WHY DON'T MEN TALK LIKE WOMEN DO?

By David Zinczenko From his book, "Men, Love and Sex The Complete User's Guide for Women"

Here's a great irony: Men, in general, are happy in their relationships. And yet women -- the very people responsible for making guys so happy -- spend a great deal of time fretting over whether their men want to stay in the relationship or are waiting to catch the next bus out of it.

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Indeed, women spend so much time fretting that they often ask men to talk more about ... gasp! ... their feelings. And the one thing that can make a contented guy discontented is being asked to talk about his feelings. It's like cooking up a great souffle, and then opening the oven to check on it -- and presto, the souffle goes flat.

It's not that you should never ask a man about his feelings. But it's all about technique: you need to coax him to that place where he can share; pushing him just makes him stubborn.

Don't use the f-word

The problem for a lot of guys is that talking feelings with a woman is like talking French with a native Parisian. No matter how hard we study, we'll never master the language with quite the same fluency. So you need to make things a little simpler for us.

From our end, we'd prefer that you don't directly ask about the "f-word" -- feelings.

Say the word feelings to a man and it's like clipping your toenails during a striptease -- total turn-off. The reason? We have feelings, but we don't have the access to them that you do. So every conversation that's pointedly about our feelings seems to us like the last 15 minutes of "Law & Order," where we're the perp and you're the clever detective, poking a finger in our face and hinting that you know just a little more than we do. And you do know a little more than we do. You know how you feel. And we don't know how we feel. So if you want us

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to talk, then help us speak your language -- by speaking a little of ours.

The point: If you want us to answer questions about what we're feeling, then stop asking about how we're feeling. Instead, watch how we behave, and where our interests lie. And be open about your feelings. The more you show comfort in expressing yourself, the more he'll do the same.

How do I know where the relationship is going?

I feel like I've hit a snag in a relationship with my boyfriend. We've been seeing each other for a few months. Everything was really great in the beginning. Now, it seems like we've fallen into that typical relationship routine. We see each other during the week, rent a movie on Fridays, and usually have sex twice a week (once after the movie). He's nice to me and treats me well, but I'd like to get things back to where they were. He tells me everything's fine, assures me he cares about me, and tells me not to worry about it. But I still do because what he says is one thing but what happens week to week is another. Any idea what he's thinking?

Yeah. He's thinking exactly what he's saying, which is that everything's fine.

Women Think not talking about the relationship means there are problems, but it's the opposite for men. If we're not talking about it, it means we're happy," says Conner, 32. So the real question is not "What's he thinking?" It's "What are you thinking?" If you're content with the relationship you've got, then relax and enjoy it. And if you want more, say so. "If a man loves a woman, he'll prove it with daily action not just words," says Jimmy, 27. Either he'll step up to the plate, or what he's giving now is all he's got -- and maybe you need to move on.

Why don't guys answer emotional questions?

I've got a good friend who recently left her husband. They have one child who's eight, and my friend and her ex are now in this bitter disagreement about custody, about money, about who gets to see the daughter when. When I told my husband about it, I asked him how he felt about it, because these are really serious issues, and I figured he'd have really serious thoughts on them. Instead, he just sat there, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "That sucks." Does the man have no feelings?
Of course he has feelings, and he told you what they were: He feels the situation sucks. Oh, but wait ... you were looking for something more. Here's the problem: You wanted him to tune into your concerns, but the signal you were sending was fuzzier than a pirate radio station. It's the old "feelings" conundrum again. If you want to ask him how he'd handle a custody issue, then ask him how

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he'd handle a custody issue. If you want to know if he thinks it's wrong for one partner to give up on a marriage, then ask him about that. But don't ask him about his feelings and expect him to surmise that your telling him a story about the neighbors is some Aesop's fable for your relationship. "We're simple. Please, no hints or assumptions," says D.J., 26. "Say what you mean, mean what you say. Don't make us guess as if we know what you are trying to say or feel."
D.J.'s a bit of a wishful thinker. Just as men like direct, problem A/solution B equations, women seem to take a more poetic and metaphorical approach to communication. That's why communication between the sexes is so much work. To men, dealing with hypotheticals is fun when we're talking about pennant races and the stock market, not when you're asking us to project how we'd feel about anything really serious, like a breakup or infidelity or pizza toppings. In that case, direct questions will get you the answers you want: let's stay together, I'll be faithful forever, and no anchovies, please.

