

10 BASIC RULES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. If you are going to offer criticism, be specific. Indicate how the other person's specific behavior has a negative effect on you. Do not criticize the entire person or their total personality. By being specific, you give the other person the option of changing a single behavior and make it unnecessary for them to feel like they have to "defend" themselves totally. But remember too that a criticism can be true and still be useless in helping the other person to change.
2. Don't be a mind-reader. Don't tell the other person what they are thinking or feeling. Instead, ask them.
3. Avoid blanket generalizations such as, "You always..." or "You never..." It is more helpful to describe specific instances of behavior which concern you.
4. Try to avoid polarization into categories where only one person is right, the other wrong; one person good, the other bad. Remember there are honest differences between people that are based on some things they had no control over: how they were raised, their values, their life experiences so far, their gender, their needs, and their problem-solving styles.
5. Try to use "I feel" rather than "You are" messages. Instead of saying, "Why are you so mean to me?" say, "I feel hurt when you do that to me".
6. Use direct communication but remember that once said, nothing can ever be taken back. If in doubt, wait. And say only what you mean, but mean what you say.
7. Understand that people don't always agree on the nature of reality because they perceive it differently. But those differences are worth discussing. It could even bring you closer.
8. Timing is important in getting your point across. Be careful to choose a time when the other person can really attend to what is being said, and when they are not distracted or pre-occupied with something else.
9. Your first response to the other person should be to clarify what you hear them saying to you – whether you agree with it or not. THEN give your response.
10. If the conversation becomes an argument and neither person is likely to be heard, suggest a "time-out" so you both can think about what's been said so far, and then when things are calmer you can come back and begin with something like, "I've been thinking about everything you said, and we may both be right about some things. Tell me again what it is you want me to understand better....."