T       F

9. LDRs require you to hone your communication skills.

T       F

10. Because your time is limited, when you reunite you should avoid talking about things that aggravate you.

T       F

Answers:

1. F    2. F    3. F    4. F    5. F    6. F    7. T    8. F    9. T    10. F

## Myths and Misconceptions Surrounding LDRs

1. Long-distance relationships are not very common.
2. LDRs have little to no chance of making it.
3. Separated couples have more affairs than geographically close couples.
4. The greater the distance between you and your partner, the greater the likelihood that your relationship won't survive.
5. You must see each other regularly in order for your relationship to survive.
6. If you close the distance between you and your partner you will have greater control over your relationship.
7. Couples that have spent more time dating each other prior to separation will have greater success at LDRs.
8. Individuals in LDRs experience lower levels of satisfaction and commitment than those in GCRs.
9. Because of the limited time separated couples have together it is best not to use it discussing perceived problems. That is, avoid conflict.
10. Disappointing reunions are a sure sign that the relationship won't work.

## 10 Frequently Asked Questions About LDRs

1. How common are they?

Seven million couples in the U.S.A. and growing

2. Do they work?

Studies indicate they have as good a chance as any other relationship.

3. Are they less satisfying?

Studies comparing LDRs to GCRs showed no difference in levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and commitment.

4. Are affairs more common?

LDR couples are at no greater risk but they tend to worry more about it

5. What is the most challenging aspect of an LDR?

Feeling like you're a part of your partner's life.

6. What are some things I can do to keep my LDR relationship healthy?

- a. Stay optimistic. LDRs work as well as any others.
- b. Relearn how to be close: share day-to-day events, use technology, write handwritten letters, and use reminders of your partner.
- c. Address issues as they arise.
- d. Stay socially connected.
- e. Expect disappointment.
- f. Learn how to be sexually intimate at a distance.

7. What should I not do?

Isolate yourself socially.

8. What problems are increased by distance?

Worrying more about cheating and reluctance to discuss certain topics.

9. What does an “average” couple look like?

The following statistics show a range/average:

Distance apart: 30 to 950 miles/ average 125 miles

Visits: once a week to once every four months/average 1.5 times a month

Phone calls: at least once a day to once a month/average once every 2.7 days

Length of phone calls: 2 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes/average 30 minutes

Letters: never to every other day/average three a month

Expected length of separation: one month to four years/average 14 months

10. What are the highlights of LDR research?

Many people go through some mild depression without any serious difficulties and this can be viewed as part of the natural reaction to separation. There are at least four emotional stages of separation: 1) protest (mild sorrow, absolute panic, anger); 2) depression (crying); 3) detachment (anticipatory distancing, pulling away); and 4) separation (nervous, anxious).

The Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships

(<http://www.longdistancerelationships.net/faqs.htm>)

## Positives and Sacrifices Associated With LDRs

### Positives

- Time apart can be a time of growth
- Forces you to have a life of your own
- Enables you to focus on studies, career, and personal interests, things that matter to you without being distracted
- Not taking each other for granted
- Increased independence and individuality
- Balance between independence and dependence
- Grow and change as needed on an individual basis.
- Improved communication
- Distance can provide intimacy unavailable by proximal relationships due to the need to communicate more
- Distance can be great for those who no longer and do not currently desire a need for physical intimacy

### Sacrifices

- Social life to take time to talk to partner on the phone or the net. You don't get to do as much as you used to.
- Financial burden (phone bills, travel expenses, looking after two households, time spent planning time together)
- Physical and mental attention (cheating is not only physical)
- Trying to work out schedules

- Messages sent through physical presence (touch, facial expression) are missing



## COMMUNICATION

Human communications expert Paul Waltzslavick once said, "You cannot not communicate." If this is true, the question becomes "what am I communicating, on a regular basis, to my spouse?" (<http://www.jeffherring.com/ccull.html>)

### Purpose of Effective Communication

The point of learning about effective communication is not to change, but to become aware of things we should and should not say to each other and to help each other feel safe (Parrott & Parrott, 1996). Page (1994) stated that "the quality of communication in a relationship is a decisive factor in whether it is able to thrive" (p. 132).

