

Communication is the life-blood of any relationship, without effective communication a relationship will wither and die. In the same way, a young baby's growth and development can be drastically arrested if denied human interaction and quality communication. Good communication consists of three essential skills.

- ◆ Listening to what the other person is saying.
- ◆ Expressing how you feel and what you think.
- ◆ Accepting the other person's opinions and feelings even when they are different from your own.

### 1 Listening

Effective listening is an active, not passive, skill made up of a number of set components. The quality of our listening greatly affects the nature of the speaker's communication.

#### Five key listening skills

- ◆ Look at the person speaking.
- ◆ Be encouraging. Say, 'yes', 'hmmn', nod your head.
- ◆ Do not interrupt – be patient.
- ◆ Use open-ended questions. Say, 'how do you feel?' and not 'do you feel sad?'
- ◆ Reflect back and paraphrase the speakers emotions and meanings, eg, 'You must feel angry'.

### 2 Communication spoilers

Behavioural scientists have identified particular types of communication spoilers which can have a negative effect on conversation.

#### Five key communication spoilers

- ◆ Judging, blaming, criticising or moralising.
- ◆ Name calling or put downs
- ◆ Interrupting
- ◆ Excessive questioning, using closed questions
- ◆ Offering solutions and solving problems rather than listening.

### 3 Healthy communication

- ◆ Relationships are most healthy when both parties can openly and assertively express themselves.
- ◆ You accept that your partner can never be the same as you in the way he or she feels or thinks about things. Accepting how your partner is and tolerating the differences, and the resulting frustration, is an essential key for relationships to flourish.

### 4 How to get your message across

Timing	Choose the right time and place. Not when you are very busy or tired. Make a special time.
Be concise	Stick to the issues. Do not lengthily trawl through old stale issues or nag.
Use the 'unselfish I' word	Beginning with 'I' shows that you accept full responsibility. Say 'I feel . . . or I think . . .', and not, 'You make me feel'.
Three-part assertive message	Describe: the behaviour; your feelings; and the effects, eg, 'When you leave your clothes on the floor, I feel annoyed, because it makes extra work. I would like it if . . .'
Choose the right words	Be positive. Avoid the tendency to insult, threaten or denigrate. Be honest but tactful. If you have to criticise others, criticise their actions not their character.
Keep your partner involved.	Make your point and encourage your partner to react. Keep in touch, listen to him or her.
Make notes	Beforehand, jot down the points you want to make.

### 5 Gender differences in communication?

We might get angry with our partner because he or she does not communicate in the same way. But it has been suggested that men and women are fundamentally different in the way they communicate. Discuss these differences, if indeed they exist, with your partner.

MEN	WOMEN
Men offer solutions to problems, wanting to achieve results.	Women want to share feelings and discuss difficulties.
Men's talk is concerned with exhibiting knowledge, passing on information, preserving status and independence.	In women's talk the emphasis is on displaying similarity, establishing connections, and creating intimacy.
Men tend to think, internally and express the finished product of their thoughts.	Women tend to think aloud, sharing their inner dialogue.