

Effective Communication and Listening in Relationships

Verbal communication can be broadly divided into instrumental and expressional communication. Instrumental communication usually involves information gathering, evaluation a decision-making; communicating to reach an outcome, solution or result. Expressional communication involves exchanging ideas or feelings, being heard and seeking feedback or validation.

Conflict or confusion can arise when these two communication needs are misread or mismatched. This can lead to one person making decisions or taking control of the issue, when the other person just wants to reflect or be heard.

All verbal exchanges involve clearly conveying what you want to say and actively listening to what is being said in turn. Use the following communication ground rules to practice the communication exercise shown below:

Speaker:

- Think about what you want to say before saying it.
- Speak in short paragraphs not loops or lengthy chains.
- Use “I” statements to take ownership of your message or point.
- Avoid “You” statements which can imply criticism or blame.
- Explain what you feel as well as what you need or want.
- Summarise your key points.
- Check for understanding before asking for a response.

Listener:

- Listen without interruption.
- Listen actively by showing interest with your body language and posture.
- Focus on what it being said, rather than thinking about your response.
- Where it’s appropriate maintain good eye contact.
- Listen for feelings as well as facts.
- Listen empathically, considering the other person’s perspective.
- Check your understanding before responding.

Communication Exercise

Choose a key issue that you want to talk about and think about the points you want to make using the boxes provided under each key point. Practice the exercise by recording your key points in the boxes and then try the exercise again on a more natural basis without writing your points down. The purpose of practicing this approach is to develop a more structured and receptive style of verbal communication.

Speaker:

1. Briefly introduce the objective facts about the situation, topic or issue *“I want to talk to you about...”*

2. Explain how this affects your feelings *“When this happens, I feel that...”*

3. Acknowledge the other person's position *“I also accept that you ...”*

4. Describe what you need *“What I need you to do...”*

5. Describe what you will do in return *“In return I will...”*

6. Briefly summarise *“When... happens >> I feel >> I therefore need >> In return I will >>”*

7. Ask for a response *“What do you take from this?”*

Listener:

1. Check your understanding *“What I heard you say is”*.

2. Acknowledge facts and feelings *“I accept that... I understand that you feel...”*

3. Present your response *“What I feel is... What I am willing to do is...”*

4. Outline what you need in return *“In return I need...”*

5. Summarise *“What I heard >> What I Feel >> What I will do >> What I need in return >>*

Evaluation

Speaker – Provide feedback to the listener using the following criteria:

- They listened without interruption.
- They listened actively by showing interest with their body language and posture.
- They focused on what I was saying, rather than looking distracted or ready to react.
- They maintained good eye contact.
- They heard my feelings as well as the facts.
- They listened empathically, considering my perspective.
- They Checked their understanding before responding.

Listener – Provide feedback to the speaker using the following criteria:

- They had thought about what they wanted to say before saying it.
- They spoke in short paragraphs; not loops or lengthy chains.
- They used “I” statements to take ownership of their message or point.
- They avoided “You” statements which can imply criticism or blame.
- They explained what they felt as well as what they needed or wanted.
- They summarise their key points.
- They checked for understanding before asking me to respond.