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Effective Communication

Think back to a recent misunderstanding. Did it result in an argument? Hurt feelings? Wasted time?

Effective communication can minimize misunderstanding - and the stress that comes with it. With effective communication, thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed in a clearer, more efficient way. As a result, both people can really understand each others' needs.

This month's Member Matters includes plenty of tips on how to be a stronger communicator -- and enjoy lower stress and stronger relationships at work and home.



Improving Work Relationships

How often have you looked forward to your lunch or coffee break, so you could chat with your co-workers about your vacation plans or the movie you saw last weekend? Friendly conversation and work-related activities can help us develop special bonds in the workplace. In fact, many of us can probably think of at least one close friend whom we've met through work.

When a person forms positive relationships with co-workers, that individual typically enjoys his or her job more and is more productive. There are times, however, when establishing and maintaining a positive work relationship can be challenging, to say the least. If you want help improving your work relationships, here are a few tips:

DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Avoid negative thoughts and criticisms. Your positive approach can make a difference. Be less judgmental and more accepting of others. You will create a more positive work environment for yourself and your co-workers.

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

Reacting defensively to situations without knowing the whole story can cause misunderstandings. Gather as much information as possible.

IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Listen carefully and focus on the speaker's message. This will allow you to respond appropriately and avoid misunderstandings. When the speaker is finished, state your understanding to ensure there isn't any misinterpretation.

RESOLVE CONFLICTS EARLY

When a negative situation does arise, don't let it fester. Be direct, but courteous. Develop a plan of action to address the problem with your co-worker. Then work together toward resolving it, before bringing it to your supervisor.

SET BOUNDARIES

Developing friendships with co-workers is a natural process. However, it's important to set boundaries to ensure that the friendship doesn't interfere with your work. Focus on your priorities at work and try to limit personal discussions to lunch breaks or after work.

TREAT ALL CO-WORKERS WITH RESPECT

Be respectful by paying attention, listening carefully and responding appropriately. Always be courteous and professional. Regardless of the situation, try not to lash out or be rude. Be open and honest about your feelings and allow others to do the same.

UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT PERSONAL OR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When you and a co-worker don't see eye-to-eye, try looking at things from his or her perspective. You'll both be more productive if you recognize the need for cooperation to reach common goals.



Tips for Communicating Effectively With Your Children

Communication is a two-way bridge that connects you to your child's feelings. Healthy communication between parents and their children helps youngsters develop positive personalities and good relationships with other people.

Healthy communication builds your children's self-esteem because it makes them feel cared for and loved. With caring parents to listen to their concerns, children feel safe and able to express their feelings and needs directly in words. Children who are nurtured with their parents' attention learn how to manage their feelings without overreacting.

A strong bond with your children also helps you feel close to them and understand their needs. Understanding your children in this way gives you the tools to help them grow and manage the inevitable frustrations of being a parent.

BUILD THE BRIDGE OF COMMUNICATION

Be available.

Children need to feel that their parents are available to them. Even spending 10 minutes a day with each child makes the bridge of communication stronger. Get yourself into a quiet, attentive mood before you start listening to your child or talking about something important.

Be a good listener.

Children believe they're important when they feel their parents understand them. Being a good listener helps children feel loved, even when they're upset and you can't do anything to fix the problem. Ask your child to tell you his ideas and feelings. Try to understand exactly what your child is saying. What your child is trying to tell you is important to him, even when it may not be to you.

Show empathy.

You can show empathy even if you disagree with your child. Let your child know you've heard and appreciate her feelings. Showing empathy means making sure you understand what your child is feeling. Restate what your child has expressed and ask if your understanding of her feelings is correct.

Be a good sender.

Your child will be in a better mood to listen to you if he feels heard and cared for. Make sure that what you say, your tone of voice and what you do send a consistent message. For instance, if you laugh when you say "no," your child will be confused about what you really want.

Be very specific about what you want your child to do. Use words to send messages, even with toddlers. Use feeling words when you praise your child's behavior. For example, you can say "I'm so happy" when your child puts his dirty clothes in the hamper. Encourage your child to praise himself as well.

