
LESSON C

Maintaining Relationships

FOCUS: Communication, including speaking and listening is a very important part of a relationship. Part of good communication is having good communication and listening skills. However, more important than that is our feelings toward others. If we have a genuine concern and care for others' well-being then that is what will be communicated regardless of our skills. At the same time if we feel the other person is a burden and a roadblock to fulfilling our own interests then despite our good communication skills that will be clear also.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Play communication game, "Blind Talk" to show that communication involves more than just talking. Use Teacher Information, "Blind Talk."
2. Do a "graffiti" activity. Use the chalkboard or a large strip of paper. Ask students to list examples of common disagreements between people who live together. [For example, eating someone's food in the frig, not doing share of chores, borrowing clothes or car or other possessions and damaging them, borrowing money and not paying it back, etc.] Roleplay several of the situations.
3. Show how conflict is a result of neglecting our obligations to others and going against our sense of right and wrong. Discuss why conflict is damaging to the relationship. Use Student Handout, "Conflict!"

[We have to accept responsibility for our part of the conflict, but often it's easier to blame others! When we blame others or find excuses, we use reponses like: I don't have time...they didn't tell me soon enough...I don't have enough money...they're too hard to work with...I don't have the ability...it's your fault]
4. Practice using "I" messages in order to handle conflict honestly. Use Teacher Information, "The 'I' Message," and Student Handout, "'You' vs. 'I' Messages". [Teacher's note: An alternative way of talking about emotional honesty is to recognize that regardless of how I say something, I can accuse someone with the way I feel. In other words, to say "I feel angry when you...." is to accuse another for the way I feel. Another way of talking about emotional honesty, other than just expressing how I really feel, is to recognize that I am responsible for the way I feel and not others. Be careful in using "I" messages because they can be a more sophisticated way to blame others and shift responsibility to them.]
5. After practicing writing "I" statements, roleplay the situations in Activity 2 again--this time use "I" messages. Also demonstrate how the conflict can be resolved without blaming others and excusing oneself but by accepting personal responsibility for the conflict and how one feels.

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6. Practice listening skills. Use Teacher Information, "Communication Test." After reviewing skills good listeners use, roleplay several situations from the Grafitti Board in Activity 1. Use Teacher Information, "Listening." [Teacher's note: Like communication skills, listening skills are a part of good relationships, but they are not fundamental. It is possible to use the skills I have hypocritically. For instance, I can perform all the "skills" but still not be a good listener because being a good listener is a matter of genuine concern and having others best interests at heart and one can have the "skills" without being genuine in using them. However, if I am sincere and genuinely concerned then I will listen to the nonverbal cues, show interest, not interrupt, etc.]
 7. Review some of the habits of poor communication. Use Teacher Information and Student Handout, "Communication Stoppers." Roleplay each communication stopper. Discuss the effect of poor listening habits on relationships.
 8. Show how double meanings can result in miscommunication. Double meanings can result from specific word choices or meanings people attach to their conversation. Use The King Who Rained by Fred Gwynne (1988). This is a delightful children's book that shows how children visualize their parent's talk. Other suggestions: The Sixteen Hand Horse, Chocolate Moose for Dinner, A Little Pigeon Toad.

"Blind Talk"

Have the participants pair up and sit back to back. Give one person of each pair these instructions, and both a piece of type paper. Have the person with the instructions read and carry out this activity herself, while instructing the person behind her to do the same. (Allow 3 min.)

1. Take a piece of type paper 8 1/2" by 11", and turn the bottom page up about 2 1/2" to make the paper square.
2. Do not turn the paper- just fold it as directed.
3. Take the right hand lower corner up to the left hand upper corner. This makes a triangle. Now press the paper flat.
4. Fold the left hand lower corner up to the top center of the paper.
5. Fold the right hand upper corner to the top outside left folded edge.
6. Divide the upper left hand corner, folding the front half down, toward you, then fold the back half down away from you.

Journal entry # 1



What does being emotionally honest mean to me?

CONFLICT!

Usually conflict in relationships is considered normal, natural, and inevitable. Although conflict is normal and natural in that it does happen, and it is inevitable in that it might continue to happen, but that does not mean that it must happen. Conflict is a result of neglecting our obligations to others and going against our moral sense of what is right and wrong. A good sign that this has occurred is that we blame other people for the conflict and give excuses prove our innocence.

List some examples of conflicts in relationships from literature, T.V., or movies. Then explain how the people involved blamed others and tried to excuse themselves from any wrong doing.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

What excuses do you use to blame others?

THE "I" MESSAGE

Most of the messages we send to people about their behavior are "you" messages - messages that are directed at the other person and have a high probability of putting them down, making them feel guilty, making them feel their needs are not important, and generally making them resist change. Examples of "you" messages are usually orders or commands ("Stop doing that! Get into the car!"), or blaming or name-calling statements ("You are acting like a baby! You are driving me crazy!"), or statements that give solutions ("You should forget that idea. You'd better reconsider that plan."), thereby removing the responsibility for behavior change from the other person. Perhaps the worst of all "you" messages is the if....then threat ("if you don't....then I will....").

An "I" message, on the other hand, allows a person who is affected by the behavior of another to express the impact it has on her/him, and at the same time, leave the responsibility for modifying the behavior with the person who demonstrated that particular behavior. An "I" message consists of three parts:

- (1) the specific behavior
- (2) the resulting feeling you experience because of the behavior
- (3) the tangible effect on you

Thus, a teacher might say to a student:

When you tap on your desk with your pencil, I feel upset because I get distracted and have difficulty teaching.

A wife might say to her husband:

When I try to help you and you don't say anything, I feel confused because I don't know how you feel about my help.

