

Dealing with Difficult People



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** The starred portions of this presentation have been adapted from **The Feeling Good Handbook** by Dr. David Burns.*

Lunch and Learn Lecture Series

Overview

- Good and bad communication
- The five secrets of communication
- Change the way *you* communicate
- Communicating with difficult people
- Using the D-DEAL technique to discuss past offenses.

Good vs. Bad Communication*

- When you are happy and others are happy, communication is easy!
- **It is during conflict when your communication skills are truly tested.**
- How well do you communicate when you are:
 - Angry, or when someone is angry at you?
 - Stressed?
 - Criticized?
 - Frustrated?
 - Vulnerable or hurt?



Good Communication*

1. You express your feelings openly and directly.
2. You encourage the other person to express his or her feelings and try to understand how he or she is thinking and feeling.

Bad Communication*

1. You refuse to share your feelings openly.
2. You refuse to listen to what the other person has to say.

Characteristics of Bad Communication*

- **Truth** – You are “right” and the other person is “wrong.”
- **Blame** – You say the problem is the other person’s fault.
- **Martyrdom** – You claim you are the innocent victim.
- **Put-down** – You say the other person is “always” or “never” doing certain things.
- **Hopelessness** – You give up and insist there is no point in trying.
- **Demandingness** – You say you are entitled to something, but refuse to ask for it in a straightforward way.
- **Denial** – You insist that you don’t really feel sad, angry, or hurt, but you really do.
- **Passive Aggressiveness** – You withdraw, sulk, pout, refuse to talk, storm out of the room, or slam doors.

Characteristics of Bad Communication*

(cont'd)

- **Self-Blame** – You act as if you are a bad, horrible person instead of dealing with the problem.
- **Helping** – Instead of hearing how the other person feels, you try to “solve” the problem or “help” the other person.
- **Sarcasm** – Your tone of voice or words convey hostility and tension that you are not openly acknowledging.
- **Scape-goating** – You suggest that the other person has “a problem” and that you are uninvolved in the conflict.
- **Defensiveness** – You refuse to admit any wrong-doing.
- **Counterattack** – Instead of acknowledging how the other person feels, you respond to their criticism by criticizing them.
- **Diversion** – You list grievances from the past instead of dealing with how you feel in the here and now.

The Five Secrets of Communication*

LISTENING SKILLS

1. The Disarming Technique
2. Empathy (Thought and Feeling)
3. Inquiry

SELF-EXPRESSION SKILLS

4. “I Feel” Statements
5. Stroking

The Disarming Technique*

The most difficult (but powerful!) listening skill.

- Find *some* truth in what the other person is saying, even if you feel he or she is completely wrong, irrational, out-of-line, or unfair.
- This is particularly helpful when you are feeling criticized, attacked, or defensive.

Why does this work?

- There is *always* some grain of truth in what the other person is saying, and you must be willing to look for it and be genuine when you speak.
- The criticizer will usually respond in a softer manner and will be more open to your point of view.
- Keep in mind that there is truth in what you are saying, too!

Using the Disarming Technique*

Example: “I’m suspicious about these communication techniques. I don’t think they will work.”

What might I say to disarm you?

Example: You forget to pick up something for dinner. You arrive home and your spouse says, “You always forget to do the things I ask you to do. I’m sick and tired of it!”

What might you say to disarm your spouse?

Example: You spend a lot of time working on a project and your boss tells you “This is absolutely terrible. Did you let a monkey work on the details?”

What might you say to disarm your boss?

Empathy*

- The definition of empathy is putting yourself in the other person's shoes and trying to see his or her point of view.
- **Thought empathy:** Rephrasing the words of the other person.
- **Feeling empathy:** Acknowledging what the person is probably feeling based on what he or she is saying to you.

Why does this work?