### Good Communication

When we think about good communication skills, we usually take for granted that this means talking (Page, 1994). That is, we equate good communication with being able to express ourselves clearly, in the "right" way, in order to get our intended message across (Page, 1994). However, research shows that "98 percent of good communication is listening" (Page, 1994), and Parrot and Parrot (1996) state that 90% of the issues we struggle with in marriages would be solved if we could empathize. Additionally, researchers suggest that listening is active, that effective listening happens when you are actively participating in a two-person give-and-take conversation, and that it requires asking questions and giving feedback (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). In this way, we attend to the four agendas of listening: 1) to understand our partners, 2) to enjoy our partners, 3) to learn something about our partners, and 4) to give our partners help or solace (McKay et al., 1995). Ultimately, the most important communication skill you can master is listening, as it "is the foundation of

affirmation and verbal intimacy, of conflict resolution, of negotiating, and of being happy together day in and day out” (Page, 1994, p. 140-141).

### Skills for Better Listening

“What people really need is a good listening to” (Mary Lou Casey as cited in Miller & Rollnick, 2002, p. 52). According to Cormier and Nurius (2003), listening is a skill consisting of four key components: 1) clarification, 2) paraphrasing, 3) reflecting, and 4) summarizing. Skills 1 and 2 address the content of a message. Skill 3 addresses feelings and Skill 4 brings everything together.

It is important to note that the message in a conversation usually consists of two parts: 1) content and 2) feelings (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). It is crucial to clarify content, as research shows that we all make unfounded inferences about meaning (Satir, 1972; VanPelt, 1989). In fact, one study of “the 500 most commonly used English words revealed a total of 14,070 dictionary definitions—more than 28 per word on the average” (VanPelt, 1989, p. 16). Parrott and Parrott (1996) strongly supported this finding and suggested there are at least 3.5 different meanings for each word we use.

While words play a part in the communication process, the importance of understanding each other’s meaning plays an even bigger part regardless of the words used (Athos & Gabarro, 1978; Satir, 1972). “Listening to another’s words and providing them with only your meanings is a near-perfect formula for some degree of misunderstanding” (Athos & Gabarro, 1978, p. 41). And, according to Satir (1972):

One of the most impossible hurdles in human relationships...is the assumption that ...[the other person] always know[s] what...[the other] mean[s]. The premise

appears to be that if...[they] love each other, ...[they] also can and should read each other's minds. (p. 53)

### *Clarification*

Clarification is required when the listener receives an unclear, vague, or ambiguous message. In order to receive clarification, a question needs to be asked around the content of the message, such as:

- “Can you clarify that for me?”
- “Do you mean that?”
- “Are you saying that...?”

Additionally, a rephrasing of the original message is helpful. Through clarification, it is possible to check the accuracy of what you have heard and clear up any confusion (Cormier & Nurius, 2003).

### *Paraphrasing*

This skill concentrates on the content of the message with particular emphasis on the cognitive part of the message—that is, the thoughts. Through use of this skill talkers are encouraged to elaborate on their story. This, in turn, should lead to increased understanding for them as well as further discussion (Cormier & Nurius, 2003).

Paraphrasing content consists of five steps:

1. Restate what the talker has said to you in your own words.
2. To clarify content, ask yourself what person, object, or idea is key in the message.
3. Pick an appropriate beginning for your paraphrase. See Figure 2 for some appropriate examples.

4. Voice your paraphrase as a statement rather than a question.
5. Observe and listen to the talker's response. This will let you know how accurately you captured the content of the talker's message.

*Figure 2.*

It seems like...	It appears as though...
From my perspective...	As I see it...
I see what you mean...	It looks like...
Sounds like...	As I hear it...
What you're saying is...	I hear you saying...
Something tells you...	You're telling me that...
You feel...	From my standpoint...
I sense that...	I have the feeling that...

