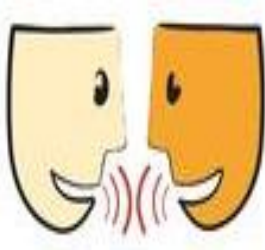


5 Ways to Address Communication Problems in Your Relationship



Good communication is a major component of a happy relationship. Misunderstandings and withheld information breed a lack of trust.

A lack of trust, in turn, contributes to further communication problems and puts the relationship in jeopardy. Communication issues resolve easily with a little effort. The improvement in your relationship is rewarding and more than compensates for the effort.

Here are five ways to address communication problems in your relationship.

1. **Misunderstandings** occur where one person is not getting what the other person is trying to say. We don't think alike, see the same thing differently and can have different meanings for the same word. As a result, we apply our way of thinking and our meanings to what we are hearing.
To avoid this, be sure to ask questions that will confirm your interpretations. Make sure you understand what the other person is meaning to say and not what you think that they are saying. Feedback to the other person what you think they are saying by paraphrasing what you understood. Use the statement "If I understand you correctly you are saying"
2. **As the conversation moves into conflict, often people stop listening.** While their opponent is still talking, they are busy planning their response. Without listening to everything that is said the likelihood of misunderstandings occurring is increased.
To avoid this, listen actively and carefully. Refrain from trying to come up with a response until the other person has finished speaking. This process slows down the conversation and helps prevent rapid escalation into arguments.
3. **Not getting to the heart of the matter.** Conflict often escalates when the real problem or issue is overlooked. When the real issue remains unexpressed, there remains an unaddressed emotional component. That unresolved emotion will cause resentment and will raise its head in future conflicts.
4. **When attempts to communicate result in arguments**
 - a. Adopt realistic expectations. Conflict may occur and that if so a solution may not be immediate. All relationships have their share of conflict.
 - b. Be willing to argue but have a cut-off point that is mutually agreed upon. This could be a time limit, or it could be when personal comments enter into the argument. This cutoff point is an agreement to go and cool off for a while before attempting to resolve anything.
 - c. During this timeout period try putting thoughts into written form to let off steam and to get clarity on what needs to be expressed.
 - d. Strong emotions render logic futile. Deal with what is causing the emotional reaction first. Once the emotions are addressed then explore rational solutions to the issues.

5. **In communicating what you need to others, it is easy to end up with a negative response.**

In communicating what you need to others, it is easy to end up with a negative response. The fear of this response is what stops a lot of people from expressing their needs. There is a way to go about communicating your needs that will minimise this negative response. Before looking at that in detail, it is necessary to understand that there are three ways to communicate – passively, aggressively and assertively.

- a. **Passive people** avoid conflict by not communicating their needs and feelings. This behaviour can damage relationships over time. The other person doesn't know there's a problem until the formerly passive person explodes for no clear reason. Passivity demonstrates an individual's lack of respect for their own needs and can lead to feelings of hurt, anxiety and anger. Passive people do not stand up for themselves and often feel victimised or bullied by others. Conversations revolve around avoiding saying things or agreeing with others to keep the peace.
- b. **Aggressive people**, in contrast, can alienate others and create undue stress. Those on the receiving end of the aggressive behaviour can feel attacked. Frequently they avoid the aggressive individual. Over time, people who behave in an aggressive way have more failed relationships. Aggressiveness is the opposite of passiveness. It involves expressing and pursuing your own rights at the expense of others. This creates the impression of disrespect and bullying for the other person. In effect, aggressive people try to get their own way, no matter what other people think. The conversation usually revolves around putting others down to get what you want.
- c. **Assertive people** have fewer conflicts in their dealings with others. This results in less stress in their lives. It also results in stronger, more supportive relationships. Assertiveness is the direct and honest communication of opinions, feelings, needs, and rights in a way that does not violate the personal rights of others. It involves a person standing up for their own rights, while acknowledging the rights of others. The main aim is to work towards a win-win solution.
- d. **Examples of the Communication Styles**
 - i. In this example, I am looking at the situation where somebody is asking you to loan them some money.
 1. *Passive Person* - "I loan money because I think I should, and then spend the rest of the day worrying and wishing I had refused." (Allows their rights to be overlooked)
 2. *Aggressive* - "Certainly not", "you've got to be kidding". (Upholds their own rights but disregards the rights of others)
 3. *Assertive* - "I appreciate you need extra cash right now but I am unable to give it to you without leaving myself short." (Take into account your feelings, rights and beliefs and the rights and beliefs of others in each situation.)

e. **Using assertiveness in everyday conversations**

- i. Assertiveness is especially useful for expressing negative feelings. It involves a 3-part statement:
 1. *When you do...* (Describe the behaviour).
 2. *The effects are...* (Describe how the behaviour affects yo).
 3. *I'd prefer...* (Describe what you want).
 4. The real focus is on the "I feel", "I want" part of the statement. When expressing anger, often the tendency is to blame the other person, fly-off-the-handle and get caught up in the emotion. This is aggressive communication and the receiver with react by becoming passive or aggressive.
 5. Example: "When you didn't take out the rubbish as you said you would I felt annoyed and upset with you. Next time, it would be good if you could let me know if you cannot do it"

f. **The advantages of using assertive communication include:**

- i. Your needs, wants and feelings are more likely to be understood
- ii. Nobody's feelings are hurt intentionally
- iii. Both parties are more likely to feel respected and heard
- iv. The relationship is strengthened by the exchange
- v. You experience fewer negative conflicts and arguments
- vi. You feel in control of your own life
- vii. Your confidence and self-esteem are enhanced (8) You have a better chance of getting what you want.

Communication is fundamental to a successful relationship. Implementing effective strategies to improve your communication skills will pay huge dividends for your life together.

Regards

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