

Communication in Healthy Relationships

This workshop will guide you through some of the many techniques to help improve communication in your relationships.



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Introduction

Communication is the first building block of any healthy relationship. It can be difficult to discuss sensitive matters with friends and family, for example: how might we bring up the sensitive subject of abuse, with a friend who is experiencing it? As we age, our roles, responsibilities and health may change, all of which may become difficult subjects to discuss with our families. It is important during this time that we model effective ways of communicating, to make sure that our wishes are clearly made known and our needs are met.

This workshop offers tips and tools that you can use to communicate more effectively.

Opening Discussion

Engage in a discussion with your group by asking them the following questions: *Do you find as you age that your role within your family has changed? If so, how? What barriers to effective communication have those in this group experienced?*

Assertiveness

DISCUSSION: *Do you think you are assertive?*

Assertiveness can be described as open, honest and clear communication. It can also be described as the ability to convey your needs to the listener, in a clear and understandable manner. We tend to get set in our ways of communicating with family members, which may result in the same disappointing outcomes. When emotions run high sometimes, family members often resort to patterns of ineffective communication or even verbal abuse.

These are some **signs of ineffective and abusive verbal communication**:

- Volume of voice goes UP
- Personal space is violated by having the speaker put their face up to yours in a threatening manner
- Threats of taking something away or physically hurting you
- Belittling and berating comments come into the conversation
- What you say is mimicked or your serious concerns are made fun or trivialized

Emotionally and verbally abusive behavior that is often perceived as normal communication, can cause very negative feelings and bring about serious consequences to an older adult. If not stopped, this can escalate.

There are tools and language we can use to convey our message, when speaking with loved ones before things reach this point. So how can we prevent or de-escalate this kind of communication?

Using ‘I’ statements. *YOU* statements sound to the listener as an attack. It is often more effective to focus on your own feelings, and how their behaviour affects you. When using “I” statements try using an easy formula, such as this example:

I feel (emotion) when you (behaviour) because (explain).

I feel sad when you call me names because I love you and take what you say to heart.

Give it a Try...

Think of a loved one with whom you might try using this method. Write down a feeling or situation about which you are having trouble communicating. Read it to them at an appropriate time and ask them to respond with their own feelings, using the same method. This communication tool can be used every day, to help you convey your feelings to those around you.

Tips: Effective Communication

DISCUSSION: *What are some ways you communicate effectively?*

- **Listen**~ Active listening involves *showing* the speaker that you are listening by nodding your head, making appropriate eye contact and waiting for them to finish before you begin speaking.
- **Summarizing**~ Sometimes while we think we understood what was being said, we really did get it wrong. Summarize what you think you heard the speaker say and then ask them if that is correct.
- **Empathize**~ Try to understand the other person's point of view and how they might be feeling.
- **Express Your Needs**~ Often we focus on trying to convey our own feelings rather than our needs. Tell the listener what you need from them. It is important that we tell them, clearly, rather than thinking they should know what we want or need.
- **Knowing When to Walk Away**~ When we are very emotional, it can be difficult to process our emotions and communicate effectively. If you need a moment to process your emotions, convey that to your loved one and come back to it when you are ready.

Grounding Techniques:

How can I control my emotions during difficult a conversation?

There are many techniques that can be used when we are in a highly emotional state. They are sometimes referred to as 'grounding techniques' and can be used whenever you feel you might need to take a break from the conversation.

- Use your senses to bring you to the present. Sit quietly and name three things you can hear, see, taste, feel and smell.
- Hold an object like a rock. Keep it in your pocket during a difficult conversation.
- Press your feet firmly into the ground, close your eyes and take as many deep breaths as you need.
- Take a break and do something you enjoy.

What if I'm Not Being Heard?

DISCUSSION:

Has there been a time when you were not being heard? How did it feel?

Remember, communication takes more than one person. It is important that we share our needs to communicate more effectively whether with a partner, family member or friend. Sharing techniques of good communication and stating very clearly that you would like them to communicate effectively with you is important. Be prepared that the other person may not be open to starting the conversation and you could encounter a negative reaction.

If you would like to work on strategies to communicate more effectively with your loved ones and are not having success, you could engage a mediator or visit a counselor either yourself or with your family member(s), to work through the difficult conversations.

If language is a barrier to communication, consider engaging the services of an interpreter through immigrant serving agencies.

Who Do I Call if I Need Help?

- 211**.....211
Connects people to the information and community, social, non-clinical health and government services.
- Canadian Hearing Society**.....1-877-347-3427
CHS offers services, products, and information that remove barriers to communication, advance hearing health, and promote equity for people who are culturally deaf, orally deaf, deafened, or hard-of-hearing.
- MCIS Language Services**.....1-888-990-9014
Provides translation services for organizations serving multicultural populations.
- Mental Health Hotline Ontario**1-866-531-2600
Offers a free and confidential service. Offers listening, support and information about counselling and other services in your community. You may call for yourself or someone you care about.
- Welcome Centre Immigrant Services**.....1-877-761-1155
Offers services such as settlement and integration, English language training, legal/mental health/employment services, culturally appropriate family counselling.