

Good Communication vs. Bad Communication



Throughout history, mystics and philosophers have told us that if you want to find the answer to life's deepest questions, look within yourself. It's tempting, but how do we look within ourselves? Socrates said that life is worthless without testing. How can you test your life? You have to close your eyes and think. Do the questions we seek to answer really make our lives better?

When I started working with people who were in troubled relationships, I realized what the mystics and philosophers meant: you can discover something within yourself that feels like enlightenment. Good communication requires constant deep introspection and insight.

The main building blocks of a good relationship

A good relationship is made up of three parts: skillful listening (empathy), assertiveness (courage) and concern (respect). A bad relationship is the exact opposite. In a bad relationship, you don't listen, you don't express your feelings and you don't convey any sense of respect or concern.

Empathy: is the first characteristic of a good relationship; it means that you try to see the world through the eyes of the other person. You see the truth in everything they say, even if they criticize you or their views differ from yours.



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You also know their thoughts and perhaps feelings and you just need to tell them what you want to give them. Most people don't consider listening to be a good thing. When they are upset, they stop caring about what the other person thinks or feels and they stop trying to find the truth in what they say. They defend themselves and try to prove that the other person is wrong and they are right.

Assertiveness: is the second characteristic of good communication. By using the phrase "I feel," you can express your feelings easily and directly. For example, "I feel a little sad right now" or "I feel sad." In addition, you share your feelings with your partner with words and they no longer feel frustrated, humiliated or defiant. In contrast, in a bad relationship, you hide your negative feelings or, instead of expressing them freely, you attack the other person and bombard them with all kinds of negative sentences and phrases.

For example, you may address the other party with false and derogatory terms such as: "You're an ignorant idiot, get out of my sight". Such statements, being said in anger, are not as effective as the phrase "I feel." These types of statements are categorized as "you" statements because by saying these statements you are actually breaking boundaries and attacking the other person. "You" statements create more conflict and arguments.

Tips

- The three main elements of any effective and healthy communication are empathy, assertiveness and respect.
- Pointing out common communication mistakes made by the other party in your conversations is not helpful.
- You can use anger as a weapon and fight with it, or you can share your feelings respectfully.

Respect: is the third characteristic of a good relationship. Even if you yourself feel hurt and disappointed, you still treat the other person with kindness, concern, and respect.

In contrast, in a bad relationship, you treat the other person in a hostile and derogatory manner, as if they were an enemy against whom you want to defend yourself or humiliate them. Your goal is to humiliate them instead of building a close and friendly relationship.

Common communication mistakes

- Truth.** You insist that you are right and the other person is wrong.
- Blame.** You point out in the middle of your words that all of your problems are the other party's fault.
- Being defensive.** Means arguing with them and refusing to admit any shortcomings or mistakes.
- Testimony.** You claim to be an innocent victim of the other party's tyranny.
- Humiliation.** You use offensive or nasty language and want the other person to feel shame and regret.
- Labeling.** You call the other person "a fool", "a loser," or worse.
- Sarcasm.** Your manner, wording and tone of voice is derogatory and provocative.
- Counterattack.** You answer criticism with criticism.
- Deviation.** You attribute the current deviation to past complaints.
- Self-Blame.** You act as if you are so bad and scary to stop the other person from criticizing you.
- Frustration.** You claim to have tried everything but nothing has worked to fix the problem.
- Desire.** You complain that the other party "should" behave as expected.
- Denial.** You deny your role in causing the problem or insist that you don't feel upset when they actually do it.
- Helping.** Instead of listening, you give advice or help.

- Problem solving.** You ignore the other person's feelings and instead try to solve the problem that is bothering them.
- Indirect aggression.** You say nothing, you sulk and you slam the door.
- Building a shield.** You imply that the other party is powerless and incompetent.
- Mind reading.** You expect the other person to know how you feel without you saying anything.

Turn the spotlight towards you.

If you want to get closer to someone you're having trouble with, try to focus on your role in the "relationship" and find your own mistakes, even though it's not easy to do. If you're willing to endure the uncomfortable process of being your own lab rat, you will be on the path to inner enlightenment and personal empowerment. Above all, remember that you cannot change other people. Their beliefs, thoughts, feelings and actions are beyond your control, but you can learn to change yourself.

To work on yourself, you need to identify your mistakes with the help of a list of common mistakes and write an example of it in your communication objectively. Then, think about the correct way to correct and eliminate the error and be sure to note it on your worksheet.

For example, you might write something like this: "I did not demonstrate any of the three elements of a good relationship: empathy, assertiveness and respect in my relationship with my roommate." Instead, write: "I argued with him and insisted that he was wrong. I certainly didn't convey any respect or empathy."

When practicing, remember to focus on what you are saying, not what your partner is saying. The other person probably made a lot of mistakes, but mentioning them won't do you any good. I can guarantee that the person you're arguing with has no interest in listening to your list of communication mistakes. In my clinical work, I have

found that most people cannot see their own communication mistakes when they first use the Elements of a Good Relationship Checklist.



For example, some people are completely convinced that they were aware of the other person's feelings when they were arguing with them and that they were expressing their own feelings as well, when in fact they were not. Mental health professionals also have a problem with this. It may sound strange, but their communication skills are also not much better than ordinary people. In any intimate relationship, we need to express our feelings. Phrases like "You're wrong" or "I feel like you don't know what you're talking about" are not expressions of emotion. Such phrases are derogatory. By saying these, you attack the other person instead of sharing your feelings and making a positive impact by expressing them. Now ask yourself, do you convey feelings of love, respect and compassion in your communication? Is your tone critical, threatening, defensive or competitive? How does the other person feel about what you are saying? It is perfectly normal for them to feel anger and frustration, but the way you express your feelings can have an impact on what happens next. You can use anger as a weapon and fight with it, or you can share your feelings respectfully, allowing you to have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with the other person. It can be surprising to discover that your response may be an example of poor communication, especially when you are convinced that the other person is at fault. If you have the courage to recognize your own communication mistakes, it will be a painful but very important step towards better relationships.