

Communication

Whether presenting in front of a group of people, in a business meeting, on the phone, or face-to-face with a loved one we are constantly communicating. Our ability to communicate effectively has a real impact on our life and the lives of those around us.

Poor communication can bring frustration, leading to raised voices and saying things that tear down and hurt and the break-down in relationships.

Good communication allows us to work through difficult situations/conflict in a healthy way, coming to a place where both parties can move forward together.

1. Can you think of a time when you were communicating with someone and it went poorly?
2. Can you think of a time when you communicated really clearly with someone about a difficult issue and it really worked?

Good communication doesn't just happen. It takes skills to communicate effectively. Below are some helpful steps in communicating effectively.



Steps in Effective Communication

1. **Give your full attention to the person you are speaking to**
Refuse to get distracted, use eye contact and face the person you are speaking to. If it is a point of conflict, sit down together with the purpose of talking it through. (Make sure you agree on an appropriate time to talk it through.)
2. **Keep calm**
Calm heads communicate clearly. Heated arguments achieve nothing. If at any time the conversation begins to turn into an argument, recognise where it is headed and stop the conversation. Calm down and start again, or come back at another time to discuss it.
3. **Share your thoughts and feelings**
Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements. E.g. *"I worry when you don't let me know when you'll be late"* rather than *"You are always late."*
4. **Listen to understand**
Listen with the purpose of understanding what the person has said. Put yourself in their shoes. The temptation here is to think about how you are going to respond while they are speaking, rather than seeking to understand what they are saying.
5. **Paraphrase what you have heard**
Share what you have heard them say in your own words. Then allow the person who is sharing to correct anything in your paraphrase that wasn't correct.
6. **Ensure both people have shared how they feel and been heard**
Sometimes one partner can dominate another. It is important that both people have the confidence and opportunity to share how they are feeling.
7. **Now talk about a way forward together that you can both agree to**
This may mean brain-storming all your ideas, whether good or bad, then going through the ideas together and working out the ones that could work and agreeing on a way forward.
8. **If needed - get outside help**
If you find yourself going around in circles and not getting anywhere, get outside help. This may be a friend, leader or counsellor.

Reflection Activity: Having read the "Steps in Effective Communication" go back to the two questions above and look at why your communication was ineffective/effective. Then ask, how you would do it differently next time?