

# Positive Communication Skills

1. **Stay Focused:** Sometimes it's tempting to bring up past seemingly related conflicts when dealing with current ones. Unfortunately, this often clouds the issue and makes finding mutual understanding and a solution to *the current issue* less likely, and makes the whole discussion more taxing and even confusing. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, your feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.
2. **Listen Carefully:** People often *think* they're listening, but are really thinking about what they're going to say next when the other person stops talking. Truly effective communication goes both ways. While it might be difficult, try really listening to what your partner is saying. Don't interrupt. Don't get defensive. Just hear them and reflect back what they're saying so they know you've heard. Then you'll understand them better and they'll be more willing to listen to you.
3. **Try To See Their Point of View:** In a conflict, most of us primarily want to feel heard and understood. We talk a lot about our point of view to get the other person to see things our way. Ironically, if we all do this all the time, there's little focus on the other person's point of view, and nobody feels understood. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. (If you don't 'get it', ask more questions until you do.) Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.
4. **Respond to Criticism with Empathy:** When someone comes at you with criticism, it's easy to feel that they're wrong, and get defensive. While criticism is hard to hear, and often exaggerated or colored by the other person's emotions, it's important to listen for the other person's pain and respond with empathy for their feelings. Also, look for what's true in what they're saying; that can be valuable information for you.
5. **Own What's Yours:** Realize that personal responsibility is a strength, not a weakness. Effective communication involves admitting when you're wrong. If you both share some responsibility in a conflict (which is usually the case), look for and admit to what's yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows maturity. It also often inspires the other person to respond in kind, leading you both closer to mutual understanding and a solution.
6. **Use "I" Messages:** Rather than saying things like, "*You* really messed up here," begin statements with "I", and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, "I feel frustrated when this happens." It's less accusatory, sparks less defensiveness, and helps the other person understand your point of view rather than feeling attacked.
7. **Look for Compromise** Instead of trying to 'win' the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody's needs. Either through compromise, or a new solution that gives you both what you want most, this focus is much more effective than one person getting what they want at the other's expense. Healthy communication involves finding a resolution that both sides can be happy with.
8. **Take a Time-Out:** Sometimes tempers get heated and it's just too difficult to continue a discussion without it becoming an argument or a fight. If you feel yourself or your partner starting to get too angry to be constructive, or showing

- some destructive communication patterns, it's okay to take a break from the discussion until you both cool off. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.
9. **Don't Give Up:** While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a constructive attitude, mutual respect, and a willingness to see the other's point of view or at least find a solution, you can make progress toward the goal of a resolution to the conflict. Unless it's time to give up on the relationship, don't give up on communication.
  10. **Ask For Help If You Need It:** If one or both of you has trouble staying respectful during conflict, or if you've tried resolving conflict with your partner on your own and the situation just doesn't seem to be improving, you might benefit from a few sessions with a therapist. Couples counseling or family therapy can provide help with altercations and teach skills to resolve future conflict. If your partner doesn't want to go, you can still often benefit from going alone.

### **Tips:**

1. Remember that the **goal** of effective communication skills should be **mutual understanding and finding a solution** that pleases both parties, not 'winning' the argument or 'being right'.
2. This doesn't work in every situation, but sometimes (if you're having a conflict in a romantic relationship) it helps to **hold hands** or stay physically connected as you talk. This can remind you that you still care about each other and generally support one another.
3. Keep in mind that it's important to **remain respectful of the other person**, even if you don't like their actions.