In effect, the "I" message allows the sender to implicitly say, "I trust you to decide what change in behavior is necessary." In this manner, "I" messages build relationships and equally importantly, they do not place the sender in the position of enforcing a new behavior as is frequently the case with the "you" messages discussed above.

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*The "I" message is a term used by Dr. Thomas Gordon in his book, Parent Effectiveness Training (1971)

Teacher's note: An "I" message can be just as accusing as a "you" message. The "I" message can be a more sophisticated way of implicitly blaming the other person for the way I am feeling. More fundamental to "you" or "I" messages is how I see you. If I see you as a burden, an inconvenience, or as frustrating me, then regardless of how I say it-- that is the message that will come across. However, if I see you compassionately, genuinely, and I have your best interests at heart and I want to act in your best interests, then that will also be apparent.

“You” vs. “I” Messages

If we want to be effective in our communication with others, we need to practice being emotionally honest. “I” messages help us identify what is happening to us, in contrast to “you” messages, which may evaluate, blame, or criticize. In emotional situations with others, it is more common to give “you” messages: “You made me mad.” “You did that all wrong!”

When we express what we feel, instead of what someone else did wrong or blaming someone else for what we’re feeling, we are taking responsibility for our communication. That is the beginning of emotional honesty. It’s important, also, to take responsibility for how we talk about our feelings, avoiding harsh or sarcastic tones of voice. Try changing the following “you” messages to “I” messages. Include the specific behavior, the feeling you have about it, and the effect on you. Think of a situation you’ve experienced.

Example:

When you _____

I feel _____

because _____

1. You make me mad. _____

2. You never talk to me. _____

3. You’re never ready on time. _____

4. You’re so unkind. _____

5. You don’t ever do your share. _____

6. You don’t take enough time for me. _____

7. You always forget to pick up your clothes. _____

COMMUNICATION TEST

Name _____

Communication skills are important in relationship, sometimes we're so involved thinking about our own responses, we forget to listen.

Read everything carefully before doing anything.

Note: This is a timed test. You will be allowed three minutes only.

1. Write your last name in the upper right hand corner of this sheet.
2. Draw a circle around the word "name" in the first sentence.
3. Draw five small squares in the name space in the upper left hand corner of the page.
4. Make an "X" in each square.
5. Write down your first name when you read this sentence.
6. Print "yes" after the title at the top of the page.
7. Make an "X" in the lower left hand corner of this sheet.
8. Underline sentence #7.,
9. Multiply 70 times 61 on the back of this sheet.
10. Fill in "I have _____" if you have followed all the directions up to this point.
11. Circle all even numbers.
12. Write from ten to one backwards to the right.
13. Draw a square around each number that is spelled out on this sheet.
14. Now that you have finished reading everything carefully, follow the directions in sentence one only.

Listening

Listening is a skill that can be learned. It takes practice, though, because we are conditioned to talk and be heard by others. We are not necessarily conditioned to hear what others are saying. Good listeners listen in order to understand. They aren't getting ready for what they are going to say next.

Good listeners:

- "listen" to nonverbal clues (facial expression, voice tone, posture, etc.)
- don't jump ahead of the speaker
- give the speaker time
- show interest and alertness
- do not interrupt
- clear up misunderstandings before they begin their own talk.

Choose a partner for the following conversation.

Exercise #1

Talk about the plans and dreams you have for living on your own. Have the person who is supposed to be listening give you plenty of advice, interrupt, make judgmental comments during the conversation.

How did you feel?

Exercise #2

Reverse the speaker and listener with your partner. Have your partner talk about the same subject. Listen responsively, attentively, without interrupting or advising or putting them down.

What was the feeling this time?

COMMUNICATION STOPPERS

Habits of poor communication are usually learned as we are children. We continue to use them with our children, continuing the process.

1. **BLAMING:** Family members frequently blame each other trying to find out who is at "Fault," who stated it, and so forth. Blaming hurts feelings, resulting in arguments, and reduces self-esteem.
2. **INTERRUPTING:** When someone interrupts another it is a sign that one idea is more important than another. Frequent interruptions stop clear communication and show disregard for other people's ideas.
3. **TALKING FOR SOMEONE:** Talking for someone, like saying, "we feel happy, don't we?" is a way of communicating that the other person is not an individual with her/his own ideas. Without knowing why, the person talked for feels unimportant, dependent on others and lacks self-understanding.
4. **DISTRACTING:** When someone talks to another, the receiver may disrupt communication by distracting the speaker. Example:
Mother: "Is your room clean?"
Son: "Oh, Mother, look at what I did in school today!"
5. **INCONGRUENCE:** This means that what a person says is not matched by her/his actions or feelings. Much of the time we do not recognize when we are incongruent, but when someone attempts to hide feelings, or is unaware of feelings, then incongruence may be observed.
6. **DISQUALIFYING:** Disqualifying someone can occur two ways. A person may say one thing one time and another, even in the same conversation, contradict what was said earlier. Or, a person may not pay attention to someone or disagree without showing it and say, "Yes, but..." or "What about this...." or "That's interesting, but I don't think...."
7. **WITHDRAWAL:** We frequently make the mistake of believing that not talking is a way to not communicate. But, avoiding conversation in families communicates hurt, rejection, neglect, indifference, and/or anger.

Communication Stoppers

When we think we are listening, we are often involved in a series of communication stoppers. Put a check (✓) beside the ones you dislike most when they are aimed at you. Underline the ones you think you sometimes do to other people.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming | <input type="checkbox"/> Incongruence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interrupting | <input type="checkbox"/> Disqualifying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking for Someone | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distracting | |

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