Examples of Sentence Stems for Paraphrasing

(Cormier & Nurius, 2003, p. 92)

*Reflective Listening/Empathic Response*

The compassionate listener can use a technique called reflective listening. This results in enhanced understanding and empathy. Put simply, the listener restates what the speaker has said to ensure that the listener got it right (Carkhuff, 1987b; Page, 1994). An empathic response lets the speaker know that the listener understands the meaning, feeling, and content of their message (Morgan, 1981) and it affirms them (Parrot & Parrot, 1996). It also requires a response, which could be in the form of a paraphrase (Morgan, 1981). For example:

Speaker: What a lousy day! My sister is driving me crazy! She phoned me six times today at work about her new boyfriend. I don't know what she expects me to do about his inability to keep a job?

Listener: I'm sorry to hear you had a bad day. It sounds like you're frustrated and a bit confused.

A note of caution needs to be added here: "Reflecting your partner's feelings will remain an empty technique and fall flat on its face unless you are genuinely interested in understanding your partner" (Parrot & Parrot, 1996, p. 22). And, while "It sounds like..." is a good way to begin your reflection, there are many others. For example: "It seems as if...What I hear you saying is...It must have been...Could it be that you are feeling...You must feel...I wonder if you are feeling..." and so on (Parrot & Parrot, 1996, p. 22). In sum, then, reflective listening is an active process in which the speaker feels valued and worthy because the listener gives undivided attention, uses a non-judgmental/non-blaming approach, focuses on feelings and facts; allows for silence and uses restatements (paraphrases) to clarify messages, all in an attempt to gain an understanding of what the person is actually trying to say.

## Relationship-Enhancing Communication Skill #1

### Effective Listening Skills

Carkhuff (1987b) emphasized the importance of reflective listening. The following exercise is based on this principle and the scenarios below are designed to help you hone your listening skills. In each instance, you are required to identify the **Who, What, When, Where, Why,** and **How** of the situation.

1. My mother's going to drive me crazy! She broke up with her new boyfriend and cried all through lunch. She says she feels like a complete failure and has had it with men! I don't want to hear about her relationships anymore. I'm the daughter for heaven's sake!

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. What a great bachelor party...the booze was free, we smoked a little grass compliments of the groom...the grub was great and the stripper was hot. What's your problem anyway, don't you want to see me have a good time?

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. I'm sick and tired of not having enough money for the things we need around here. I scrimp and save and never treat myself to anything nice, but you and the kids don't appreciate the sacrifices I make for you. Sometimes I just feel like walking out the door and never coming back.

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. My new supervisor has it in for me. I don't think he likes me very much or that he wanted me on his team. He's real chummy with Bill, and yesterday Bill told me he'll be the new Project Manager. I'm so mad I could just spit.

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Gender Differences in Communication

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant! – Anonymous

There are few studies on gender differences in the development of intimacy (Durana, 1997). What is known is that, while women emphasize talking and the sharing of emotions, men emphasize shared activities (Durana, 1997). And, through a process of socialization, women place more importance on feelings and empathy, whereas men want to find solutions (Durana, 1997). According to sociolinguistics expert Deborah Tannen (1991, 1992), the way men and women listen to and talk to each other—at work or at home—can cause troublesome misunderstandings. She stated that this communication gap between the sexes has its roots in childhood and that no one is to blame for the all too familiar feeling that the opposite sex “just doesn’t understand.” The explanation offered up by Dr. Tannen (1991, 1992) for this phenomenon is that boys and girls learn to use language in very different ways. As a result, she says, this leads to difficulties in adulthood, even when both are genuinely trying to communicate in a sincere manner. Not only is there a feeling of not being understood by the opposite sex, there can also be a feeling of working at cross-purposes with each other (Tannen, 1991, 1992).

Nonetheless, despite socialization processes and gender differences, there is hope for couples willing to learn and practice a few simple communication principles such as those proposed by Page (1994): 1) learn effective listening skills, 2) practice using “I” instead of “You” statements, 3) gain an understanding and be willing to accept gender differences, 4) ask for what you need and want directly, and (5) affirm one another.



## Relationship-Enhancing Communication Skill #2

### “I Statements”

“I” statements are meant to inform your partner about how you are feeling or experiencing something and says nothing about them. The use of “You” statements tends to blame, accuse, and criticize, and puts your partner on the defensive (Page, 1994). For example, “I feel like I don’t get to finish what I’m saying” versus “You’re always interrupting me.”

