

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

How To Be A Better Communicator

from the American Counseling Association

We're all aware that communicating plays an important role in the relationships we have with others. Regardless of the type of relationship, from romantic to family to job-related, the better you are at communicating, the more successful that relationship is likely to be.

So how do you become a better communicator? The first step is to become a better listener. Too often, especially in trying to talk about something emotional or argumentative, we tend to think more about what we're going to say while ignoring what the other person is trying to express. We may assume we know what the other person will say and, without taking the time to really hear and understand what their words, begin our own response. Listening is an active and difficult skill.

Beyond listening, there are other factors that make for better communication. One important item is making eye contact with the person you're talking with and listening to. You also want to be aware of nonverbal communication, such as body language and voice tone. A mocking tone, rolling eyes, hands on hips or crossed arms are all negative communications that can cause whomever you're speaking with to withdraw and become defensive.

You also want to focus on how you are expressing yourself verbally. It helps to make "I" statements rather than "you" accusations. You want to avoid words like "always" or "never" which tend to put a listener automatically on the defensive. Name calling or being overly critical or sarcastic is never productive.

Positive communication happens when you express yourself in small chunks, rather than talking fast and trying to get all your points in at once. You also want to make sure you're having a conversation, rather than just lecturing. Take turns and let whomever you're talking with have a chance to express an opinion, and listen to him or her without interrupting or finishing the thought being expressed.

Communicating well in any type of relationship takes practice and work, but it can pay off when a major discussion has to take place. Start practicing with simple issues to express yourself honestly, clearly and coolly, and to learn to listen to the other side as well. Poor communication is one of the major reasons for work frustrations, family problems and marriage issues. If communication issues are causing you relationship problems, consider consulting a professional counselor for help.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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words: 395