

Improving Your Communication Skills

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.” – Stephen Covey

We’re a society of poor communicators. Why? Because nobody teaches us this stuff! The good news is that you’re reading this right now, and as the saying goes: If you want to change the world, start with yourself.

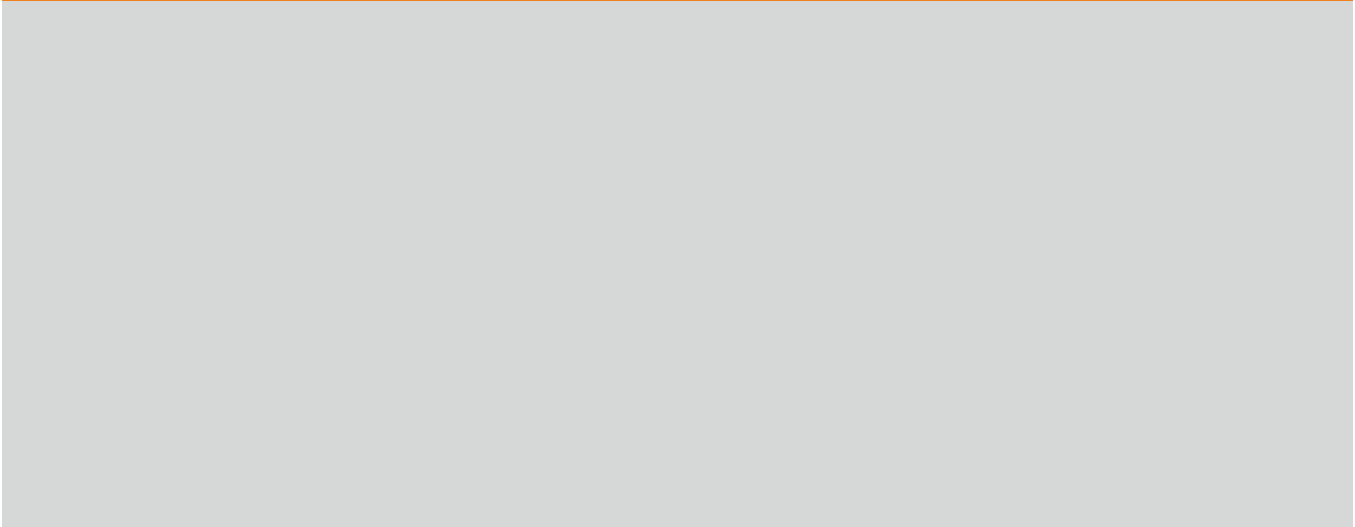
Poor communication habits trigger social disconnection. Become a better communicator and open yourself up to experiencing higher levels of connection, intimacy and love.

Poor Communication Habits	Effective Communication Habits
<p>Partial listening – Splitting your attention between multiple things besides the speaker, such as being distracted by a device, your thoughts, or by a task you're doing.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Speaker A tries to communicate with Speaker B who continues to send an email on their phone while also attempting to listen.</p>	<p>Mindful listening – Giving the speaker your full attention; removing distractions, noticing your thoughts and then redirecting your attention to what the speaker is saying, and pausing your tasks.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Both speakers put their phones in their bags while communicating and practise refocusing on the content of what the other is saying when they notice their minds wandering.</p>
<p>Mind reading – Assuming you know exactly what the other person is feeling or thinking without asking them directly.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I can tell you’re having second thoughts.”</p>	<p>Checking perceptions – Asking clarifying and probing questions to find out if your interpretations are accurate.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I noticed you changed the subject pretty quickly, could you tell me what you’re thinking?”</p>
<p>Hijacking – Redirecting the conversational focus on yourself instead of allowing the other person to fully express themselves.</p> <p>Be mindful of talking about yourself a lot and showing limited interest in others.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Oh yeah – I’m having trouble with my boss as well at the moment...”</p>	<p>Probing – Asking questions to improve your understanding of what the other person is thinking, feeling and needing.</p> <p>Showing that you can relate to what the person is saying after they've have the opportunity to express themselves first.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “You’re having trouble with your boss? How come?”</p>
<p>Judging – Evaluating the other person and what they’re saying rather than mindfully listening to them.</p> <p>Similarly, be conscious of the habit of projecting your own values and beliefs onto others.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Labelling someone as being selfish after something they’ve just said to you, and following your thought trail around this instead of listening to them.</p>	<p>Non-judging – Communicating with an open-mind, being curious, and accepting that everyone is different – everyone has their own unique set of experiences.</p> <p>Honoring the fact that we all have a right to our own opinions, values and beliefs.</p>