This exercise is designed to help you become comfortable speaking in “I” language versus “You” language. Below you will find four scenarios to get you started. Begin by reading each vignette, then practice writing a response using “I” language to address: (1) the issue in each case and (2) your feelings in regards to it.

- **Scenario A:** Your husband comments that you are spending too much money on clothes, but you believe your spending is in line with your family’s budget.

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- **Scenario B:** Your wife forgot to pick up your suit from the cleaners. You feel annoyed because you had planned on wearing it for an important meeting in the morning.

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- **Scenario C:** Your husband promised to help you clean the house today, but has been watching television all morning. You are starting to feel anxious, as your company is due to arrive within the hour and there is still much work to complete.

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- **Scenario D:** Your wife says she felt neglected at the party you two attended last evening and questions your love for her. You feel she is being oversensitive.

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## Tell Me More

Many women report that when they want to talk to their partner they feel as though they are barely being listened to and that their mate usually responds with some advice and then appears to tune out (Tannen, 1992). And, if the woman persists in trying to be heard, her man usually responds with more advice (Parrott & Parrott, 1996; Tannen, 1992; VanPelt, 1989). When a man gives advice and wants to “fix it,” this is what he wants for himself versus what his wife wants, which is empathy (Demmitt & Demmitt, 2003; Parrott & Parrott, 1996). Deborah Tannen (1992) referred to this phenomenon as “man talk.” She suggested that when men talk it is usually for the purposes of exchanging information: for example, getting a sports score, sharing how to solve a work-related problem, or even suggesting ways to save money on refinancing a mortgage. In any case, there appears to be a subtle competition going on in which the man with the most important information wins at the conversation game.

When women have a problem, they tend to want to talk about it with others, verbalize it out loud, look at it from all possible angles, and generally ruminate about it ad nauseam (Tannen, 1992, Page, 1994). Conversely, men tend to quietly mull over their problems until they come up with a possible solution so that by the time they mention it to others they may just want to check in with them to see what they think or may want advice (Tannen, 1992). When men quit listening and instead offer up advice prematurely (i.e., before their mate asks for it), what usually follows is unnecessary irritation and frustration, as it interrupts the woman’s flow of thought. Unfortunately, this tendency to do to our partner what we want for ourselves instead of giving them what they want does not serve us well in our relationships

(Page, 1994; Parrot & Parrot, 1996; Tannen, 1992). The following well-known words of Ralph Roughton will help clarify this concept.

### On Listening

When I ask you to listen to me and you start by giving advice, you have not done  
what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that  
way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my  
problem, you have failed me, strange as it may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen, not talk or do...just hear me

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you  
contribute to my fear and inadequacy

And I can do for myself. I'm not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering, but  
not helpless.

But when you accept as simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how  
irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and get about the business of  
understaning [sic] what's behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the  
answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people...because God is  
mute, and He doesn't give advice or try to fix things. God just listens and lets you  
work it out yourself

So, please listen and just hear me. And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I'll listen to you. – Ralph Roughton

(Retrieved August 11, 2005, from: <http://rrr.kimcm.dk/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1587>)

So, what's a man to do if doing what comes naturally to him (i.e., giving advice) proves not to be useful? One of the most powerful exercises he can engage in is active listening (Christensen & Heavey, 1999; Gladwell, 2005; Ladner Hawes, 1984) and it is through the utterance of a simple phrase "Tell me more" that his partner will feel heard. Other possible phrases include: "How do you feel about that?" or "What happened then?" or "What do you hope will happen?" It really doesn't matter what words you use as long as your spouse gets a sense that you are sincere in your response (Christensen & Heavey, 1999; Cormier & Nurius, 2003; Gladwell, 2005). While it may at first appear as though engaging in this line of communication will extend the conversation, the reality of the matter is that it will probably take less time and the two of you will walk away feeling less frustrated than if you had engaged in giving advice.

## Hot Topics

There are particular themes relating to LDRs that people in such relationships tend to regularly need to cope with. There are certain “hot topics” that have a tendency to be of real importance when people need to be away from each other. Below you will find the topics and specific coping strategies identified by couples in LDRs.

