


**MAINTAINING A HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER:  
STRATEGIES FOR COUPLES**

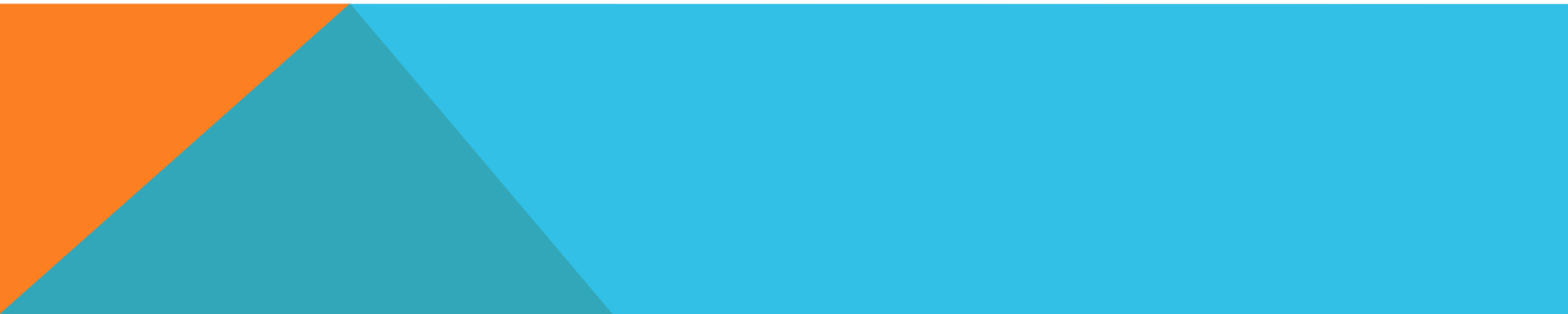
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# 10 MOST COMMON CHALLENGES PARENTS FACE

- Coming to terms with child's disability
  - Locating support and guidance – partnering in parenting approach
  - Accessing child care
  - Financial obligations associated with child's disability
  - Time alone for self and each other
  - Division of child care and family roles
  - Effective communication with each other
  - Approach to handling behavior and other needs
  - Maintaining affection and intimacy
  - Ability to resolve negative emotions (anxiety, grief, frustration, etc.)
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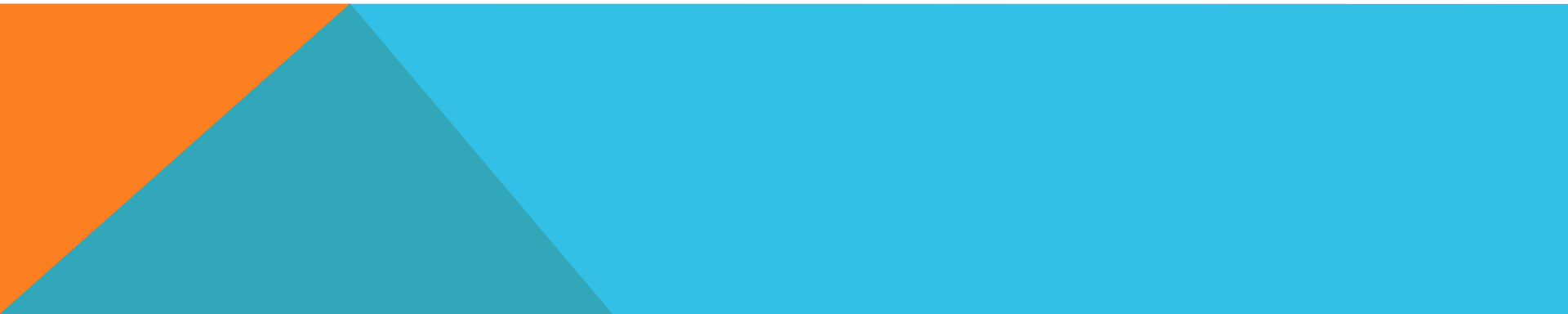
# HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

