

Communicating for Connection Worksheet

Practice the following strategies for effective communication, using real-life or role-playing situations. Coach each other, by gently prompting as necessary, to use the steps as described and give positive feedback wherever possible. After practicing each strategy, discuss how it felt to communicate this way and share examples of how you might use it. When finished, discuss the Scripture passages at the bottom of the second page.

“I” Messages

An “I” Message identifies what the sender is feeling, as opposed to a “you” message, which attacks the receiver. By sending an “I” Message, the speaker demonstrates that he or she owns the problem.

1. It consists of three parts: I feel [feeling]_____about [situation] _____ because [how it affects me personally]_____
2. It is a statement of fact, rather than evaluation.
3. It is less likely to provoke resistance or anger.
4. It tends to evoke “I messages” or Active Listening from the receiver.
5. It is risky, in that it may reveal the humanness of the sender and the receiver may use that vulnerability against the sender.

Mistakes in using “I messages” include implying an accusation or judgment and expressing oneself so angrily that others feel attacked in spite of what you say.

(Adapted from *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children*, by Dr. Thomas Gordon (NY: Penguin Group USA Inc., 1970, 1975, 2000)

Active Listening

Active Listening consists of feeding back to the sender what you have heard, in order to confirm or correct the message received. Its primary purpose is to enable the sender to articulate and solve his/her own problem. It assumes that each person has the resources necessary to do so. The receiver feeds back the meaning of the message as he/she understands it. Active listening usually ends in a question-like tone.

Mistakes in using active listening include parroting the speaker’s words without understanding or empathy and rephrasing what you think you heard, then saying “you shouldn’t feel that way.”

(Adapted from *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children*, by Dr. Thomas Gordon (NY: Penguin Group USA Inc., 1970, 1975, 2000)

Empathic Listening

Empathic Listening goes beyond Active Listening to connect at the heart-level. The listener tries to guess and name the feelings that might underlie what the speaker is saying. Express the guess hypothetically and wait for the speaker to affirm or correct what you say: “You must feel....” “That must feel” Or you might actually ask a question: “Are you feeling.... because of [what happened or what was said]?” “Are you feeling.....because of the need for...?”

(Adapted from *NonViolent Communication: A Language of Life*, (previously *A Language of Compassion*), by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 1999).

The “No-Lose” Method for Resolving Conflict

When conflicts arise, we are likely to try to resolve them so that “I win and you lose” or “You win and I lose.” This alternative method allows both parties to win by finding a solution acceptable to both. In its simplest form, the “No-Lose” method involves the following steps:

1. Define the problem. Both parties must agree what the conflict is and must hear clearly what the other is feeling and thinking. This may take lots of “I” Messages and Active and Empathic Listening, and it may take a long time.

2. When you both feel understood, list on a sheet of paper without evaluation or comment every possible solution you both can think of. Brainstorm freely, because even a far-out or absurd idea can trigger something else that might really work; but only if there are no negative responses along the way. Know that you will both have a chance to eliminate anything that you cannot really accept, but avoid stopping the flow of creativity by criticizing ideas while brainstorming.

3. Cross out the solutions which are unacceptable to either party.

4. From the remainder of the list, choose one idea or combination of ideas that both agree might work.

5. Plan how to put it into practice, who will do what, when and where; and decide when and how you will evaluate the results.

The advantages of this method over those by which someone must win and someone must lose are many, but three of the most valuable are these:

1. The participants treat each other as equals.

2. The needs of both parties are taken into consideration.

3. Joint ownership of the problem and of the solution increases the commitment to make it work.

As with any other change someone’s style of operating, the “No-Lose” method takes practice; but the results are well worth the effort.

(Adapted from *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children*, by Dr. Thomas Gordon (NY: Penguin Group USA Inc., 1970, 1975, 2000)

Discussion:

How do the communication strategies described above relate to the following Scriptures?

Proverbs 15:1 *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

Proverbs 18:13 *If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame.*

1 Corinthians 13: 4-6 *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.*

Colossians 3:12-13 *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*