Use "I" statements to tell your child what makes you unhappy about her behavior. It's better to say: "I was worried when you came home late from Jessica's house" than to

yell "Why were you late for dinner again?" Tell your child what you feel and think, not what she should think or feel.

Be a good role model.

Young children learn by copying their parents' behavior. If you use a lot of feeling words, it will help your child learn to do the same. Verbalizing feelings also helps children learn to control their behavior.



Communicating Effectively with Your Spouse

While romance might get a relationship started, good communication keeps it going. These healthy communication habits can help you strengthen your bonds with your spouse:

MAKE INTIMACY A PRIORITY

With busy schedules and multiple demands, it's easy to let your need for intimate contact with your spouse slide; but intimacy strengthens a relationship like nothing else can. No matter how busy you are with work and family obligations, try to spend private time regularly with your spouse. Even if you don't have time for romance, use the time to talk about the successes and frustrations of your day.

FIND A GOOD TIME TO TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

When you have something difficult to talk about, check with your mate for a specific time to discuss it. Resist the temptation to talk when he or she walks in the door after a hard day at work. Try choosing a subject you want to discuss, and both of you write about it for 10 minutes; then talk about it for 10 minutes. Make sure you stick to the time frame. If you need more time, agree on when you can talk about it again.

FOCUS YOUR CONCERNS

Think about what you want to say before you begin to talk. With sensitive topics, it might be tempting to avoid talking about what's on your mind. Get right to the point and after you've stated your request, listen closely to your spouse's reply. Stay focused on finding solutions to problems rather than on emphasizing differences.

LET BOTH SIDES BE HEARD

When you have a disagreement, remember that both of your needs are important. Use a firm and gentle tone of voice in stating what you need, why you need it and what you want your mate to do. However, try not to elevate your needs above your spouse's. Listen and show that you see things from your spouse's perspective.

Conflict is a normal part of healthy relationships. But remember, your safety always comes first. If you suspect that you are the victim of abuse (physical or emotional), either currently or in the past, seek help. If you are uncertain, a therapist may assist you in helping to identify any possible issues. If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

BE HONEST BUT NOT ACCUSATORY

It's easy to blame the other person when you're angry or hurt, but blaming only invites retaliation. Talk about your feelings instead. For instance, avoid saying "You ruined the plans again. You're always late." Instead, using "I" statements, say: "I'm very disappointed that you were late. I was counting on you to be home in time." This approach is less likely to provoke a defensive response and more likely to encourage an open discussion.

VALUE YOUR DIFFERENCES

Sometimes the differences in your temperaments and communication styles will be more evident than your similarities. When you feel this way, how and what you communicate to your spouse will determine how effectively you solve your problems. Appreciate your differences and you'll learn to work together better.



Communicating with Your Child Care Provider

Close, trusting relationships with your child's care providers will help you feel more relaxed and assured while you're on the job.

If you've recently hired an in-home provider, arrange for the person to spend time with you and your child before you return to work. Take some time to get to know each other and discuss how you'll keep in touch during the day. Many parents pick a time when they call from work to check in with the caregiver or to receive a call from their child.

If your children attend a day care center, find out if the staff has special routines or schedules for checking in with parents. While it's important to respect the routines of your day care center, never enroll your child in a day care center where you're not welcome to drop in unannounced.

Many professional caregivers look forward to a brief chat when a parent drops off or picks up their child. This is a good time to explain that your child had a difficult time sleeping the night before or to learn what kind of day your child had. If one parent is responsible for dropping off and picking up the child, the other parent should occasionally do so in order to get to know the caregiver. During these talks, avoid making negative statements about your child in front of him or her.

Day care staff members have many obligations. If you repeatedly stay for extended periods of time when you pick up or drop off your child, you may be preventing the caregiver from watching the other children. Instead, for longer discussions, arrange in advance for a time when you can talk away from your child and be uninterrupted by distractions. Set up a meeting with the day care teacher or suggest having dinner out with the caregiver. This will allow you to discuss issues, such as behavior problems, or to resolve conflicts as they arise.

Getting Started is Easy!
Call your EAP for more information.