- We can only control ourselves--we cannot change others, but sometimes making small changes ourselves will lead to positive changes in our family and marital relationships
- We can become more aware of how we think and communicate with one another
- We can change and improve our own thinking patterns
- We can engage in more positive and cohesive communication patterns

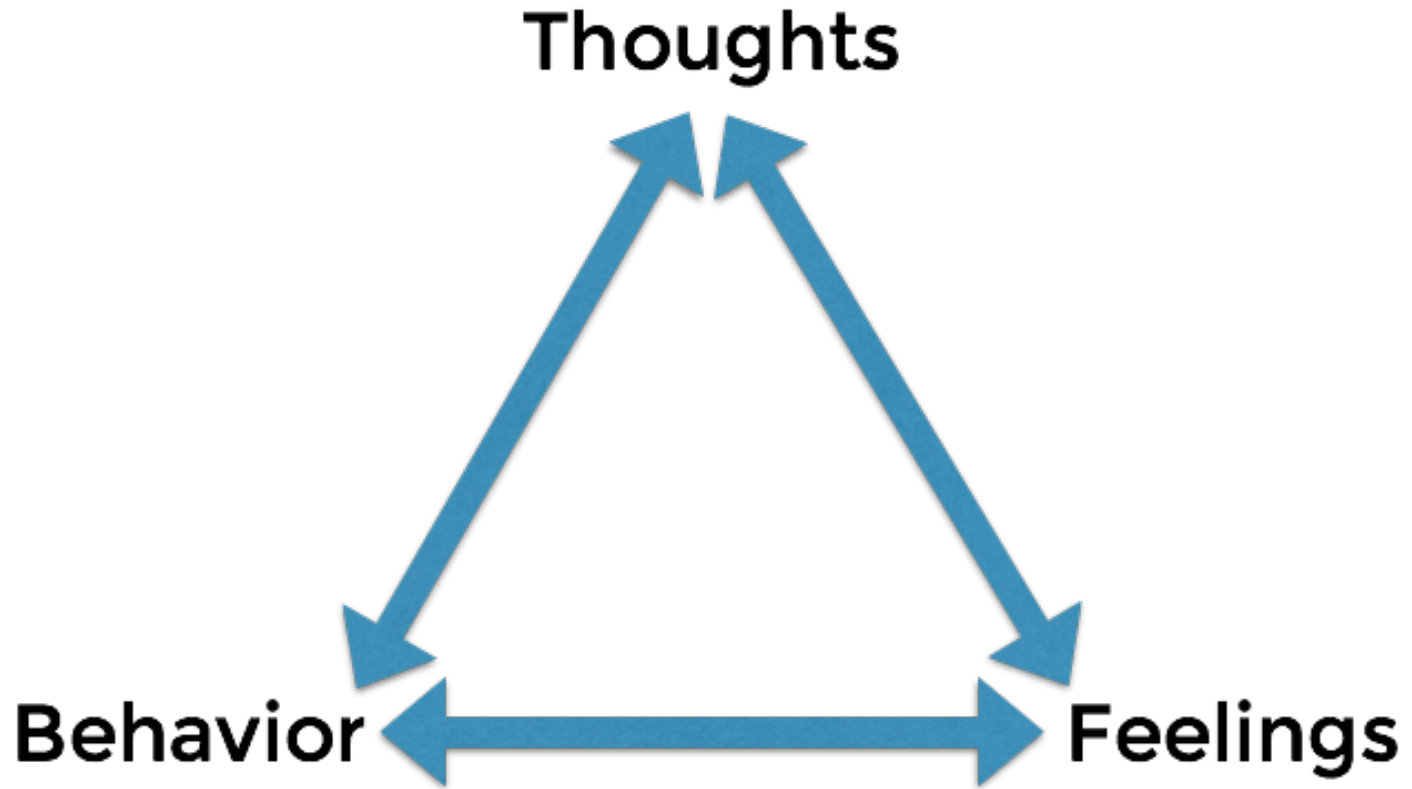


# WHEN NEGATIVE THINKING GETS IN THE WAY

- It is very easy to fall into a pattern of negative thinking—once the thoughts, feelings, and behavior pattern takes shape in a negative way, it can quickly spin out of control!
- In order to turn negative thinking patterns around in a more positive way, we must first shift our own thoughts, feelings, and behavior



