

Communicate: Improve Your Relationships with Effective Communication Skills

Conflict in a relationship is virtually inevitable. In itself, conflict isn't a problem; how it's handled, however, can bring people together or tear them apart. Poor communication skills, disagreements and misunderstandings can be a source of anger and distance, or a springboard to a stronger relationship and happier future. Next time you're dealing with conflict, keep these tips on effective communication skills in mind and you can create a more positive outcome.

Here's How:

1. **Stay Focused:** Sometimes it's tempting to bring up past seemingly related conflicts when dealing with current ones. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, your feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.
2. **Listen Carefully:** People often *think* they're listening, but are really thinking about what they're going to say next when the other person stops talking. Truly effective communication goes both ways. Don't interrupt. Don't get defensive. Just hear them and reflect back what they're saying so they know you've heard. Then you'll understand them better and they'll be more willing to listen to you.
3. **Try To See Their Point of View:** In a conflict, most of us primarily want to feel heard and understood. We talk a lot about our point of view to get the other person to see things our way. Ironically, if we all do this all the time, there's little focus on the other person's point of view, and nobody feels understood. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.
4. **Respond to Criticism with Empathy:** When someone comes at you with criticism, it's easy to feel that they're wrong, and get defensive. While criticism is hard to hear, and often exaggerated by the other person's emotions, it's important to listen. Also, look for what's true in what they're saying; that can be valuable information for you.

5. **Own What's Yours:** Realize that personal responsibility is a strength, not a weakness. Effective communication involves admitting when you're wrong. If you both share some responsibility in a conflict (which is usually the case), look for and admit to what's yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows maturity. It also often inspires the other person to respond in kind, leading to mutual understanding and a possible solution.
6. **Use "I" Messages:** Rather than saying things like, "You really messed up here," begin statements with "I", and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, "I feel frustrated when this happens." It's less accusatory and helps the other person understand your point of view rather than feeling attacked.
7. **Look for Compromise** Instead of trying to 'win' the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody's needs. Either through compromise, or a new solution that gives you both what you want most, this focus is much more effective than one person getting what they want at the other's expense. Healthy communication involves finding a resolution that both sides can be happy with.
8. **Take a Time-Out:** Sometimes tempers get heated and it's just too difficult to continue a discussion without it becoming an argument or a fight. If you feel yourself or your provider starting to get too angry to be constructive, or showing some destructive communication patterns, it's okay to take a break from the discussion until you both cool off. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.
9. **Don't Give Up:** While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a constructive attitude, mutual respect, and a willingness to see the other's point of view or at least find a solution, you can make progress toward the goal of a resolution to the conflict. Unless it's time to give up on the relationship, don't give up on communication.
10. **Ask For Help If You Need It:** If you've tried resolving conflict with your provider on your own and the situation just doesn't seem to be improving, you might benefit from asking a Registry Specialist for guidance.