

## Mastering the art of communication.

Almost always, people can learn how to communicate well if only they want to. This makes having *comfort* in your relationships something that is truly within your reach. By keeping the following additional points in mind, you and your family may be able to weather almost any issue or crisis.

- **Never negotiate when angry.** If there is an ongoing issue that is likely to come up, try to negotiate a win/win solution when you are feeling *good* about yourselves. Try to *initiate* negotiation by asking the other family members to discuss an issue-with the understanding that this will infinitely help the relationship in the long run. Make sure that each member has considered the other's perspective. If someone is venting anger, sometimes it is better if you just back off. A full-blown argument (which nobody wins) cannot happen unless *all* members of the family collaborate.
- **Learn to empathize with others.** Empathizing does not necessarily mean agreeing, but simply understanding how the other person feels. Healthy relationships have plenty of space for disagreement, but much less room for lack of empathy. Be careful about what you share with your relatives and friends concerning your family. Although discussing your relationship and its issues with outsiders may feel very good when you are angry, you will often regret it later on, after things get patched up.
- **Learn to take risks.** Never underestimate the power of risk taking. Is there some issue that might be bothering one or some members of your family? Or an issue that has been bothering you, though you are reluctant to bring it up? A part of risk-taking is making your needs known-in fact, being vulnerable. Each time you open that channel of communication, it starts the momentum in a positive direction. Ultimately, taking those risks will make your relationship deeper, closer, and more enjoyable for all members of the family.
- **Practice what can be considered "mega communication", or communicating about your communication.** In other words, practice listening exercises. From time to time, check with each other to find out if there is anything that seems to be creating any negative residue. Set time aside to talk, turn off the TV, and remove any other distractions, even if it is just for ten or fifteen minutes. Some of the most destructive issues in relationships build up slowly because they are not talked about. However, doing this *too* often can sometimes be destructive also.

- **No one has 100 percent of their needs fulfilled all the time.** Do not put negative labels on your relationship because it is sometimes unfulfilling. Accept that it simply *will* be unfulfilling at times. The fact that there are lows in your relationship as well as some very good high points is just an indication that you as well as everybody else in your family is human.
- **Work at achieving a balance together.** When you have disagreements in such areas as pocket money, partying, etc. usually the one who says no wins the argument. But when one person practically always says no, the relationship may be headed for trouble. It is fine to say no sometimes-but relationships that work best require a fair degree of compromise.
- **Put some humour into your interactions.** Learn to laugh at your issues. It is easier and more fun if you can loosen up together! Not only that, but humour is creative, because it turns "logic" upside down. You may find some imaginative ways to solve problems that have you stumped.
- **Once you have resolved an issue, let go of it.** Some families find it helpful to establish a twenty-four or forty-eight hour rule. If it is not resolved within that period of time, it is dead forever. Do not dig up old "resolved" matters to justify your current argument. \*\*\*\*

### Supporting one another.

Here are some common ways people define support from their families.

- **Being left alone.** It is important to have some time by yourself to sort things out in your own solitude.
- **Holding and comforting.** Some people like not to talk but just to be soothed on a feeling level, or to be listened to without response.
- **Having the other person take over the situation.** Looking to one another to talk things over, to fact find, and possibly to act as the devil's advocate works for many.
- **Ask for what you want.** Do not assume that other family members should know.
- **Do not be judgemental of other family members' preferences.** Most of us develop our preferences because we find what really works for us, and we make choices for our own reasons, in our own ways. \*\*\*\*

Information in this pamphlet is taken from: \* "When Good Things Become Addictions", Dr. Grant Martin \*\* "The Freedom We Crave", William Lenters \*\*\* "The Art of Staying Together", CDr. Michael S Broder \*\*\*\* "The Twelve Steps, Friends in Recovery" \*\*\*\*\* "God, Help Me Stop", Claire W.



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CARING FOR CULTURALLY AND  
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COMMUNITIES

## COMMUNICATION — A Guide for Youth & Parents

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## What is good communication?

During adolescence communication often is affected negatively between parents and teenagers. Arguments seem inevitable as young people often question the family values and experiment with new ideas. It is essential for parents and youth to learn to keep the communication going in positive and productive ways and if they need to argue to do so fairly. During adolescence parenting styles may need to change and new rights and responsibilities need to be given to youth. Every family has its arguments from time to time. The important thing is not to let these arguments escalate.

## Communicating and resolving issues fairly.

Before looking at some very specific “*dos and do nots*”, consider the following possible outcomes of any conflict you may be having.