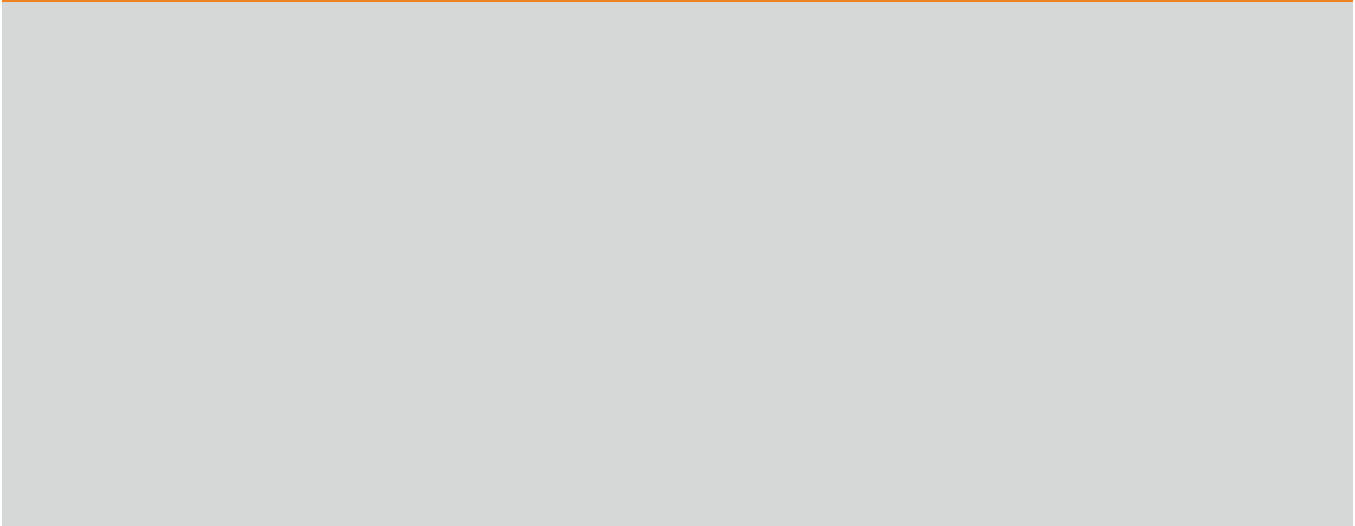
Poor Communication Habits	Effective Communication Habits
<p>Teaching or preaching – Offering solutions rather than listening and seeking to understand the other person; giving unsolicited advice.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Oh, my sister experienced the exact same thing. You should...”</p>	<p>Asking permission – Resist entering ‘fix mode’ and focus on mindful listening. When you’re confident that you’ve given the person enough time to fully express themselves and come up with their own solutions, you could ask their permission to give your advice.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Can I tell you what I’d do in this situation?”</p>
<p>Demanding – Making demands instead of respectfully asking for what you want.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Get your room cleaned now!”</p>	<p>Making specific requests – Asking someone to do something only if they’re willing to, rather than demanding something from them.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I’m feeling really frustrated about this. Would you be willing to clean your room now please?”</p>
<p>Discounting – Giving the message that the other person’s opinions, feelings and needs don’t matter.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “That’s not true! I never take you for granted.”</p>	<p>Validating – Communicating in a way that shows you’re taking the other person’s opinions, feelings and needs into account.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “It’s understandable that you feel like that considering the situation you’re in...”</p>
<p>Belittling – Giving the message that the other person should feel foolish for having a particular feeling, need, or opinion.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Wow, I can’t believe you actually think that!”</p>	<p>Supporting – Demonstrating acceptance, warmth, and care to the other person.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “Okay, I’d be interested to know more about how you came to that opinion?”</p>
<p>Guilt-tripping – Giving the message that the other person is behaving immorally or is in the wrong for having certain needs.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “If you don’t trust me, then what’s the point? It tells me there’s something very wrong with our relationship.”</p>	<p>Summarising – Repeating what you’ve heard back to the speaker in a brief way to ensure you’ve understood them properly.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “So you’ve been feeling anxious because you haven’t been hearing from me as much when I’m away?”</p>
<p>Derailing – Shifting the attention from the other person’s feelings to your own to stop them from carrying on with what they were saying.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I can’t believe you’d say that – you’ve really hurt me.”</p>	<p>Being quiet and not interrupting – Giving the person time to think and express themselves fully.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Waiting for a few seconds without filling the pauses to allow the other person to think and finish what they’re saying.</p>
<p>Placating – Agreeing with someone without really listening or providing the opportunity for them to fully express themselves.</p> <p><i>Example</i> “I know, you’re right. It won’t happen again, okay?”</p>	<p>Reflecting – Repeating someone’s words back to them exactly to demonstrate that you’re listening and to move the conversation forward.</p> <p><i>Example</i> Speaker A: “To be honest, I was really disappointed that you forgot about it.” Speaker B: “You were disappointed I forgot...” Speaker A: “Yep, I was counting on having you there with me...”</p>

