



Complaint: We don't go out as much as I'd like to.

Criticism: You never take me anywhere.

Complaint: It upset me when I came home and there were dirty dishes in the sink.

This morning we agreed that you would wash them.

Criticism: You left dirty dishes all over the kitchen again. You promised me you wouldn't. I just can't trust you, can I?

Complaint: I expected you to come home right after work. When you didn't, it made me feel like you care more about going out with your friends then spending time with me.

Criticism: I hate that you're the type of person who never thinks to call and tell me you'll be late coming home. You always leave me hanging. You care more about your friends than you do about our marriage.

Knowing the difference between a criticism and a complaint can improve your relationships.

A criticism is an attack on someone's character, it's a jab. It's made with the intention of hurting the other person and to inflict emotional pain. People respond to criticism by being defensive and often engaging in a counter-attack, or they simply shut down and withdraw.

A complaint, on the other hand, is a request for a change in behaviour. Complaints have a request within them, a need, a longing, a desire. If you can distinguish between a criticism and a complaint, hear the request within the complaint, and respond appropriately, then the emotional intimacy in your relationship will shift for the better.

*Here are 2 tips to remember when handling complaints -*

*1. Understand that a complaint is NOT a criticism.*

*2. Learn to listen for the request within the complaint and respond (don't react) to that.*



A complaint sounds like this:

"I'm getting anxious and stressed over getting the house ready in time for the holiday party. Will you please help tackle some of this stuff?" Does that sound like a criticism? It's not.

*There are 4 key factors in this that make it a complaint and not a criticism.*

- 1. It has an "I" statement, which the speaker is using to show ownership of how they are feeling.*
- 2. The speaker is identifying a feeling/emotion that is contributing to and causing their emotional state (feeling anxious, and stressed).*
- 3. The speaker is identifying what is behind their distress (getting the house ready in time for the holiday party) and is not blaming the partner for their emotional stress.*
- 4. The speaker states a way they can feel better, and offers a positive way the partner can help (by helping get the house ready for the party).*

The critical/criticism version of the above example would sound something like this: "You're stressing me out and making me anxious. You never help me get things ready. You're so lazy. You always leave the work to me." That is a criticism.

Phrases like: "You always", "You never" or name calling are signs that a criticism is being voiced. The speaker is attacking the partner and blaming the partner for their emotional state. Statements like this one escalate things. This is an attack, and when we feel attacked we get defensive, and when we are defensive we usually counter-attack or shut down. It's a natural response to defend and protect ourselves when we are attacked. When you come at your partner in a critical way and bring up things in a harsh tone, you can anticipate this reaction from them.