

Basic Simple Steps for Better Relationship Communication

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Sometimes we need to look at simple relationship communication skills prior to digging deeper into how to develop compassion in a relationship. This brief article offers some basic simple steps that people in relationships can practice in an effort to move toward healthier and more growth fostering experiences. This could be considered the primer before putting on the more durable paint of compassion.

These following steps are simple easy things we can all learn to practice. What is great about these steps is that they really do work! They will improve your relationships.

- 1) The very first step – be aware of how you walk around and present yourself to others. Do you walk head up, or are you always looking down? Do you smile, or is there none? Are you always in a hurry to get somewhere, or do you take the time to notice other people? Do you greet people in a friendly manner or are you distant and formal? First appearances do make a difference. Are you taking the time to notice your surroundings and how you move within them?
- 2) Say thank you but be specific “Thank you for”
- 3) If you see something done well give a compliment (again be specific and sincere). If someone looks especially nice (new hair look, great outfit), then give a compliment. Caution, this can be misinterpreted so you may start with “Is it alright if I give you a compliment?”
- 4) When you first meet someone spend some time asking them about their lives. Then remember this for the next time you meet, and say “How is doing?” or “How did.....turn out for you?”. Be genuinely enthusiastic. It is also helpful to remember their first name.
- 5) For someone you see daily after work, ask “How was your day today?” Use number 3 if this is not your first time asking this. Take the time (even a few minutes helps) to sit and listen.
- 6) Watch for mood changes (facial gestures, vocal tone, body language) and then ask “How is it going today?” or more informal “What’s up? You don’t seem yourself today?” Also if the person is excited, take the time to genuinely share in their joy.

- 7) If it looks like someone needs help then ask if you can help. Offer what you are able and what you can't do then see if you can find someone else to assist. If you see someone is in danger then get help – do not assume that it is already done.
- 8) Occasionally, not on schedule, not meeting an immediate request, do something nice for someone. Perform those random acts of kindness.
- 9) In specific language ask for what you need, but make sure the door is open. Often people are “in their own space” and if you hope to have your needs heard then you need to enter their space and observe that they are ready to listen. Think of it as a knock on the door: “Is this a good time”, “Can I talk to you about something”, or “I can see your busy. When might be a good time for me to speak with you”.
- 10) Constructive feedback is specific with the offer to explore solutions, and again given when the door is open. Broad general feedback like “Your work”, “What a mess you made of things”, “You do that again and you will be....” or “Wait till (somebody) hears about this” do not contribute to good relationships. Instead be very specific, define the problem (when, where, what happened, and what were the consequences) and then open the door to exploring solutions to prevent it from happening again. It is always a good idea to emphasize the persons strengths during this solution seeking.
- 11) Having to be right often leads to a fight. Sometimes stepping out of the argument and listening in an attempt to really hear the other person's viewpoint helps. The best way to deal with an argument is to avoid having one. If it does get to being a heated argument, then walk away and find a safe place to cool down.
- 12) If you attack, people react. Statements starting with “You are a...”, “How could you...”, “That was really....”, or “Can't you see that....” can be seen as attacks. But attacking can also be perceived when something that the person has strong attachment to is being attacked, for example, “What you are doing is really....”, “It has all been done before”, “You are wasting your time”, “Your work is...”, or “How could you be, don't you realize....”. There are better ways to provide feedback so that it doesn't seem like an “attack”. Start with “Can I give you some feedback” or “Is it OK if I share some thoughts I have on this?” Start with saying something that was positive and then provide a constructive suggestion on how things could have been done differently.
- 13) People do say, or do, things that can get our emotions going. When your emotional buttons are pushed the first thing to do is to STOP and BREATHE. Before you can do this stop and breathe technique you need to learn your own “buttons”. This requires you to become sensitive to when your buttons do get pushed, but after learning that, then practice STOP, and take a breath (or two) before reacting, or speaking in any situation where your buttons are pushed (unless there is risk of harm, and then you should seek safety). Think about what you are about to say

and ask yourself “Is this going to contribute to understanding and relationship”. If you can’t think of something then you can ask the other person, “I don’t fully understand what you mean by.....” Some paraphrase of this can be repeated if need be. If that doesn’t help, then say “Thanks for the extra information. I will give this some thought” or “I need to have some time to think about all this” and move on to other things. If you need to leave to cool down then do that before continuing the conversation.

- 14) If you have made a mistake then admit it and take corrective action. If someone has made a mistake that affected you then help him/her take corrective action. This is part of forgiveness (there is more information on this topic on the website).
- 15) Stop complaining, whining, spreading gossip, or slipping in those little “jabs” during conversation. Use your conversation to improve relationships not criticize them. Stop being manipulated by the “culture of fear” that surrounds us, where things are often perceived as much worse than they are. Time is better spent on the above 14 steps. But if you do hear genuine reports of harm – report them!

These 15 steps, if practiced regularly, will improve the quality of your relationships, and your life.

High quality relationships have been connected to happiness and to health. These first steps form the foundation for better communication, and the initial steps between understanding the connections between high quality relationships and improved compassion that directly promote happiness and health.