

Communication Guidelines For Speaking & Listening

Learning about communication skills can be helpful in managing the stress in our lives. The way we communicate with others can increase or decrease our stress level and the stress of those around us.

Guidelines for the Listener

Tune in. Give the person speaking your full attention. Show interest. This doesn't mean just being silent. There are ways you can actively show the speaker that you are really listening. Look at the person speaking to show that she/he has your attention.



Be responsive. Respond to what the other person has said. Ask questions to check that you really understand; paraphrase. Avoid interrupting. Let the other person finish speaking while you listen for details instead of just waiting to get your point across.

Be open minded. This means being flexible and willing to change your ideas. Don't assume you have all the information and facts you need. The other person may know something you don't.

Probe for understanding. Find out why another person holds opinions and how she/he came to believe certain ideas.

Acknowledge the other person's view. Show that you are sympathetic by recognizing the other person's feelings and concerns.

Check language. Be sure you understand the language used and the meaning of what is being said.

Check outcomes. Make sure everyone involved in the situation is clear on agreements made. Check for feelings and attitudes at the end.

Reprinted with permission from David L. Snow, Ph.D., Yale University, Dept. of Psychiatry

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Guidelines for Speaking

Be specific. Stick to the subject. Don't be vague or indirect.

Be aware of your own behavior. Be aware that your tone of voice and manner (e.g., facial expression, posture, gestures) communicate as much as do your words.

Discuss, don't argue. Don't let discussions break down into nagging, arguing, or repetitious criticism. Be calm; show respect and patience. Use a diplomatic approach.

Share air time. Don't monopolize the conversation. Hear what the other person has to say.

Show respect. Respect the other person's feelings and dignity. Avoid rudeness, name calling, and insinuations so that the other person doesn't have to avoid conversation just to defend him/herself.

Check for clarity. Don't assume you're making yourself clear. Check to be sure that real communication is occurring by asking if the other person understands or by asking him/her to repeat what you said.

Be honest. Don't demand or dictate in your style of speaking or in giving your standards. However, be honest and direct about your ideas, your feelings, and about what you expect and plan to do. Let the other person know why you hold a certain idea.

Hold two-way conversations. Give your point of view as information, not as "law" or as the only good idea. Remember that right and wrong vary with opinion and that it's necessary to consider the other person's point of view.

Seek solutions. Avoid focusing on the negative aspects of the situation. Focus on giving and getting information in order to solve a problem.

Don't get "personal." Don't attack the other person, attack the problem.

