

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

To have your needs met, you must be able to effectively communicate those needs to another person without making them feel defensive or argumentative. There are many ways to improve communication with your children and partner. Here are some ideas:

**Choose your timing** Avoid leaving discussions about heavy topics such as finances or weekly planning until late evening. Few people will be thrilled to be faced with sorting out major issues when they're at their most tired. Instead, leave heavy topics for mornings and afternoons when people are alert, available, and more likely to be able to respond with clarity.

**Organize & clarify ideas in your mind** This should be done before you attempt to communicate these ideas. A good rule of thumb is to choose three or fewer main points and keep your communication focused on those. That way, if you become emotional or argumentative, you will be able to return to one or more of these key points without feeling flustered.

**Practice active listening** Give the speaker your full and divided attention. Do not interrupt or listen passively. Maintain eye contact, ask questions, listen to both the content and feelings of the speaker, and provide feedback. Try to see the problem from the other person's point of view and let the speaker know that you see their point.

**Use I messages** I messages communicate what you want or feel. You messages tend to blame, criticize, or pass judgment. (e.g., "I feel upset when you don't help me clean up after dinner" versus "You never help out after dinner. You're always thinking about yourself").

**Be polite & focus on the positives** Avoid putdowns, insults, and being rude. Politeness is extremely important in the effective conflict resolution, and you can make a conscious decision to be polite no matter how anyone else is acting. Edit out complaints. Try to make positive statements to each other.

**Focus on fixing the problem & not blame** Blaming sets people off against one another rather than uniting them to solve a problem.

**A problem is always legitimate** Although you may not see an issue as a problem, your partner or child may do so. Address the situation as if it were your own problem that you wanted to solve. Invest time in solving problems even if you do not think them worrisome. One less problem for your partner is actually one less problem for you too!

**Ask what the person is thinking & feeling** This will prevent you from making assumptions and validate the other person's thoughts. Giving validation helps instill a sense of control in the listener and prevent defensiveness and anger.

**Be calm** Try to identify angry thoughts when they first occur. If you are furious, it is best to step back from the situation for a while to let yourself calm down. Using deep breathing can help you calm down quickly.

**Making requests** Avoid requests that are vague, disguised, or delivered in a negative tone. Be positive, specific, use I language, and don't forget to praise and thank the listener for their efforts.

**Handling anger in front of children** When anger and conflict initially erupt in front of children, also try to resolve these feelings in front of them. They need to learn about effective negotiation, discussion, and compromise. Apologizing teaches them about reconciliation.

Source: *The Incredible Years* by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, 2006