

# Fostering Communication

By Jennifer Engel

I have found that one of the number one problems in many relationships is lack of communication. This is a lack of openness from someone within the communication cycle because they have no desire to see a situation from another person's point of view, or they deem the other person's point of view as being invalid. Another stumbling block that can get in the way of communication is fear. Fear that their voice won't be heard, their feelings won't be validated, or fear that the wants and needs of both parties will collide (rather than harmonize), which will cause both parties to have to make some difficult (and possibly undesirable) decisions. Therefore, they would rather avoid the subject and keep holding onto patterns and beliefs that no longer serve one or more parties involved.

As a society we often lock each other into prisons of shame and judgment, which lead to stalemates in the communication process. More often than not, I have found that this is due to some deep seeded social obligation and/or cultural beliefs. What I have found, however, is that stalemates can lead to stagnation which can lead to depression, and possibly the death of one person's feelings (or the relationship) over time.

Even though conversations can be difficult, it is imperative that they be had so that all parties stay open and so that there is nothing to "clog the pipes" of the relationship. Openflow and communication actually create stronger bonds as trust is reinforced and all the needs of all parties are being met.

**Challenge:** How often do you stop and think about your belief, where they came from, and if they are (or are not) serving you? Or how often you do (or don't) communicate with the people around you about your beliefs, values, and how your relationship(s) are going?

## *Opening Up the Lines of Communication*

The ideal situation would be for those involved to just simply be able to communicate about the experiences they are having together in that open, non judgemental, compassionate state, but sometimes (as stated previously) this doesn't happen because some people fear that they think the conversation could lead to conflict, which may even lead to an end of the relationship, which then triggers fears of abandonment. Yet, if someone can open up and practice courage through communication and create a space of safety, they might just find that they can simply tune up or overhaul what's been causing the conflict and "new life" will be created within the relationship.

## *What if someone doesn't want to communicate?*

One of the worst things people can do is to stop the line of communication. Imagine a sewage (or ejector pump) in a home that gets clogged or that stops working. What would happen? A mess! Relationships are no different! Strong, consistent, compassionate communication allows the emotions of all parties to flow freely, rather than creating pent up emotions that explode, leaving nothing but a big mess and hurt feelings behind. Therefore, when the lines of communication stop, it's time to consider how to fix the problem. Below are the top five tips on how to make that happen:

### **Before you begin communication:**

1. Know your why: Do you want to talk in order to accuse and belittle the person you want to talk to or to figure out from their point of view why they may be displaying cold-shoulder behavior?
2. Check Yourself: Before attempting to talk to someone else, check yourself. Are you calm or still angry? Will your tone be polite or accusatory? Is your posture open or closed? Tone and Body Language is 90% of communication. Also people tend to mirror the behavior and attitude of the other person they are interacting with. So if your tone is harsh and closed off, so too will theirs be. Yet if your tone is calm and caring, and your body language is open, even if the other person doesn't start off that way, watch their tone and body language change to mimic yours. This is what psychologists refer to as co-regulation.
3. Be ready to be open: Be ready to see the situation from another point of view rather than your own--theirs. All feelings are valid, whether or not you feel their perception of them is not. Sometimes it is easy to see things from another's point of view, which may in turn, cause you to change yours. Other times it is difficult and you agree to disagree.
4. Perform a little CPR:
  - a. **Concern**- be ready to address the concern by using I statements: "I feel the need to talk about a situation where...."
  - b. **Pattern** - Identify the pattern that seems to be preventing communication, "the last two times when I tried to talk about this situation, you said "I don't know" or "I don't want to talk about this."
  - c. **Relationship** - focus on a common purpose or vision that will move the relationship forward by also asking for their point of view, "I know talking about this can be tough, I don't want it to be tough, but I want to address it so that our relationship can move forward. Why do you think this topic is so tough to talk about?"

4. **Make it Mutual**: After having the conversation, see if you (and all parties involved) can come to a mutual agreement on how to best move forward.

**If they still won't talk**: Give them time to RECOVER:

- Review
- Extend
- Consistency
- Overview
- View (the preview)
- Encourage
- Review/Replay

## THE RECOVER PROCESS:

- **R - Review the Goal:** “My hope is that we can talk about this again later so that we can solve this problem and keep our relationship moving forward.
- **E - Extend the Space and Time:** “I can see you need some space and time to think about this. I will give you.... (60 minutes, 24 hours - be specific) to think about this. I would like to meet you back (set location) at (set time) so we can talk about this again. Then,leave.

**Note:** The shortest amount of time I would recommend for reconnection is one hour. This is about how long it takes for brain chemicals to switch back from the irrational part of the brain (which is where thoughts can go when someone is “triggered”) back to the rational thinking part of their brain.

- **C - Consistent:** Be consistent with communication as well as with following through on reconnecting back.
- **O - Overview:** When you reconnect back, allow the person you are trying to communicate with to try to give an overview of what situation is not going well in the relationship. This will allow you to see if they heard you correctly as well as have you hear it from their point of view.
- **V - View (Preview) a Consequence:** If the person still refuses to communicate during the second check back, preview a consequence, “I know this conversation is tough, but if we don’t talk about it I feel as though if it is not addressed we are going to continue to be angry with each other which will cause...(fill in the blank: anxiety, depression, loneliness, us to turn to others for support, if we can’t resolve this issue, perhaps we need time apart, etc.)
- **E - Encourage:** After previewing the consequence follow it up with encouragement, “I would rather we talk about this and move forward so that we can feel (fill in the blank: happy, connected, etc.)
- **R - Review and Replay** - If a conversation was able to be had, have each member involved review their understanding of what the problem was and how it will now be resolved moving forward.

Side note: Restorative Justice questions can be very helpful during this time as they are non judgemental and open up lines of communication that help both people see a situation from both (or multiple) points of view:

- What happened?
- Why do you think that is?
- How are you and others affected?
- What has been the hardest part for you in this?
- \* What can we do to make this right?

If a conversation was not had, review the consequence and encouragement and/or put the consequence in place.

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