

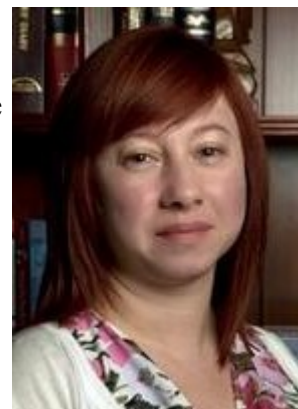
7 Easy Tips for Better Communication

by Amy Sereday

How many times have you left a conversation with a loved one feeling frustrated; like they didn't listen to a single thing you said? Or maybe everyone involved continued to talk over one another, making any communication seem impossible?

For most of us, it has happened more than once or twice. Not only are these kinds of discussions unproductive, but they can lead us to feel angry and irritated with that person, making future communication even more difficult.

The good news is that communication is an interactive process and there are steps you can take to improve your connection with others! Here are a few tips you can utilize to create better dialogue:



1. Recognize your role.

Communication is often a two (or more!) way street and it is important to recognize the role that we play in our communication with others. If conversations frequently take an unfortunate turn, give some thought to how you can improve the outcome. Remember: we can't control the behavior of others, only how we react to that behavior. So make a plan to go into conversations with positive intent!

2. Practice active listening.

Why is it so frustrating when someone cuts you off or talks over you? It's because you know they aren't taking the time to listen to you. It is important to listen and wait for our turn to speak. It is the key to building empathy and trust. Active listening is a set of skills that helps you to be a better listener, such as:

- Demonstrate concern. Simply asking "How can I help?" is a great way to start.
- Ask open ended questions – Questions that don't yield a yes or no answer spark more conversation.
- Make sure you get the whole story first. It is important to understand the situation fully before expressing your opinion or providing advice. This way, you can avoid a misunderstanding or jumping to conclusions.
- Be patient and don't worry about filling the silence. Sometimes people, especially seniors, need a moment to collect their thoughts.

3. Speak your truth.

Often when our boundaries are disregarded, we get angry, sad, or frustrated. When we hold those emotions inside, as we often do with family, they begin to color the way we communicate.

Establishing our boundaries and communicating our feelings openly are important steps in healthy communication. “I am not comfortable with this.” “I am frustrated by that.” Practice using “I” statements to begin communicating your feelings and speaking your truth.

4. Acknowledge the truth of others.

We can never truly know what is going on in someone else’s head but we can try to look at things from their perspective. Another person’s thoughts and feelings are true for them, even if they aren’t true for you. They aren’t lying. Their truth is simply different from yours. So acknowledge their truth, and know that it is OK to have a different perspective.

5. Understand your emotions.

The emotions you feel directly impact how you communicate. Understanding those emotions is key to making a better plan. For example, if you know a certain person or topic makes you uncomfortable, have a strategy to handle those conversations, such as excusing yourself to clear your head. Another strategy for handling emotions is to acknowledge them openly. “This conversation makes me uncomfortable. Could we talk about something else?” By sharing your feelings, you validate your emotions and prevent them from derailing the conversation. And others will appreciate your candor!

6. Create space for communication to thrive.

Studies show that uncluttered, bright and inviting spaces encourage conversation. In addition to creating a comfortable space, you can foster opportunities for conversation to develop. Try inviting the other person to dinner, taking a walk together, or perhaps a long drive. Be cautious in your use of modern communication. Email and text messages can be a great way to stay in contact but so much is lost in tone and translation. If you are having difficulty communicating, try making a voice call or visiting in person. The space you create for healthy communication will be worth the effort.

7. Keep the conversation flowing.

According to renowned marriage and family therapist John Gottman, our perception of relationships is built on a “magic ratio” of 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction. What does this mean for families? If you only reach out when something is wrong and don’t balance that with pleasant conversations, the other person will perceive the relationship negatively, making it increasingly difficult to communicate in a healthy way. So make the effort to keep your ratio up! Call just to say “hi” or share some good news. Sharing positive moments can make all the difference.

Both you and your family can benefit from healthy conversations. Be open, kind, and respectful. And when in doubt, press pause and walk away. By practicing these tips in your everyday conversations, your relationships will improve and your family will feel more at ease.

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