



Communication and Your Relationship

The way you communicate has a big impact on your ability to get on with people and get the things you want.

Good communication skills can help you avoid conflict and help you solve problems.

Open and honest communication is important for making friends and having healthy relationships.

Communicating positively can help you avoid being perceived as

negative, critical or defensive. This style of communication will be more effective.

It can also help you control emotive reactions and focus messages on needs and the relationship.

What is communication?

Communication can be expressed in three different styles. You may use one style more than others or use a mix of all three. The different styles are:

Aggressive communication: This style is expressed in a forceful and hostile manner. Facial expressions are unfriendly. This communication style often uses 'you-statements', where the other person is blamed and accused of being wrong or at fault.

Within this style, the basic assumption is 'your needs don't matter'.

Passive communication: This style involves putting your needs last. Your thoughts, feelings or needs go unexpressed.



You may feel that people 'walk all over you' because you don't assert your own needs. This can lead to resentful feelings as you bottle up what you are feeling.

Within this style, the basic assumption is 'my needs don't matter,'

Constructive communication: This style involves clearly expressing what you think, how you feel and what you want, without demanding that you must have things your way.

Within this style, the basic assumption is 'we both matter - let's try to work this out.'

Not only is important to know the different communication styles but also to think when you use those styles and what may trigger their use.

Discuss with your partner what each other's triggers may be. There may be triggers you or your partner may not be aware of.

Tools for constructive communication

There are 12 key tools that can help develop constructive communication. These are:

1. Do you use 'I' instead of 'you' messages?

'You' messages sound like you are blaming and accusing. You can convey the same message using 'I', which doesn't sound blaming.

2. Do you communicate the entire message?

There are four parts to delivering a clear message:

- observation,
- thoughts,
- feelings, and
- need.

By addressing all four, you are more likely to have your needs met and understood.

3. Do you use feelings as weapons?

Describe your feelings objectively, be specific and keep your voice under control. Avoid being aggressive.

4. Do you use specific or aggressive language?

Be specific in your complaints. Aggressive complaints are more likely to produce defensiveness and can lead to misunderstanding.

5. Do you focus on the problem or the blame?

If you have a complaint, focus on the issue and not the person.

6. Do you bring up historical events of the current issue?

It is more constructive to focus on the current issue. By bringing up old issues, you may escalate the conflict.

7. Do you deliver mixed or clear messages?

Avoid mixing compliments and complaints by keeping your statements clear.

8. How is your body language?

See if your words and actions match your body language and tone of voice. Are your arms crossed or are you tapping your foot?

9. Do you react straight away?

If you remain calm, you are less likely to say things you may later regret.

10. Resolve negative feelings

Don't let problems grow into feelings of contempt. Instead take steps to resolve problems.

11. Are you proactive or reactive?

Defensiveness tends to escalate conflict and does nothing to resolve the problem.

12. Do you *shut down* or *open up*?

Stonewalling is when a person refuses to communicate. This is damaging to your relationship and makes communication impossible and. Some people need thinking time, some people talk it out. But there needs to be balance.

Next Steps

For more information on our services and how they can support you, or to find your nearest centre:

Call 1300 364 277

Visit www.tas.relationships.org.au