Why can't a guy just plan out our future?

My husband and I have two kids, a boy and a girl, ages three and six. I'm tired of taking the pill, so I've tried talking to my husband about other options. Specifically, I asked him if he wanted more kids. (I could go either way.) And if he didn't, then we should talk about a vasectomy. But he can't decide whether he wants more children, and he doesn't seem too thrilled with the idea of getting the vasectomy. Why doesn't he just tell me what he wants so then we can come up with some kind of game plan?
Your question contains this interesting phrase: "I could go either way." It sounds like you and your husband are both comfortable in a pair of flip-flops. In our polls and surveys, we've asked men about the vasectomy issue. John, 41, has been talking about a vasectomy with his wife, but they're having trouble getting at the root of who really wants to do what. "Neither of us will come right out and say we're done having kids. She thinks me not signing right up for the operation somehow means that I have this evil master plan: that if I dump her, I'll be able to have kids with some 22-year-old bimbo. But I just don't want to get one, because neither of us have closed the door on having kids, and if she's up for it, I'm up for it."
The fact is that men hate admitting that they don't have a plan, and with complex issues like this, it's hard for a guy to decide, unilaterally, the rest of both your lives. He's going to flip and flop like a beached sea bass until he knows for certain. And then, one day, he's just going to announce his decision.I know, it's hard living with us. Just don't try living without us.

Masculinity mastered: what you now know about men

- *"Feelings" is our f-word.* Bleep it out of your conversational repertoire. Try pointed questions like "What do you think about...."
- *We feel everything's okay* when we're not talking about feelings. When we're talking about feelings, we feel everything's on the rocks.

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- *Backed into a corner*, we won't let you into our heads. Give us some space and we'll let you in.

Say this tonight!

- *The sexiest thing* a woman ever said to Dale, 32: "What would you like for breakfast?"
- *The sexiest thing* Tricia, 28, ever said to a man: "I wish I could have you."

Say this, not that!

- *Say this*: "What do you think about that?"
- *Not*: "How do you feel about that?"
- *Because*: He knows how to answer the first question, but the second one makes him nervous.

- *Say this*: "I wish I could say this in a way that makes more sense to you."
- *Not*: "You don't understand me."
- *Because*: Miscommunication is a two-way street.

- *Say this*: "Let's go for a drive."
- *Not*: "Let's sit down and talk."
- *Because*: Men are less tense when they're doing something physical.

- *Say anything*: Once
- *Not*: Ten times
- *Because*: To a guy, repetition makes a statement meaningless.

What it means when....

- *He says*, "I love you" for the first time (not during sex).
- *He does*. And he thought it long before he ever said it.

- *He says*, "Fine," in response to a question about how his day was.
- *Fine*. If something significant happened, he'll tell you -- in a few hours.

- *He says*, "Five," when you ask him how many women he's slept with.
- *Twelve*.

Wondering woman

Why is it so hard for guys to write a personal message in a birthday card? Every year all I get is "Love, Jim." Five minutes on the way back from the drugstore doesn't give a whole lot of time to come up with something clever. Plus, he'd rather let a nice dinner and a show do the talking for him.

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Male mysteries

- *27*: Percentage of men who say they primarily fight with their wives or girlfriends about the fact that they don't share or talk about their feelings.
- *65*: Percentage of men who don't want their partners to ask more questions about them.

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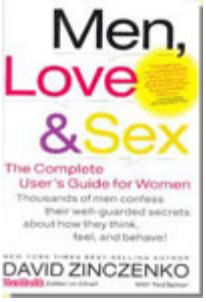
David Zinczenko is editor in chief of Men's Health and editorial director of the new magazine Best Life, a magazine for affluent, 40-plus men. He co-wrote The New York Times bestseller the "Abs Diet for Women: The Six-Week Plan to Flatten Your Belly and Firm up Your Body for Life ," and "Men, Love and Sex : The Complete User's Guide for Women," which offers up hundreds of insights on how men think, feel, and behave.



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