- **A lose/lose solution.** This is where each person comes out of the conflict without achieving his or her goal. Sometimes a lose/lose situation occurs when one member of the family wins a concession, but then loses on the more intangible or long term level of the relationship.
- **Win/lose solution.** This describes a situation where in order for one member of the family to get his or her way the others must *not*—by definition—get their way. The trick then becomes to see which member of the family can overpower the other, and the game becomes *control*. This often works in business, but rarely in relationships.
- **Win/win solution.** In this outcome, every member of the family gets something of what they want. Thus, no one feels used or exploited. Win/win solutions usually come as the result of each member of the family making some sort of compromise. That means no one may get everything he or she wants, but everyone gets enough to come out of the conflict with dignity, and maybe even with positive feelings intact. This is the most rational goal to keep in mind whenever conflict resolution is called for. To achieve a win/win solution, consider these “*dos and don'ts*” as guidelines.\*

## The “do nots” of communication.

- **Do not displace anger.** Make sure you are discussing the issue you mean to be discussing, and with the person you need to be discussing it with. Do not ventilate anger that belongs elsewhere toward some other member of the family.

- **Do not air dirty laundry.** It is usually best to keep arguments private and to avoid embarrassing each other by arguing and fighting in public or in front of family or friends.
- **Do not think about winning or losing.** Instead, concentrate on resolving the problem. Remember, if everyone is concentrating on winning, at least one of you will lose in the short run. Thus, no one will ultimately win, which means everyone will probably lose.
- **Do not keep things pent up** to the point where your fight will become an overreaction to the issue at hand. Work to keep current with your feelings.
- **Do not be archaeologists.** Avoid digging up old material that is no longer relevant.
- **Do not be afraid to back off sometimes.** Not every issue is that important to every one. Good relationships are ones in which no one is afraid to be flexible, to compromise, and to give in when appropriate.
- **Do not let things get out of hand.** If you lose your focus, one of you should blow the whistle and stop the discussion. Many families find that by actually having a *code* word for stopping a fight that is going nowhere, the issue can often be resolved with much less pain.
- **Do not overreact to some one else's anger.** This will only continue the vicious cycle. Sometimes by merely letting the other person ventilate, the anger will soon be gone and then you can discuss the issue.
- **Do not threaten** in the middle of an argument.
- **Do not leave the house in the middle of an argument.** It is okay and even admirable to back off (and backing off is not leaving). But relationships are one instance where you can run but you can not hide.
- **Do not open a Pandora's box** on every (or, better yet, any) issue.

## The “dos” of communication.

- **Do fight with your head**—not strictly with your emotions. Your emotions may be what got you into the conflict, but it is your head that will find you that win/win solution.
- **Do take responsibility for your own feelings.** Keep other people's opinions, and things other people may have said, out of the argument. Try to avoid acting like a prosecutor—looking for more and more evidence to indict your partner.

- **Do listen to the other person.** Before you react to the other person's words, listen to them. He or she may actually have a point! Whether or not you will ultimately agree with it, at least *know* the other person's point of view.
- **If you have to fight, do it clean.** That means without bringing to the discussion sensitive issues that have no relevance. Forget the martyr stuff such as, “Look at all I have done for you” and “If you really love me you would...” \*\*

## How to handle ongoing problems.

Obviously, the best way to handle a sticky issue is to nip it in the bud as soon as possible, or as soon as it begins to become a problem for everyone. However, often this is easier said than done. But whether this has been your Achilles heel for decades or you are just beginning to experience problems, try this *procedure*:

- **Step one.** Take time when you are feeling good about yourself and each other. Sit down and negotiate a *procedure* for handling your problem the next time it comes up.
- **Step two.** It is most important that when you are negotiating a *procedure*, you avoid getting into an argument about the situation or problem itself at this time, or you will be likely to induce the battle that you are trying to avoid.
- **Step three.** Put your procedure in *writing*. Each of you should sign it and keep a copy handy. Make your written procedure as detailed as possible, taking into consideration practically anything that can go wrong in using it. Be as creative as you can about your procedure; it can take many forms. The most important thing is that your procedure be spelled out as something that can be easily followed. Even more importantly, make it something you are going to stick to, so that your argument can end in the shortest possible time.
- **Step four.** When the issue comes up next, the person *not yet as angry* will refer to this agreement that you set up and follow the detailed step by step procedure spelled out. This may even include the more angry person (or each of you separately) ventilating, without retaliation until the argument loses steam.

Once the procedure is developed, the issue sometimes resolves as well. But this is not always the case. Most families have something that one or some members blow out of proportion. This is what triggers the tendency to become irrational. Resolving it rarely happens unless everyone can agree that you have a problem. But if you can, that in and of itself is often much more than half of the battle. \*\*\*