

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Adapted by Occupy Sonoma County Community Wellness Group

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Speak for oneself directly to whomever is appropriate. Avoid blaming as much as possible.
- Share problems and get feedback about oneself.
- Express one's persistent feelings with the appropriate person.
- Make one's assumptions and expectations conscious to oneself and clear to others.
- Learn to let go of perfectionism, details and being "right" all the time.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHODS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

(Yes it is OK to conflict. It's a necessary part of relating as two separate individuals.)

WIN-WIN: Assume a win-win possibility, where you can come to a mutually satisfactory resolution with no losers. Even if you don't end up agreeing to anything it can be mutually satisfying to each be heard and understood.

CHOOSE YOUR TIME: Pick a time and place (not public) when you are both ready to conflict.

CLARIFY: Name the issue as clearly as you can before you begin.

OWN UP: Claim your own feelings with opening phrases such as "I feel... when you..."

BE DIRECT: Use lots of "I feel . . . I want . . . I need . . . I can't tolerate . . ." etc.

ACTIVE LISTENING: Be sure, by restatement or repetition of others' statements, that you really hear and understand the others' position (this does not mean you must agree.)

TIME OUTS: Call a "time out" or cooling off period if the conflict becomes manipulative or destructive, if there is no real listening or if you are overwhelmed. "Time outs" are to be previously agreed on as a safe method for taking breaks, not for avoiding the issue. A time out can be called by either person but there must be a return time designated to get back to the issue at hand. (This could be as short as five minutes or as long as a couple of days.)

RESPECT BOUNDARIES: Honor physical boundaries and needs for time outs.

USE A TALKING STICK OR BATON: A good method for slowing down the process, getting heard and not interrupting each other. The person holding the baton (stick, rock, shell or any designated object) speaks for 3 to 5 sentences while the other listens. It is then passed and the other person speaks 3 to 5 sentences. This continues until nothing is left to be said. An alternative method is to let the baton be held for as long as each person desires, until they run out of things they want to say, then pass it.

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UNHEALTHY COMMUNICATION IN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Communicate indirectly, using “messengers” or hints or non-verbal cues. If unhappy about something, talk to others rather than the person involved.
- Don’t talk about problems in the primary relationship outside of the relationship.
- Feelings should not be expressed openly. Feelings may be dangerous.
- Expectations / needs should always be met, even anticipated.
- If one has to ask for something it’s not valuable.
- Give to get.

This is not an exhaustive list. You may discover more rules in your relationships or organizations as you deal with issues of communication.

UNFAIR COMMUNICATION

GUNNY SACKING: Stuffing all of your annoyance and irritations into a “gunny-sack” until your sack is full, then exploding with all the stored-up anger over one (often minor) issue.

KITCHEN SINK: Similar to gunny-sacking, but drags all of the problem issues into one fight, making clarity (or resolution) impossible.

WIN-LOSE: Approaching a conflict assuming that only one person can win – and it’s going to be me!

BELOW THE BELT: Hitting another person’s emotional soft spots, for example, reminding them of former “failures”, using information given to you in a moment of extreme vulnerability against them.

WITHDRAWAL: This takes several forms, including leaving emotionally, giving “the silent treatment”, walking out physically, and ignoring the other person’s attempts to engage you. (Note: walking out physically is acceptable if there is any threat of violence. It is recommended as a mutually agreed upon method to stop escalation before violence occurs.)

INDIRECT: Includes arguing about what is not the real issue, using tears to manipulate, sarcasm and baiting, coercing, acts of sabotage (such as “forgetting” their family is coming).

PUSHING EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES: Insisting that an issue continue to be dealt with right then, even when one or both are emotionally exhausted, overwhelmed or too confused to go on. Insisting on continuing a fight when it is non-productive. (See page 1 “Time Outs”)

PUSHING EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES: This involves staying so close physically to the other person that there is no room to conflict with one or both of you feeling physically threatened by close proximity when anger is up. (This is particularly important when dealing with survivors of any abuse.)

CONDESCENDING / PLACATING: Any form of discounting or minimizing the other’s feelings or experience. This comes out as statements such as “You are just upset because: you’re getting your period,” “You just had a bad day at work,” “Whatever you want,” etc.

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KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS: This is a variation of placating that is quite toxic. This is acting soooo rational, soooo kind and soooo in control that it leaves the other person feeling crazy for having feelings.

SELF-DEPRECIATING: This is responding to another's criticism or concerns by excessively putting oneself down, leaving no room for constructive dialogue or negotiation.

NAME CALLING: Name calling, put downs, general devaluation of the person is counter-productive and emotionally abusive.

PHYSICAL CONTACT: Any physical contact during a conflict is rarely appropriate. Slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, hitting of any kind are all physically abusive behaviors. Throwing or breaking objects is an indirect threat of physical violence and can also be abusive.

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE: Acquiescence with an attitude! One appears accommodating or neutral while there is underlying resistance and anger. This anger leaks out in forms such as: veiled insults; lack of follow through on commitments; critical comments seemingly unrelated to the issue at hand, etc.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE: Attempting to resolve conflict while under the influence of chemical substances (including alcohol, marijuana, prescription and non-prescription drugs).

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