



FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Creating an open family environment

“Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible - the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.” - Virginia Satir

Communication plays an important role in maintaining positive family relationships. Healthy families communicate openly, clearly, respectfully and frequently. The family environment is the place in which family members should feel comfortable in sharing their ideas, feelings, fears, hopes, joys, sorrows and needs. However, at times this is easier said than done. This is because the family environment is also the place where we generally feel safe to express our frustration and anger about life. No family is free from conflict, but families who have strong communication skills are more capable of working through life's ups and downs. Here are some building blocks to help strengthen family communication:

START WITH ACTIVE LISTENING We often listen, but do not really hear what the other person is saying. Try to hear more and talk less.

Pay attention to what the other person is saying, rather than thinking about your response.

PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT Convey an open and positive attitude. Be aware of your body language; 70% of communication is nonverbal. Some non-verbal ways to show you care about what the other person has to say include giving eye contact, nodding to show understanding and smiling. Try to avoid body language that could be interpreted negatively such as crossing your arms or rolling your eyes.

CLARIFY If you are unsure of what the other person is trying to say, ask for more information. Another way to clarify is to attempt to repeat back what you heard word for word, so as not to misinterpret the other person's words or intent, i.e., “I heard you say that when your friends ignored you at school, it made you angry.”

REFLECT Try to paraphrase what you have heard by capturing the main message of what the other person has said, particularly his or her feelings, i.e., “It sounds like when your friends ignore you this hurts your feelings.”

KEEP IT SIMPLE Focus on one issue at a time and be brief. Focus on the present rather than bringing up past problems or mistakes.

TAKE OWNERSHIP Assume responsibility for your feelings by using “I” statements. When _____ happens, I feel _____ because _____, i.e., “When you come home late, I feel worried because I don’t know if you are safe.”

SHOW RESPECT Even if you disagree, or still do not understand the other person’s point of view, your efforts will likely be noticed if you are respectful. Avoid name calling, blaming and criticizing.

NOTICE THE POSITIVE Notice what people do well and praise them for it. Take notice not only of what you may have in common with another family member, but what makes him or her unique. Also, try to take notice of the small things that a family member may do to help the household run smoother, i.e., “Thanks for hanging up your coat and taking off your muddy shoes when you got home.”

For more information about improving communication within your family, contact FCS Counseling.



Becky Douglas, LMSW is here to help families transform challenges into opportunities for change and growth. Families who face overwhelming challenges can find ways to move forward with positive and healthy behaviors. With a focus on what works for your family and the willingness to seek and practice healthy solutions it is possible to create the change you desire. Families often experience the most effective change in their own environment. Becky will meet with you in your home to develop strategies for enhancing the quality of your family life. Becky is passionate about serving people who want the opportunity to heal and find healthier ways to move past surviving to thriving, on their own terms. She has 27 years of experience in social services. Becky is the co-author of the article Family Preservation Services under Managed Care: Current Practices and Future Directions. Evening and daytime hours are available.

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