

How to Effectively

Communicate

by: **teen lifeline, inc.**

Communication can be difficult for anyone, but especially for teen parents and the different relationships they have to navigate. We will identify personal communication styles before giving tips to improve communication skills.

Defining Communication Style

Passive

- Do you try to push your feelings away rather than express them to others?
- Do you worry expressing yourself will cause others to be angry or to not like you?
- Do you often hear yourself saying, "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter to me," when you actually do care?
- Do you try not to "rock the boat," keeping quiet in order to not upset others?
- Do you often go along with others' opinions because you don't want to be different?

Aggressive

- Are you concerned with getting your own way, regardless of how it affects others?
- Do you often yell, swear or use other aggressive means of communicating?
- Are your friends often afraid of you?
- Do you not care if others get what they need as long as your needs are met?

Passive-Aggressive

- Do you have a tendency to be sarcastic in conversations with others?
- Do you give people the silent treatment when you're angry with them?
- Do you often find yourself saying one thing but really thinking another?
- Are you generally reluctant to express your emotions in words, resorting instead to aggressive behaviors, like slamming doors?

Assertive

- Do you believe you have the right to express your opinions and emotions?
- When you're having a disagreement with someone, can you express your opinions and emotions clearly and honestly?
- Do you treat others with respect and respect yourself during communication?
- Do you listen closely to what other people are saying, sending the message that you're trying to understand their perspective?
- Do you try to negotiate with the other person if you have different goals, rather than to focus only on getting your own needs met?

Tips for Communicating Effectively

The best way to communicate is by being assertive. Here are some tips to help develop a healthy, effective communication style.

- ◆ **Be clear.** Determine exactly what you want and clearly, honestly, and specifically communicate what that is. Try to start by talking about your own emotions to avoid blaming others. You may not completely change their feelings or opinion, but maybe you can both make a compromise.
- ◆ **Actively listen.** Being assertive isn't just about getting your own way, but it is also about meeting the needs of the other person. To actively listen, give your full attention to the person speaking. Notice the nonverbal cues you are giving and positively show you are listening by leaning in, nodding, maintaining eye contact and responding when it is appropriate. Summarize and ask if you heard them correctly to make sure you are both on the same page.
- ◆ **Validate others.** In order for positive communication to happen, they must feel validated. Make sure you are not being judgmental, think about it from their point of view and do not blame or judge. Listen to what they have to say, while you do not have to agree with them, be respectful and allow them have their own opinion heard. Avoid interrupting while the other person is talking. Don't start thinking about what you are going to say before they finish, but fully listen and then respond.
- ◆ **Watch your tone.** Make sure that your tone is conveying what you are trying to say. Sometimes, others can misunderstand or get defensive not because of the words coming out of your mouth but because of the way you are saying it. Especially when you are talking with a lot of emotion, make sure you are as calm as possible before getting into a serious discussion.
- ◆ **Recognize stress.** Are your muscles tight? Are your hands in fists? Are you not breathing properly? Your body is letting you know that you are stressed - listen to it. Calm down and manage your stress by taking deep breaths, thinking of a good memory, laughing, or doing something else that soothes you. Especially in stressful situations, sometimes you will need to find a way to compromise, or agree to disagree and come back to the conversation at a later date when it is not as tense.
- ◆ **Be emotionally aware.** Emotions affect the way you feel, what motivates you, how you react, and the way you listen to others. If you are not in tune with your own emotions and the way you are feeling about the situation, you will not be able to communicate your feelings and needs with others. To avoid feeling frustrated and misunderstood, consider the emotions behind the conflict and discuss what is really bothering you instead of the little frustrations that come out of that. By addressing your emotions, others will better understand your situation and you can build affectionate, close relationships.

SOURCE:

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<http://www.charlotteparent.com/articlemain.php?Say-WHAT-Helping-Teens-Communicate-Effectively-3834>

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