



# Guide to Communication

## What's inside

Loving communication

How to start a difficult conversation

Tips for if you're shy

How to be assertive

How to talk about your feelings without starting an argument

This package was created by Healthy U: Peer Health & Wellness at the University of Manitoba. We are a group of trained, non-judgmental, and confidential student health and wellness leaders on campus.

We provide outreach activities, workshops, and one-on-one support for our fellow students on a variety of health and well-being topics. Feel free to drop in to chat or pick up more information packages.

If you would like to request or attend one of our workshops or events, check out our website for details.



# Steps to loving communication

## Have reasonable expectations

Your partner is not a mind-reader! Let them know what you're thinking and offer explanations.

## Know your own feelings

Take time to think about how you really feel and why, so you can do something about it.

## Recognize and correct communication-blocking habits

For example, don't use generalizing words like 'you never' or 'you always'.

## Listen to hear

Often while the other person is talking, we're simply waiting to speak. Make sure you're really listening to what they're saying instead of jumping to conclusions or ignoring their perspective.

## Save their pride

Wait til you're in private instead of calling them out in front of others.

## Use "I" statements

This means focusing on your own experience, rather than assuming you know what the other person is feeling. "I feel hurt when you don't call me back," or "I'm hearing that you're stressed out, is this true?"

## Give each other compliments and positive feedback

Make sure you're regularly telling the person good things you notice about them, instead of only giving feedback when something is wrong.



## How to start a

# Difficult Conversation

## Make sure you've put a lot of thought into it before you start the discussion

Consider your own feelings (and if you're over-reacting or if this is a sensitive topic for you). Think about assumptions you're making ("They did this to be rude" or "They don't care about what I think") - make sure you give the other person a chance to explain how things really are for them.

## Pick the right time and place

Don't start the conversation when one of you is in a rush, and try not to have the discussion when one or both of you is emotionally worked up. Also, make sure you allow for privacy and don't go where others may overhear or intrude.

## Don't put them on the defensive

If you start the conversation with an accusation, you're probably not going to make any progress. Try opening with "I think we've had a misunderstanding," or "I'd like to know what you meant by that." If you give the other person a chance to explain their side before you assume anything negative they will likely be more open to a healthy discussion.

## Don't be 'in it to win it'

If you're having the conversation in order to make the person agree with you, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. If you set your goal for both understanding each other better or making a compromise, you will likely be much more satisfied with the result.

# Are you shy?



## Communication Tips

### Speak up

- If someone asks your opinion, give it to them
- Offer help when someone is struggling (did you understand the lecture but the person beside you didn't? Try offering to explain it to them)
- Say hello when you see someone, ask how a classmate's day is going, etc.

### Forgive yourself when things don't go how you hoped

If your shyness is from a lack of confidence, you probably feel like you made a fool of yourself when things don't go the way you wanted them to.. The truth is you are probably the only one who noticed. Everyone muddles their words, speaks at an uncomfortable time, or receives a negative response sometimes. Let yourself off the hook!

### Practice!

Challenge yourself to making eye contact, prepare thoroughly for presentations instead of silently dreading them, and speak up. The more times you communicate, the more confidence you will build.

### Don't do it alone

Try joining a group of people that all want to improve their communication, like a public speaking class or a business networking group. Not only could this boost your confidence, but you will see that there are others in the same boat as you are.

# Becoming Assertive

## What is assertiveness?

Being assertive means being upfront about what you want and need, while still considering the rights, wants, and needs of others. It allows you to get your point across firmly, fairly, and with empathy.

## What are some benefits of being assertive?

- It becomes easier to negotiate a win-win situation. You can advocate for yourself while still respecting the other person's view.
- Reduces stress and anxiety. You are able to ask for what you need.

## How do I develop assertiveness?

- Understand and value your rights
- Voice your needs and wants confidently - don't wait for someone else to recognize what you need.
- Know that you can't control other people's actions
- Express yourself respectfully
- Be open to compliments and criticism
- Learn to say no
- Gain some communication techniques.
- Become more clear by using phrases like "I need" instead of "I'd kind of like", or "I know" instead of "I think".
- Know when to escalate. For example, if someone hasn't responded to your request, follow up with a stronger request or discussion.
- Use 'I' statements such as "I feel" or "I noticed"
- Remember to express empathy ("I understand you're stressed," "I hear that you're overwhelmed.")

# How to talk about your feelings without starting an argument:

## Use sentences that begin with "I"

"You hurt my feelings. You know I wanted to come. You didn't have to go without me."



The speaker is blaming the other person for the feeling of anger, putting them on the defensive.



Argument

"I feel hurt that you didn't wait to go with me. I told you I wanted to come."



The speaker expressed what they felt and took responsibility for it.



Conversation

## Listen actively

Instead of thinking of what you're going to say next, make sure you are actually listening to what the other person is saying. You can try summarizing what they're saying ("So I think you're saying I misunderstood you," "I hear you're upset too"). You can also check in with the other person by stopping to ask what they think or feel.

## Set ground rules

Before you begin a difficult conversation, let the other person know what you need. Feeling safe allows your conversation to be more productive.

## Express your views

The more often that you express how you think and feel, the easier it is for people to understand where you're coming from in a conversation. If this is difficult for you, practice with small things that may seem less personal.

## Think about the other person's views

Once you understand the beliefs someone holds, it becomes easier to respectfully disagree.

## Pay attention

By showing that you're paying attention, the other person may feel more respected. It also helps to focus your attention and allows you to pick up on their non-verbal cues. Make sure you aren't trying to multitask, and make sure you are actively listening to what they are saying.

## Reflect, don't react

Instead of letting the conversation become rapid-fire back and forth, stop to think about what the other person is saying. Then summarize what they have said and repeat it back for clarification. This allows them to feel heard and understood, and misunderstandings are cleared up before they escalate to argument.

## Be specific

Make a plan for what you will do to address the problem, and make it specific. Instead of saying something like "I'll give you more space," try "I'll knock on your door before I come in." This will make your commitment easier to manage. Make sure you ask the other person what they need, so that you can develop a way to address the issue that meets the needs of both of you as much as possible.