Quickly defined, gossip is *talk of a personal, sensational, or intimate nature.* And there are far better things to talk about than the sensational, intimate details of another.

Gossip almost always complicates our lives rather than simplifies. Unfortunately, gossip feels good and the short-term rewards often distract us from the fact that we know better. It makes us feel better about ourselves to know something about someone else and share that with another. Other times, speaking about the personal faults of others makes it easier to overlook our own.

Even under the best of motives, gossip almost always does damage to the relationship that we can never completely undo. Consider some of these life-complicating dangers of gossip:

* **Damaged Relationships.** When we learn that a friend has passed on a rumor about us – true, but confidential information – it always does damage to the relationship. The same is true when you are the one passing on the gossip.
* **Trust is destroyed.** It is virtually impossible to restore complete trust in a person who has shared your secrets with another. And it is vey difficult to trust someone who has just shared with you someone else‘s secrets.
* **Adds unnecessary complexity.** If you’ve ever told a secret that you don’t want somebody else to pass along, you know exactly what unnecessary complexity is. Gossip adds the nagging worry that word will make it back to the person or spread beyond our control.
* **Devalues the relationship in front of you.** Intimate, personal details about a person who is not there always removes you from your present reality and transports you somewhere else. Not only does it distract you from the relational opportunity in front of you, it puts you squarely in the middle of a personal scenario where you do not belong.

One important ingredient to simplify our lives is to avoid gossip at all costs. If gossip is a source of complexity in your life, try giving one of these steps a shot:

1. Appreciate the difference between “helpful” and “gossip.”

There are times in life when it is genuinely helpful for you to know the personal background or personal details of a friend‘s life. But if someone begins sharing intimate details of another‘s life and you are in no position to help (or have no intention to help), it is not helpful speech. It is gossip. And will only lead to disaster.

2. Stop it before it starts.

If your conversation begins to turn toward gossip, take the high road and end it. A simple sentence that goes like this, “I‘m not sure I‘m in a good position to be having this conversation,” quickly shifts the focus to yourself while communicating your point to your partner.

3. Engage in meaningful conversations about the people around you.

There is a 100% chance that you have not fully explored the deepest places of the heart and life sitting right in front of you. Rather than engaging in conversation about someone else, choose to ask deeper questions about the hopes, dreams, and fears of the people who are present.

4. Avoid the two greatest causes of gossip: pride and self-exaltation.

Gossip makes us feel better about ourselves because we get to revel in the fact that other people have problems too. This is especially gratifying when their problems are seen as more severe than our own. It is selfish pride and a need for self-exaltation that results in that mindset.

5. Stay positive with your speech.

Use positive words as much as possible – even when talking about another. Speaking positively about a person who is not present rarely leads to gossip and almost always leads to a closer ally. This positive speech will also encourage the people around you to do the same.

6. Celebrity gossip is still gossip.

Remember, just because they appear on magazine covers does not make their personal secrets fair game as a conversation topic. Gossip can appear on the pages of a magazine just as easily as it can during a conversation in your living room.

Is it just me or does it seem that with all the things that we could choose to talk about on any given day… the intimate details of another person’s life should be lower on the list than it usually is?