### The Importance of Trust in LDRs

- LDRs require maturity—can you handle it?
- Doubts are natural. Will you be able to tolerate the other person’s doubts?
- Trust is a two-way street. Do you trust yourself and the other person?
- Do you trust that the other person’s social life is not a threat to the relationship?
- Do you trust yourself/your partner to walk away from (resist) temptation?
- Physical proximity encourages the establishment and maintenance of trust.
- Face-to-face contact maintains emotional trust.
- Phone based communication contributes more to positive relationships than does computer.
- Continuous communication links enhance familiarity through shared identity as a couple.
- Never make statements like, “I will trust you if (fill in the blank).”

### The Importance of Honesty

- Honesty is the foundation block for your relationship.
- Be honest about your feelings early on and talk to your partner face-to-face.
- If either of you feels it isn’t working talk about it.

- Don't be agreeable on everything and speak your mind.
- Expect some rough spots and throw out any fantasies about a perfect relationship.
- Be real.
- Be open about new friendships that develop while away.
- Ask yourself how you would feel if your partner did what you were going to do?

#### Strategies for Coping as an Ongoing Activity

- Establish ground rules: When are you talking? What can you do or not do? Can you see other people?
- Remind yourself why you wanted the relationship in the first place.
- Build in some alone time during times together.
- Volunteer at something you find meaningful.
- Have a support system for yourself and each other (family, friends, co-workers).
- Find a new creative outlet for yourself: art classes, etc.
- Challenge yourself by doing things alone.
- Develop your spiritual self.
- Socialize but be mindful of putting yourself in situations where you might be tempted to compromise your commitment.
- Look after your health by getting adequate sleep, eating a healthy diet and participating in some sort of exercise.

#### Strategies for Coping When Depression and Difficulty Hits

- Give yourself permission to feel what you feel.
- Acknowledge your emotions: cry, scream, and yell.

- Get physical: exercise, clean your home, or go to a sporting event.
- Write a letter, a poem, make an entry in a journal.
- Talk to a counsellor, a friend, someone else involved in an LDR.
- Call a friend and go to a movie, a sporting event, out to dinner.

Coping with Saying Goodbye, Jealousy, Doubt, Dealing with Feelings of Abandonment  
and Disappointment, Insecurity and Tension

- Anticipatory anxiety is a natural emotion arising from the hurt that will be there when the person leaves.
- Expect tension as it is an invisible wall that is erected for protection and the smallest things can turn into disagreements.
- A good way to feel more secure is to have some long-term goals.
- Reassure each other.
- Try to keep the same routine and in this way keep the same feelings. Try to keep it similar to the way it was before your loved one left. For example, if the weekends were the time you would normally spend more time together than keep it like that. In this way you won't feel so much different in the weeks that they are away as the weeks that they are present.
- Say goodbye the night before to associate goodbyes with warmth and intimacy instead of the miserable crying scene at the airport.
- Remember that being apart will not cause cheating but it will cause you to worry more about it so ease up.



## Emotional Stages – Elation, Loneliness, Attachment

- Expect to feel lonely.
- Expect limited contact (phone, etc.).
- Expect sabotage from others or even yourself re faith in the relationship.
- Anticipate the challenges while you are apart and try to meet them with a positive emotional/mental spirit. Stay optimistic.
- Words coupled with sharing real life experiences and specific plans to be together will give you something to look forward to.
- It's natural to wonder if it would be better to find someone closer because it hurts so much to see your loved one have to leave again.
- Join an online support group such as Yahoos' "Wish You Were Here." Be careful how much you open yourself up to others.
- Don't expect smooth sailing when you are finally together – people change, especially when apart: shyness, insecurity, habits, and hygiene issues.
- Do not idealize your partner or your relationship when she or he is away. This will keep you grounded and away from unrealistic/perfectionist expectations.
- Sometimes couples may feel they are no longer good together and lose their ability to be together. Talk about it—try to listen and be open.

## Dealing With Phone Arguments

- Keep the calls brief and information-based.
- Call daily if possible and agreed upon so you have something to look forward to.