# OUR THINKING





# ATTITUDES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Attitudes are the lens through which we view our experiences and our interactions with others
- What are the attitudes we have toward our partner?
- What are the attitudes we have within ourselves?
- When attitudes get in the way, we can deal with them through  
COMMUNICATION

# 4 MOST DANGEROUS ATTITUDES

Criticism – an attack on the person’s character

Contempt – making partner feel despised/worthless

Defensiveness – looking for excuses

Stonewalling – shutting down and closing off





# CRITICISM

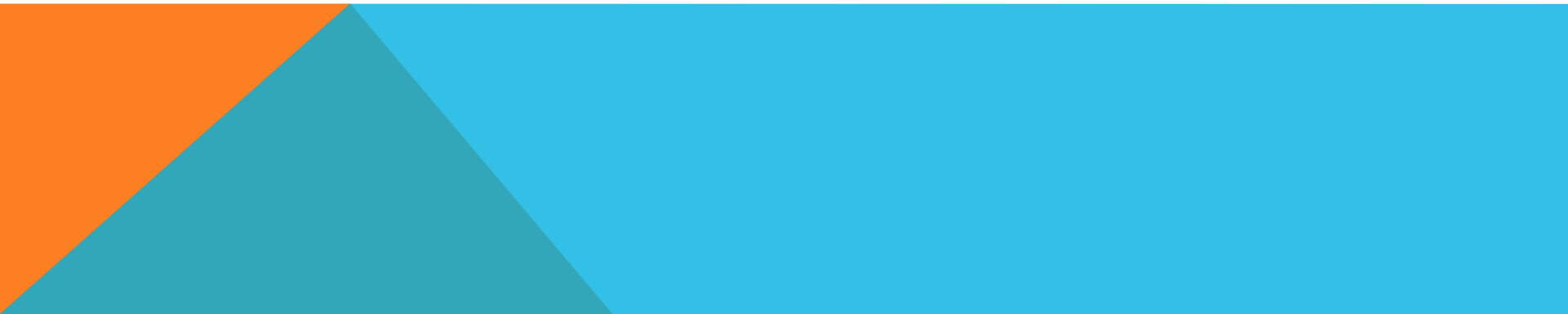
Complaint: "I was worried when you were running late and didn't call me. I thought we had agreed that we would let each other know if that happened."

Criticism: "You never think about how your behavior is affecting other people. I don't believe you are that forgetful, you're just selfish! You never think of others! You never think of me!"



# CONTEMPT

"You're 'tired?' Cry me a river. I've been with the kids all day, running around like mad to keep this house going and all you do when you come home from work is flop down on that sofa like a child and play those idiotic computer games. I don't have time to deal with another kid - try to be more pathetic..."



