

Student Counseling Services

Communicating Your Needs in a Relationship

We may understand on an intellectual level that communication is important, but how often do we take the time to evaluate the effectiveness of our communication in our own personal relationships? There are many ways to communicate how you feel to the people in your life.

Communication Barriers

Perceptual Misunderstandings – Misunderstandings seem to grow when we avoid taking the time to check for accurate understanding. It's tempting to assume that we already know what someone thinks or feels. Take the time to carefully listen with empathy and objectivity.

Leftover Issues from Previous Encounters – You may have thought that a previous conflict was resolved only to find that it keeps returning. This means that some aspect of the conflict was not addressed. It may be necessary to return to the issue to see what aspects need to be evaluated.

Polarized Language – Using statements such as “you make me sad” creates a threatening and hostile environment. Instead say “I get sad when...”

Inability to Negotiate Conflict in a Mutually Beneficial Fashion – When we operate from the mindset that only one of us can get what we want, we may be defeated before we even start. Yet, if we always try to bully the other person, we may win the argument but lose the relationship.

Dealing with Difficult Conflict

There are many difficult situations that emerge when dealing with a loved one. For example:

- Holiday tug-of-war planning with extended family or in divorce situations
- Coping with relational dynamics during family get-togethers
- Going on family vacations or outings

In order to deal with strong personalities who may resist your requests, it may be necessary to set boundaries by:

- Being clear on what your needs are
- Politely, but firmly, stating your case
- Avoiding the over-explanation of your decision
- Anticipating possible objections and how you can confidently respond
- Seeking support from your partner when communicating with in-laws or with children

Maintaining Successful Relationships

To maintain and strengthen relationships, we have to:

- Make the relationship a priority
- Regularly schedule mutually beneficial time together
- Develop a communication frequency that is comfortable for both parties
- State when an event has a special meaning and you want the other to attend

For more information on this topic or further assistance, please contact your Student Counseling Service.

Say What You Mean the Right Way. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://wpoelearning.workplaceoptions.com/SB_Say_What_You_Mean/SB_Say_What_You_Mean.htm



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