- The other person feels *heard* when you restate his or her own words.
- It provides the opportunity for the other person to correct you if you misinterpreted what he or she said.
- *It will not work if you are not genuine.*

Great Ways to Begin Empathy Statements

- “It seems to me like...”
- “It sounds like...”
- “What you are saying is...”
- “Let me make sure I am understanding you correctly.”
- “Please tell me if I am interpreting what you are saying, but you seem to be saying...”

Examples of Expressing Empathy

Example: Your teenage child insults you and calls you names for not allowing her to take the car for the night.

How might you empathize with her?

Example: Your spouse becomes extremely annoyed when you don't complete a chore around the house and are therefore late to pick up the kids from a friend's house.

How might you empathize with your spouse?

Example: Your friend stands you up lunch...again. When you confront him the next day, he becomes defensive and says he just has too much on his plate and you should relax.

How might you empathize with your friend?

Remember, you are not trying to prove who is right and who and is wrong...you are trying to communicate!

Inquiry*

- Asking open-ended questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.
- Keep in mind that it's difficult for most people to express intense feelings.
- Convey a sense of genuine interest and warmth and a desire to solve the issue.
- **The purpose of inquiry is to make the other person feel secure and safe to express their feelings.**
- Avoid using inquiries that can be answered with a “yes” or “no” – encourage the person to expand their statement.

Examples of Using Inquiry

Example: You get passed up for a promotion at work. Your boss tells you she is unsure of your capabilities to meet deadlines.

How can you use inquiry to transform this negative interaction into a productive one?

“I know you want the best person for the job [disarming] and I hear you saying that you feel I lack certain abilities to meet certain standards [empathy]. What kind of characteristics are you looking for in regards to this position [inquiry]?”

Example: Your spouse claims that you no longer care about how he/she feels and that you never make an effort to show your affection.

How can you use inquiry to uncover what he/she is thinking?

“You know, you’re right, I don’t express how much I love you often [disarming]. It must be very hurtful for you to think that I don’t love you [empathy]. What would you like me to do to show you how much I care [inquiry]?”

“I Feel” Statements*

- Expressing your own thoughts and feelings by using statements that begin with “*I feel* _____” instead of other statements that may come across as accusatory (“You make me so angry!”)
- Vulnerable feelings: “I feel _____”
 - Sad
 - Rejected
 - Unloved
 - Inadequate
- Negative feelings: “I feel _____”
 - Angry
 - Criticized
 - Misunderstood

Using “I Feel” Statements*

Example: *Your friend/spouse attacks you by saying: “This is all your fault. I’m right, and you’re wrong. Why can’t you stop being so stubborn and just admit that you’re wrong?”*

Defensive Answer: “You’re pretty stupid to think that you’re right all the time. You think you’re perfect. Why can’t you admit that you’re just as much to blame?”

Persuasive Answer: “I probably have been acting really stubborn [disarming]. You say that things are my fault, and I’m willing to accept my part of the blame [empathy, disarming]. There is truth to what you are saying, and I want to understand your point of view [disarming, inquiry]. I’m feeling very frustrated as well because I’m not getting my ideas across [“I-feel” statement]. I want you to try to understand how I feel [“I-feel” statement, empathy].”

Which of these is going to trigger effective communication?

Stroking*

- Find something genuinely positive to say to the other person, even during the middle of an intense conflict.
- This communicates respect even when you are feeling extremely intense emotions.
- Let go of the idea that you have a great relationship with another person just because you never argue.
- Being mad at another person ***does not*** mean that you do not respect or love each other.
- **You can dislike what a person is *doing*, you can disagree with what they are *thinking*, and you can be uncomfortable with what they are *feeling*. You will not gain anything by judging or condemning them as a *person*.**

Examples of Stroking*

- “We both have an incredibly strong opinion about this and I am uncomfortable with your point of view, but I want you to know I respect what you are saying.”
- “I am more angry than I have ever been, but I love you and I know we can work this out.”
- “I think we’re both extremely frustrated with each other right now, but I think we can talk this over. It may be really uncomfortable and maybe even hurtful, but I’m convinced that it’s worth it and will be beneficial in the long run.”