# DEFENSIVENESS

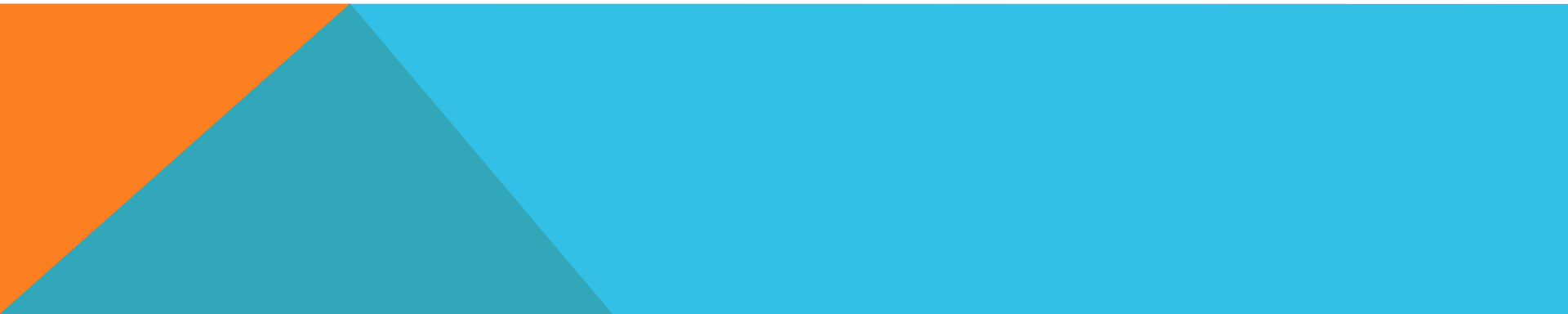
"Did you pick up the medication from the pharmacy like we discussed this morning?"

"I was just way too busy today. As a matter of fact you know just how busy my schedule was. Why didn't you just do it?"



# STONEWALLING

Rather than confronting the issues (which tend to accumulate!) with our partner, we make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, changing the subject, or engaging in obsessive behaviors.



# COMMUNICATION = PROBLEM & SOLUTION

- Weakness in communication is often a key to the development of the problems we have in our relationships
- Strong communication is often the key to resolving the problems we have in our relationships
- Communication is THE key to resolving the 10 most common challenges parents of special needs children face!



# EVERYTHING IS COMMUNICATION

Communication is:

- What we say
- What we don't say
- What we do
- What we don't do

Even couples who don't think they are communicating actually ARE communicating through everything they do and don't say or do throughout the day!



# KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Focus on one person and one topic at a time
  - Slow down
  - Take turns
2. Speak clearly and from the heart
  - Clearly state what you feel
  - Clearly state what you want



# KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

3. Listen respectfully

- “Listen like a sponge”

4. Act like friends


- Think about HOW you say things—kindness vs. mean-spirited
- How would you speak to a friend?

5. Take a break when you need to





# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OTHER PARENTS

- Recognize the importance of communication
  - Don't blame each other
  - Both parents attend support groups, educational meetings, therapy sessions, etc.
  - Be patient and sensitive with each other
  - State how you feel using a caring tone and "I" statements
  - Regularly set aside time to be together and talk
  - Prioritize date nights
  - Take advantage of available programs and resources
  - Seek professional help when needed
  - Set aside time for yourself
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# WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Often couples have difficulty establishing more productive and beneficial communication patterns in their relationship, especially when there is a long history of unproductive patterns

Outside help, at least initially, can be very beneficial:

- Marriage/couples/relationship counseling
- Pastoral support through religious organizations
- Seminars and retreats
- Support groups/mentoring with a couple who has been there

# COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: WORK TOGETHER

1. Make a list of 3-6 relatively small things you would like from your partner this week (ex: take out the trash, fold clean clothes, spending time with the baby while you take a walk, eat dinner together, etc.)
  2. Revise your lists together – discuss, cross out, edit; come to an agreement about what can be happily and reasonably accomplished this week
  3. Make a commitment – do what you agreed to do for one week
  4. Notice how clear communication and willingness to respond to each other's requests make a difference
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# HELPFUL RESOURCES

Website, Books, Programs, and Seminars: The Gottman Relationship Institute – [www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com)

Book: Strengthening Relationships When Our Children Have Special Needs; by Nicholas Martin, MA

Book: Married with Special-Needs Children: A Couple's Guide to Keeping Connected; by Laura Marshak & Fran Prezant

Book: Working Parents, Thriving Families: 10 Strategies that Make a Difference; by David J. Palmiter Jr. PhD, ABPP