- Talk about day-to-day aspects of your life. This will be like your after work chat and help you to feel like you are a part of each other's lives.
- Keep the conversation happy and focused on what you will be doing when you get together next.
- Do not avoid arguments.
- Change the focus when a "hot" topic is being discussed.
- Defer discussion of "hot topics" until face-to-face connection is possible. Address issues during the middle of your next visit. This allows you to enjoy your greeting and also keeps you connected at the end.
- Be mindful of verbal cues and check out your perceptions with your partner.
- Stay focused on the aspects of your life that you want to share (health, family, job, etc.).
- Do not fight over small problems. Because you can't talk as often you as you two want, problems tend to be magnified. Let go of the small problems and save the fighting for the really important issues.
- It is easy to misunderstand your partner's tone over the phone so be sure to clarify in a non-threatening way for the intended meaning.
- Fights happen. Respect your partner's space and give them the time they may need to resolve their frustrations.
- Don't panic if there's no answer. There are a number of possible reasons: dead battery, silent mode, work, or maybe no desire to speak at the time of your call.

## Some Warning Signs That Your LDR is in Trouble

- Attracted to other people
- Want to go out and party
- You start to lie about his/her expectations
- Jealousy
- Doubt
- Feelings of Abandonment and Disappointment
- Insecurity
- Numbness, detachment from romantic feelings
- Tension
- No more terms of endearment or verbal affection (pet names)
- Withdrawal

Here's a website that is offered by the Counselling Centre at an American university and it explores the seven key elements of successful LDRs:

<http://campus.umn.edu/counsel/selfhelp/vpl/distancerelationships.html>

### Commitment and Clarity of Expectations

The importance of clarity in expectations is emphasized in a number of articles/websites and includes things like setting limits on how long a couple will be apart. As a result, a visioning exercise will follow to address this important aspect of LDRs.

## Relationship-Enhancing Communication Skill #3

### Relationship Vision

A Relationship Vision is important for the development and maintenance of a successful relationship (Hendrix, 2001). One way to increase the likelihood of success is by clarifying parameters, expectations and agreements (yours and your partners). The following exercise is meant to help you design your dream LDR relationship.

Guidelines:

1. Set aside approximately one hour to complete this exercise with your partner.
2. Each of you needs to think about the following questions then write short sentences that best capture your relationship vision in the spaces provided below. You are encouraged to establish your priorities and list your goals in order of importance.

- What's your reason for wanting this relationship?

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- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very little and 10 being very much, your commitment level to this relationship is? Your partner's commitment level is?

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- What was the strength/state of the relationship before the separation?

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- How long are you willing to be apart? 1month, 2 to 6 months, 7to 11 months, 1 year, more than a year?

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- How much are you willing to spend to be in this relationship? \$50/month, \$100/month, \$200/month, \$300/month, \$500/month, \$1000/month, more than \$1000/month?

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- Are you willing to share the costs of being apart? If so, how much and on what?

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- How long are you willing to drive or fly to see your partner?

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- How often or how long will you talk on the phone or e-mail one another?

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- How long will you call each other?

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- How often will you have face-to-face contact?

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- When will you talk about the tough issues?

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- How will you divvy up the responsibility of the realities of everyday living (money, kids, et cetera)

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- Will you have separate/mutual vacations?

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- I'll be flexible on (fill in the blank)

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- I'm committed to (fill in the blank)

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- I'm willing/not willing to do without the constant physical (human) contact - touch, smell, and physical intimacy? I'll get my needs met in this area by (fill in the blank).

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- I agree/disagree that we will see other people?

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- How will we deal with getting reacquainted? What will we focus on besides the physical aspects of our relationship that we have been missing? What other areas need to be nourished?

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- What are our future plans for the next month? The next six months? The next year? Are we in agreement? If not, how can we come closer together?

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- In what way has your experience of your LDR been a gift to you?

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3. Share your vision with your partner and note similarities and differences. Combine your similarities into a new vision and see if you can come up with compromises on your differences or if you can simply let them go.

