



# BalanceWorks<sup>®</sup> Newsletter

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## Effective Communication

Communicating effectively can have a huge impact on both our personal and professional lives. Ineffective communication can leave us feeling frustrated and misunderstood. In contrast, when we communicate effectively, each party leaves the interaction feeling like they have been heard and that their feelings have been validated.

### *General Communication Tips*

- Listen, Listen, Listen! Being a good listener is the key to effective communication.
- Maintain eye contact. This allows you to pick up on and react to non-verbal cues.
- Don't interrupt. Always let the speaker finish their full thought, before you respond.
- Show your interest in the conversation. Nod occasionally, smile at the speaker, etc to show you are engaged with what is being said.
- Avoid distractions. When conversing, resist the temptation to

send a text message, check Facebook, or touch up your makeup when in the middle of a conversation.

When discussing a problem or issue as well as a difficult or sensitive topic, good communication skills are especially important. Use the following guidelines whenever you find yourself in a potentially adversarial conversation:

### *Take Ownership of your Reactions*

Remember that you are in complete control of how you react to any conversation. Resist the urge to interrupt or yell back at the speaker. Also, it's usually best not to focus solely on defending yourself, but rather first listen to the speaker's feelings and reasoning. For example, if a co-worker angrily accuses you of passing the blame to them for not completing a project, instead of stating that you did no such thing and that they should have gotten their portion of the project done... Try saying "I understand why you would feel that way, but my intention was only to explain all factors in why the project is not yet complete, not to pass all the blame to you." Finally, always try to remain calm, cool, and collected

For more information or support on effective communication, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks<sup>®</sup>** by calling:

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throughout the conversation and avoid further antagonizing the person you are speaking to.

### *Ask Questions*

When you find yourself in a conversation where someone is clearly upset and you are not sure why, it helps to ask questions to get at the root of the problem. Questions are also very helpful when discussing a delicate topic. For example, if you are having a conversation with your teenager about suspected bullying, but they seem reluctant to talk about it, it may help to ask a series of pointed questions to ascertain how they feel about the topic and how things are going in school and with their friends.

Finally, questions should always be non-threatening and aim to help the speaker open up. Psych Central recommends asking the following general questions to gain a deeper understanding of the situation you're discussing:

- How does that make you feel?
- What is the worst part?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- What would you prefer instead?

### *Ask for Clarification & Reframe*

Closely related to asking questions, it's also a good idea to ask for clarification when discussing a difficult topic or dealing with a hostile situation. When people are upset, they are often running off pure emotion, which may cause them to be irrational. This can result in speaking erratically or exaggerating facts and opinions. If you don't fully understand what the other person is saying or you feel they are speaking

irrationally, it helps to ask for clarification, then repeat back to them what they said, and finally ask them to confirm that this is really what they mean. This technique can help cut through the emotions behind the issue at hand and instead focus on the actual issue and how to move forward.

### *Validate Feelings, Not Facts*

When dealing with an emotionally charged conversation, it's fine to validate the speaker's feelings even if you don't agree with the facts. It's important to let the speaker know that you recognize and understand their feelings. Before moving the conversation forward, first validate the speaker's feelings, so they know you care about them and how they feel. After you have expressed concern for their feelings, the speaker is more likely to do the same for you and try to understand where you are coming from as well, which can expedite a resolution.

Communication is a very important skill both personally and professionally. Use these tips to effectively communicate with family, friends, and co-workers.

***Remember that your Personal Assistant is available to provide additional communication tips and that your EAP is available to help you overcome communication barriers.***

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