Changing Your Communication Style with People Who....

- Refuse to talk to you
- Act hostile
- Are stubborn and argumentative
- Are critical and judgmental
- Complain

People Who Refuse to Communicate*

- What do you do with a person who doesn't want to talk?
These individuals may:
 - Slam doors, pout, sulk, give the silent treatment, or use any method possible to avoid talking, even when you insist that you want to communicate.
 - This is their method of staying in control and having power over the situation.

You may hear:

- “There is nothing to talk about! What is done is done!”
- “Of course I'm not upset? Can't you leave me alone?”
- Or you may hear absolutely nothing since the individual has left the room, shut the door, or is simply ignoring you.

People Who Refuse to Communicate (cont'd)*

1. Empathize.

2. Avoid a power struggle.

- Don't insist that the person talks to you right now. Respect their right to be alone.
- Don't retaliate by saying, "Fine, I won't talk to you either!"
- Don't blame yourself or judge your actions by the other person's childish behavior.
- Don't get judgmental. Yes, they are being hostile and childish, but your goal is empathy and a discussion at a later time.
- DO empathize with their reasons for not wanting to talk.
- DO continue to empathize and postpone even if they refuse to talk again.

People Who are Hostile*

- Hostile individuals may respond to you with sarcasm, verbal put-downs, and aggression.
- Hear the truth in what the person is saying, acknowledge his or her feelings, and **change the focus** by drawing attention to the hostile way those feelings are being expressed.
- **Changing the focus communicates that you want to hear what the person has to say.**
- “You have a right to be so angry at me for _____ [disarming]. I understand that you are feeling very angry and disappointed with me [empathy]. I’m feeling really put down right now [“I-feel” statement]. Your tone of voice has a very sharp edge [changing the focus]. You have a valid right to be upset [disarming] but when you swear at me and threaten me, it makes it hard to work together .”

People Who Are Stubborn*

- Ask yourself...Why is this person always so stubborn?
 - Maybe part of the problem is you are not listening!!!
 - *Every stubborn, argumentative partner has an equally stubborn partner who is defensive and argumentative and who refuses to listen to them.*
- *Disarming, empathy, and inquiry are your greatest tools!*
- “You know, you are right [disarming], I did lie to you and I betrayed your trust [disarming]. This must have been so incredibly painful for you [empathy]. I feel punished and rejected [“I-statement”] because you won’t talk to me. I want to know what I can do to work this out [inquiry].”

People Who Are Critical/Judgmental*

1. Disarm the person who is criticizing you. Find some truth instead of getting defensive. When you find the truth and acknowledge it, the critical person usually calms down. **This is the most important part of dealing with someone who is critical.**
2. Use the empathy and inquiry techniques. Encourage the other person to express all their criticisms and negative feelings.
3. Express your feelings with “I feel” statements instead of arguing.

People Who Complain*

- By now, you've probably realized that most people who complain usually don't want advice (or won't listen to it if they do ask for it).
- The best way to deal with complainers? **Agree with them!**
- “You're right [disarming]! You do work incredibly hard and don't get the credit you deserve [disarming]. Everyone takes you for granted [disarming]. It's not fair [disarming]!”
- People who complain usually just want to feel validated. Disarming gives them that.

Using the D-DEAL Technique

- **Disarm** the individual by finding some truth in his or her point of view and reflecting their words back to them in an empathetic tone.
- **Describe** the situation that made you upset using specific examples.
- **Express** your emotions by using “I-statements.”
- **Ask** for what you would like to see changed.
- **List** the reasons why this change would be beneficial for all parties.



QUESTIONS?

If you'd like to see more examples of what was covered in this presentation, check out *The Feeling Good Handbook* by Dr. David Burns!

Please direct all other questions to
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How has HYOU helped you? For the month of July, share your testimonial and be entered into a drawing! Your testimonial should include what has worked for you, what you've learned, how far you've come, and any suggestions for others. Email your testimonial to Mary, mstevenart@nifs.org during the whole month of July.