Review the communication habits and fill in the boxes below:

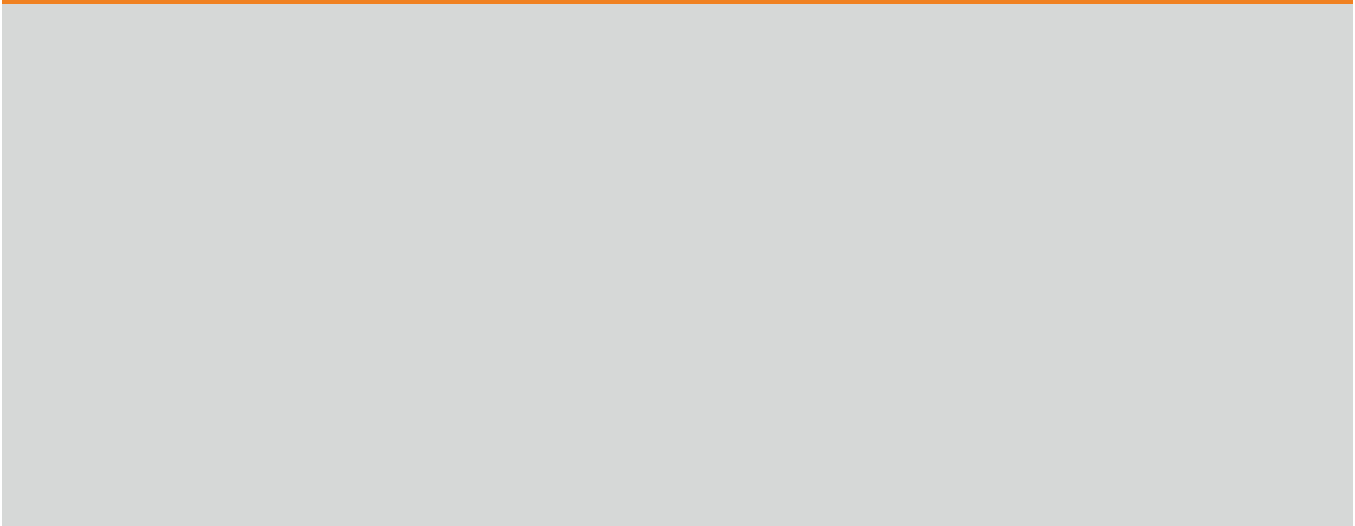
MY EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION HABITS



MY POOR COMMUNICATION HABITS



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION HABITS TO DEVELOP



Guided Discussion for Effective Communication

Here's a structured conversation exercise for improving communication in a relationship:

Step 1. Both people read through the communication skills table.

Step 2. Person A shares which poor communication skills resonated with them – what they'd like to work on improving.

Step 3. Person B shares their opinion about which communication skills they'd like Person A to work on improving.

Step 4. Person B shares which poor communication skills resonated with them – what they'd like to work on improving.

Step 5. Person A shares their opinion about which communication skills they'd like Person B to work on improving.

Step 6. Both people take it in turns to finish one the following prompts:

- » "I'm sorry that..."
- » "I hope that..."
- » "I understand that..."
- » "I forgive you for..."

Want more worksheets like this?

Discover practical tools for effective communication in The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit:

- [For personal use](#)
- [For professional use](#)
- [For organisations](#)

