

## **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information. It's about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information. As well as being able to clearly convey a message, you need to also listen in a way that gains the full meaning of what's being said and makes the other person feel heard and understood.

Effective communication sounds like it should be instinctive. But all too often, when we try to communicate with others something goes astray. We say one thing, the other person hears something else, and misunderstandings, frustration, and conflicts ensue. This can cause problems in your home, school, and work relationships. Communicating more clearly and effectively requires learning some important skills. Whether you're trying to improve communication with your spouse, kids, boss, or co-workers, learning these skills can deepen your connections to others, build greater trust and respect, and improve teamwork, problem solving, and your overall social and emotional health.

Common barriers to effective communication include:

**Stress and out-of-control emotion.** When you're stressed or emotionally overwhelmed, you're more likely to misread other people, send confusing or off-putting nonverbal signals, and lapse into unhealthy knee-jerk patterns of behaviour. To avoid conflict and misunderstandings, you can learn how to quickly calm down before continuing a conversation.

**Lack of focus.** You can't communicate effectively when you're multitasking. If you're checking your phone, planning what you're going to say next, or daydreaming, you're almost certain to miss nonverbal cues in the conversation. To communicate effectively, you need to avoid distractions and stay focused.

**Inconsistent body language.** Nonverbal communication should reinforce what is being said, not contradict it. If you say one thing, but your body language says something else, your listener will likely feel that you're being dishonest. For example, you can't say "yes" while shaking your head no.

**Negative body language.** If you disagree with or dislike what's being said, you might use negative body language to rebuff the other person's message, such as crossing your arms, avoiding eye contact, or tapping your feet. You don't have to agree with, or even like what's being said, but to communicate effectively and not put the other person on the defensive, it's important to avoid sending negative signals.

When communicating with others, we often focus on what we should say. However, effective communication is less about talking and more about listening. Listening well means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding the emotions the speaker is trying to convey.

There's a big difference between engaged listening and simply hearing. When you really listen – when you're engaged with what's being said – you'll hear the subtle intonations in someone's voice that tell you how that person is feeling and the emotions they're trying to communicate. When you're an engaged listener, not only will you better understand the other person, you'll also make that person feel heard and understood, which can help build a stronger, deeper connection between you.

Nonverbal communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice, and even your muscle tension and breathing. Developing the ability to understand and use nonverbal communication can help you connect with others, express what you really mean, navigate challenging situations, and build better relationships at home and work.

Direct, assertive expression makes for clear communication and can help boost your self-esteem and decision-making skills. Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in an open and honest way. It does not mean being hostile, aggressive, or demanding. Effective communication is always about understanding the other person, not about winning an argument or forcing your opinions on others.