## Innovative Ways in Which Existing Technology Can Contribute to Long Distance Relating

Couples are able to communicate with each other via their computers and cell phones through various means such as: video conferencing, web cams, messenger chats through providers such as MSN and Yahoo (which also provide the ability to post short audio clips), posting boards online; and text messaging and emails on cell phones. Also, there are some free long distance phone services offered over the Internet such as Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) Google Talk ([www.google.com/talk](http://www.google.com/talk)) and iChat ([www.apple.com/macosx/features/ichat/](http://www.apple.com/macosx/features/ichat/)) all of which enable users to make free calls around the world. A headset, mike, or speaker is all that are required in addition to free software and a computer. A web cam can be added for video calls.

There are numerous all-in-one music, photo, and video burning digital media software programs to help you burn CDs and DVDs as well as transfer your movies, photos and music to an iPod, PSP or Cell Phone. Test a few until you find one that you like. Some of the more popular ones have been listed below but there are new ones being created almost daily.

- Burn a love song to a CD or make a music CD of your partner's favourite songs (RoxioEasy Media Creator)
- Create a digital scrapbook of photos uploaded from your digital camera coupled with scrapbook templates (Scrapgirls.com or Cottagearts.net)
- Create a digital slideshow of your favourite photos put to music (Corel Presentations or Apple Keynote)

Note: Here are three ways to help you get the most from your digital photos:



1. Find a photo-viewing program (such as iPhoto or Kodak Picture Viewer) that will allow you to keep all your photos in one place.
  2. Most photo sites (such as Flickr.com, Shutterfly.com, DotPhoto.com, Kodak Gallery.com, and Sony.com) allow you to both create and store your photos in online albums for free. Rather than send photos along via e-mail attachments, the access is easy as there is no never ending download or email filter to contend with.
  3. If you choose to print your photos use a digital online service such as Kodak or Sony. These services are professional, cheap, and your photos will be delivered to your door within a few business days.
- Create a personalized digital video of the two of you enjoying time together (Roxio Easy Media Creator, Adobe Premiere Elements)
  - Send an e-card for free ([www.care2.com/send/categories](http://www.care2.com/send/categories), [www.readersdigest.ca/cards.html](http://www.readersdigest.ca/cards.html))
  - Instant Messaging Services (IM). Differs from email in that the communication takes place in real time based on typed text. It is possible to see if your partner is available as most services offer an online status or away message. Popular IM services include: .NET Messenger Service, AOL Instant Messenger, Excite/Pal, Gadu-Gadu, Google Talk, iChat, ICQ, Jabber, Qnext, QQ, Skype and Yahoo Messenger.
  - Internet Telephone – MSN and SMS.ac. Text messaging can be up to 140 characters long (or about 20 words) and can be sent to your partner's wireless telephone.
  - Live video communication over the Internet enable couples to share things like opening of Christmas presents at a distance with the use of Internet

Videoconferencing. (Cu-See me; Apple's iChat – couples can talk and even see each other)

- Meet in halfway points and make romantic adventures out of the trips. Explore learning about the cities your partner is in through things like a Google search to look at internet photos and websites that features the places your partner is working or living in, and thus make an adventure out of the travel.

There have been major changes in both telephone and email communications in recent years making each much more reasonably priced and accessible. There are four major providers of cell phone/email plans in Canada at present. They are:

Bell

Provides phone, mobile, satellite communications, Internet access

<http://www.bell.ca/home>

Rogers

Engaged in cellular and other wireless communications

<http://www.shoprogers.com/homeen.asp>

Fido

Cellular and wireless products

<http://www.fido.ca/portal/home/homepage.jsp?lang=en>

Telus

Wireless voice, data and Internet services across Canada.

<http://www.telusmobility.com/>

## Other Ways to Stay Connected

- Write down everything you appreciate about your partner and send it to them in an email, card, or letter.
- Send compliments about their physical features, a colour that they wear, how smart they are—anything to give them a boost to their confidence.
- Write a list of things you can do to improve your relationship and start implementing them.
- Have a virtual date over the Internet and share a mutual interest like visiting the pyramids in Egypt or watching the same movie at the same time while chatting on a free Internet phone service.
- Listen to the same music and share your meals online.
- Send a picture or letter made into a jigsaw puzzle for your partner to unravel.
- Shop together at Internet sites.
- Send a voice memo key chain or photo frame.
- Get a free blog and send your partner the username and password.
- Share a moment once a day/week/month and do the same thing at the same time.  
Examples could include saying a prayer together, sending an IM.
- Buy each other a plant. Press some of the flowers or leaves to send along with a letter.  
Plant them next to each other when your LDR ends.
- Send your partner something personal that will remind them of you (such as an article of clothing). Sprinkle it with your cologne or perfume.

