

WELLNESS TIPS

IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION TO STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy communication fosters a sense of connection in relationships. Today's Tips focus on ways to communicate that will strengthen your relationships.

Positive interactions contribute to sense of well-being, positive emotions, and increased life satisfaction (Positive Psychology). Take advantage of opportunities to be supportive by actively acknowledging a positive event, such as making a comment that you know how hard they worked on their research poster. Encourage the person to share more about what they have done by asking questions ("That's great that you ran your first 5K. How did you train to run in the Doc Dash?") This is called appreciative feedback and strengthens relationships and feeling more connected by enhancing positive emotions.

Approach your relationships with a positive sense of encouragement. Convey the message that you respect and appreciate the other person.

Conflict in relationships is normal and inevitable. What is potentially problematic for the relationship is how it is handled. Approach stressors, anxieties, and hardships with the attitude of openness and honesty in addressing them. A willingness to work together by focusing on the issue and not blaming each other, but instead, increasing your understanding of the other person's perspective contributes to strengthening the relationship.

Listening is one of the most important communication skills. Being distracted, thinking about a good rebuttal, judging what is being said, and refusing to try to understand the other person's perspective disrupt feelings of closeness and interfere with trying to resolve disagreements because the other person does not feel heard or valued and the listener may be reaching inaccurate conclusions. Repeating back what you have heard helps validate to the other person that you are trying to understand, gives them an opportunity to clarify and expand on what they are saying, and allows you to correct wrong interpretations. Listening carefully to the other person's point of view even when you do not agree will help you to know what contributes to that person's perspective, points of disagreement, and the other person will be more likely able to listen to you in turn.

Describe an issue in a nonjudgmental way. ("I notice this is the third time this week you were late for our study group." Not "You are being inconsiderate of the other group members.") You may receive information that will clarify the situation or change your perspective.

Using "I" statements shifts from an accusing, blaming tone and makes it easier for the other person to listen to what you have to say. ("I'm irritated when this happens because we have less time to review the material for the test.")

Request what would be an acceptable solution. (“I would like to begin on time so that I can plan my schedule more effectively.”) Requests are not the same as demands and the person may choose not to meet the request. Encourage them to offer a solution and negotiate.

In disagreements, stay focused on the topic at hand. Do not bring up other issues or past events. This complicates the discussion and sidetracks the issue, making it more difficult to reach a resolution and increases stress everyone is experiencing.

When you have a conflict, take responsibility for the part you have played. Often both people have contributed to a conflict and it is not due to just one person’s actions. Acknowledging your part in the conflict can allow the other person to consider what they are responsible for by decreasing defensiveness.

Try to reach a compromise that is acceptable to you both and meets both of your needs. Winning a disagreement means someone loses, which is not a win for the relationship.

Taking time-outs can be helpful if arguments are escalating. They help you cool down and give you time to think about the situation. Make sure you set a time to return to the discussion.

Make sure your body language and tone of voice are consistent with your words. Moderate your voice and speech – not too fast, not too loud, not at a higher pitch. Keep it calm.

These tips of working to understand the other person’s point of view while conveying your point of view in a respectful manner will support meeting both of your needs and closeness in the relationship.

Ohlin, Birgit. “7 Ways to Improve Communication in Relationships.” PositivePsychology.com. July 11, 2020.

<https://positivepsychology.com/communication-in-relationships/>

Scott, Elizabeth. “How to Improve your Relationships with Effective Communication Skills.” Verywellmind.com. July 13, 2020.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-conflict-in-relationships-communication-tips-3144967>

Check the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Feel free to contact the MSCC for questions or concerns or schedule an appointment.

Stay safe and stay well! Liz Schacht PhD ARNP elizabeth-schacht@uiowa.edu

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