

Improving Communication with Family Members

Objective

To increase open and respectful communication in your family.

What to Know

Sometimes families experience a communication breakdown and family members feel misunderstood, angry, and alone. Do you ever feel this way?

The goal of communication should be that family members feel safe to express their thoughts. They feel listened to and understood. Family members feel that they can express themselves without criticism and no matter what they say, they will feel loved and respected.

If you feel like your family needs help in communicating in ways that support each other, this worksheet can help.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions about communication in your family.

On a scale from 1-10, where 1 = the worst, and 10 = the best, rate how well you think your family communicates: _____

What topics are harder to talk about than others? Be specific.

Is there anything people do that get in the way of communication (e.g., family members are late or don't show up when they say they will, family members look at their phone when others are talking, etc.).

When certain topics come up, do family members get angry, interrupt, shut down, or otherwise become upset? Describe what happens.

Can you think of some specific ways your family could be better at communicating?

Choose one of the following activities to do with your family to help improve communication.

1. Hello, Are You There? Sometimes when you're talking on the phone the call drops, or there is static or fuzzy reception. It can be frustrating when you're trying to talk on the phone and the other person can't hear you, or you can't understand what they are saying! It is so important to hear and be heard when you're communicating with someone.

Ask one family member (the "talker") to talk about one of the following:

- Talk about a time when you were sad or upset.
- Talk about a time when you were really angry.
- Describe a time when you were disappointed.
- Talk about a time when you felt like a family member wasn't listening to you.
- Is there something you're scared to share with your family? Talk about it.

The "receivers" (the rest of the family) will reflect back to the "talker" what they hear him/her saying. They might say, "What I hear you say is...," or "I understand you felt..."

Take turns doing the exercise. As each family members finishes as "talker," he/she can discuss how it felt to tell his/her story and what it was like to feel heard by other family members.

2. Charades. Talking isn't the only way to communicate, as your facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, and attitude are part of communication. Cut the following statements into strips of paper and place the strips in a paper bag, bowl, or other container. Each family member chooses a slip of paper, silently reads it, then acts it out without using words. The other family members will try to guess how the person is feeling.

You are cuddling with a stuffed animal or a pet.

Someone you don't really like is talking to you.

Your favorite toy is broken.

You're watching a scary movie.

You're waiting in a very long line.

You are riding a roller coaster at an amusement park.

You just received some bad news.

Your alarm didn't go off and you are late for school or work.

You just won a contest.

Your best friend is moving to another country.

You fell down and hurt your foot.

You have a stomachache.

You just woke up from a nightmare.

You're at a party and you don't know anyone.

You're walking on a tightrope.

The cookies you are baking in the oven are burning.

Your friend told you a funny joke.

You are about to give a presentation to a crowd of 500 people.

Was it easy to communicate without words? Why or why not?

What else can your family do to improve communication?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