- Create a calendar with a picture of yourself or the two of you together for each month.
- Handwritten letters or cards speak to both time and effort and have a way of making the person receiving them feel special.

## Helpful Websites for Long Distance Relationships

- Dr. Greg Guldner's Website: *The Center For The Study of Long Distance Relationships* (Corona, California). This site is supported by extensive research  
[www.longdistancerelationships.net](http://www.longdistancerelationships.net)  
Dr. Guldner also has a book: *Long Distance Relationships: The Complete Guide*
- Other websites listed in Dr. Guldner's Book: *Long Distance Relationships: The Complete Guide* (p. 184). These sites are listed with a precautionary note that they are not supported by research, so "surfer" beware.  
[www.longdistancecouples.com](http://www.longdistancecouples.com)  
[www.theromantic.com/stories/longdistance/main.htm](http://www.theromantic.com/stories/longdistance/main.htm)  
[www.etoile.co.uk/Love/Long.html](http://www.etoile.co.uk/Love/Long.html)  
[www.marriage.bout.com/c/ht/01/04/How\\_Maintain\\_Long\\_Distance0986863563.htm](http://www.marriage.bout.com/c/ht/01/04/How_Maintain_Long_Distance0986863563.htm)  
[www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/long\\_distance\\_romance](http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/long_distance_romance)  
[www.sblake.com/](http://www.sblake.com/)  
[www.wineberry.net/lw/](http://www.wineberry.net/lw/)  
[www.umar.edu/~counsel/long.htm](http://www.umar.edu/~counsel/long.htm)  
[www.groups.yahoo.com/groups/a-special-love/](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/groups/a-special-love/)
- Dr. John Gottman's Website: *The Gottman Institute* (Seattle, Washington). This site is supported by extensive research  
[www.gottman.com/](http://www.gottman.com/)  
Dr. Gottman also has a book: *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*

## Additional Sites

The following websites are not necessarily academic or research based and quite personal. Due to the dearth of material available, they will, nonetheless, provide some practical strategies, suggestions and themes.

- US Secretary of State: Long Distance Relationships and Separated Tours: When Couples Live Apart

<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/12511.htm>

- National institute for Building Long Distance Relationships: This site is designed to help any couple where one or both people have to be away for periods of time.

<http://www.fambooks.com/couples.htm>

Here's a direct link to a particular activity called: 20 Activities for Long Distance Couples

<http://www.fambooks.com/couples/activities.htm>

They also have a book: Long Distance Couples: An Activities Handbook for Strengthening Long Distance Relationships

- There are many sites available that are created by people in LDRs. Here's an example of someone who has had a 4 year LDR and who offers resources and advice to others considering an LDR.

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/s/a/sar242/ldr.html>

also

- <http://www.geocities.com/lysh19>

- Here's an online dating magazine:

<http://www.onlinedatingmagazine.com/columns/connect/01-longdistancerelationships.html>

## Helpful Resources on Communication in Marriage

Recommended by Dr. Les Parrott III & Dr. Leslie Parrott in their book *Questions Couples*

*Ask: Answers To The Top 100 Marital Questions* (1996, Zondervan):

- *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What you Want in Your Relationships* by John Gray (HarperCollins, 1992).
- *How to Talk so Your Mate Will Listen and Listen So Your Mate Will Talk* by Nancy L. VanPelt (Revell, 1989).
- *Communication: Key to Your Marriage* by H. Norman Wright (Regal, 1974).



## Helpful Resources on Gender

Recommended by Dr. Les Parrott III & Dr. Leslie Parrott in their book *Questions Couples*

*Ask: Answers To The Top 100 Marital Questions* (1996, Zondervan).

- *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* by Willard F. Harley, Jr. (Revell, 1986).
- *Men & Women: Enjoying the Difference* by Larry Crabb (Zondervan, 1991).
- *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen (Ballantine, 1991).