

Communicating in a Conflict

Conflict can happen in any relationship. It is not always a bad thing, but the ways people handle it can bring them together or push them apart. Next time you are dealing with conflict, keep these tips in mind.

The Basics

Speak up early. Some people stay quiet about a conflict for a long time and then speak out in an angry, hurtful way later. Instead, talk about conflict when it happens.

Stay focused. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Avoid saying things like “You always...” or “You never...” Stay focused on the present, your feelings, coming to an understanding, and finding a solution.

Communicating Means Talking and Listening

Listen carefully. Hear the person out. Say back what you have understood so the other person knows you value what has been said. It is not respectful to interrupt or roll your eyes while others are speaking. If you are thinking about what you want to say next, you are not listening.

No one knows what another person is thinking and feeling unless they tell us. Ask the other person about their thoughts and feelings, and listen to the answers.

Try not to get defensive. When someone comes to you with what feels like criticism or disapproval, it is easy to feel on guard. Listen to the other person and try to understand his or her perspective.

It can be tempting to blame the other person. Instead, try to consider the situation fairly. Think about the needs of both people to come up with a solution.

Own what is yours. Admitting when you are wrong is important. It often helps the other person do the same. This will lead you both closer to understanding each other and finding a solution.

Use “I” messages. Avoid saying things like “You really messed up here.” Instead, begin statements with “I,” and make them about yourself and your feelings: “I feel frustrated when this happens.”

Reach for Agreement

Try to see the other person’s point of view. When you really try to understand the other side, you can better explain your own. If you do not understand, ask more questions. It is easier to listen after you feel heard.

Look for whatever is true in what the other person says.

Try to think about the situation fairly, where you consider the needs of both people.

Look for compromise. Aim for solutions that meet everybody’s needs. There is not always a right and a wrong. Two points of view can both be valid, and sometimes it is best to agree to disagree.

Let go of winning. Try to find the things on which you both agree, and then you can work toward solving the conflict.

When the Going Gets Rough

Take a time-out. You may feel yourself or the other person starting to get too angry to make any progress. That is a good time to take a break from talking.

Knowing when to take a break is important. Be sure to tell the other person you need a time-out. That way, he or she will not feel rejected.

Do not give up. If you take a break from the discussion, always come back to it. You can make progress toward resolving the conflict using these attitudes:

- Respect for the other person
- Willingness to see the other’s point of view
- A mindset that together you can fix the conflict

Ask for help if you need it. If the conflict seems not to be getting better, it can help to get someone else involved.

- Remember, the goal is to find a solution on which both people can agree. It is not about winning or being right.
- When the conflict happens in a romantic relationship, it can help to hold hands or touch as you talk.
- It is important to respect other people, even if you do not like the other person’s actions.

Huntsman Cancer Institute’s social workers can help you talk with loved ones and work toward understanding.

Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Call 801-213-5699