



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER *for*
HEALTHY MARRIAGE *and* FAMILIES

Strong Families:

Tips for Healthy and Effective Communication



Benefits of Healthy and Effective Communication

When we communicate in healthy ways, we build relationships that promote appreciation, admiration, trust, and respect. Developing healthy patterns of effective communication is as important in our interactions with family members as it is at work and in the community. Here are some examples of how healthy communication supports healthy relationships:

- **Meeting Each Other's Needs:** Healthy communication meets the needs of others when it is used to help them feel safe and secure; feel respected and like they belong; develop positive self-esteem; achieve goals; experience growth; and develop healthy loving relationships. Basically, we meet these needs when we consistently communicate to others that they are both loveable and capable.
- **Developing Healthy Friendships:** Developing healthy friendships is the foundation for long-lasting relationships. Creating and maintaining healthy friendships includes establishing positive communication and disclosure, expressing realistic expectations, building trust and love, and successfully nurturing relationships through the inevitable ups and downs.
- **Setting Realistic Expectations:** Some of the greatest sources of unhappiness in relationships are associated with unrealistic, unexpressed, and unfulfilled expectations. Communicating expectations in healthy ways includes being aware of our own and others' expectations.

Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is communication.

Oscar Wilde, Author

We must also be willing to negotiate a balance between our realistic expectations and others' realistic expectations.

- **Building Trust:** Developing trust includes perceiving others as dependable, available, responsive, able to negotiate conflict successfully, and worthy of continuing our relationship with them into the future.
- **Developing Loving Relationships:** Loving relationships are developed by communicating love through loving behaviors (such as hugs and kisses, helping each other, kindness, saying "I love you," support), expressions of loyalty and commitment, and experiencing positive emotions.

Healthy communication includes sending and receiving information. Here are some tips for sending and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages.

Tips for Sending Messages

- **Be Clear, Concise, and Straightforward:** Messages that are clear and to the point help avoid confusion. In other words, "say what you mean and mean what you say." When others cannot depend on us to tell them the truth, it

damages the trust in our relationships. When dealing with difficult topics, it sometimes helps to write words down first, before expressing them, to determine the best things to say.

- **Just the Right Amount of Information:** Sharing the right amount of information based on the age and emotional state of listeners is important so they can process the information without being overwhelmed.
- **Timing is Everything:** Be sensitive about when and when not to have certain conversations. When you or the other person is sad, angry, tired, or stressed may not be the best time to discuss a sensitive subject.

Are you positive or negative? The positive sending and receiving of verbal and non-verbal messages with at least a 5-to-1 positive-to-negative ratio is an important factor in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.

John Gottman, Psychologist

Tips for Receiving Messages

- **Listen Silently:** Silent listening means not interrupting and includes all non-verbal messages sent by the receiver to the sender through actions such as eye contact, facial expressions, and head nodding.
- **Listen Reflectively:** Reflective listening includes responses that let the sender know you are listening, like paraphrasing or using what are called bridge words, such as “Really?” or “And what happened next?” and “Wow, it sounds like that hurt?”

- **Listen to Find Common Ground:** Look for points of agreement rather than disagreement to achieve an overall win-win for the relationship.

As you think about the benefits of healthy communication and the tips for achieving it, think about your own communication patterns.

How do you:

- Send clear, concise, and straightforward messages?
- Listen silently and reflectively?
- Communicate to others that they are both valued and capable?
- Use communication to build trusting relationships?
- Communicate your realistic expectations in healthy ways?
- Look for points of agreement?

Healthy Communication Benefits Everyone

When we witness healthy communication patterns, we tend to learn how to treat others in healthy ways. Strengthening our own skills and modeling positive communication skills teach our children the importance of healthy communication and healthy relationships.

Learning healthy communication skills can lead to character and relationship virtues such as greater awareness, balance, resilience, resourcefulness, positivity, kindness, appreciation, tolerance, respectfulness, unselfishness, benevolence, humility, compassion, and forgiveness. ■

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