

BASIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

1. Use “I” statements and other statements of personal reference.

It’s important to acknowledge and *accept* your own feelings in order to facilitate the interaction and to reduce the possibility of the other person becoming defensive.

“I think...”

“I feel...”

“I need...”

“I want...”

“The way *I* see it is...”

“In *my* opinion...”

2. Paraphrase what the other person is feeling and empathize.

Even if you’re not sure what the other person is feeling, it’s okay to guess; if you are wrong, the other person is likely to appreciate your efforts to understand, and it gives them the opportunity to correct you. However, you can also *ask* for clarification—e.g., by saying something like “I get the sense you’re angry with me—is that right?”

Additional Examples:

- “It sounds like you’re saying that you’ve been under a lot of stress”
- “I can understand that you’re upset.”

3. Avoid “you” statements or either accusatory-type statements, as these are likely to result in defensiveness and denials.

“*You* think...”

“*You* make me feel...”

“If only *you* would...”

4. Also avoid overgeneralizations, particularly the words “always” and “never.” Instead, focus on *specific* instances of behavior.

Instead of saying “You *always* leave your clothes on the floor” or “You *never* clean up,” try: “I was annoyed when you left your clothes on the floor *last night*.”

5. It’s okay to make a request for change, but offer to compromise in the process.

Examples:

- “I need to get to bed by midnight—if I gave you privacy for an hour, could you finish up on the computer before then?”
- “I won’t nag you about leaving your clothes on the floor as long as you pick them up before you leave for class the next morning—would that work for you?”
- “What would be an acceptable compromise for you?”

6. Try the following language formula:

“I feel _____ [*state your feeling*]

when you _____ [*describe the **specific** situation or behavior*]

because _____ [*describe the concrete effect, consequence, or unmet need on your part*].

I would prefer _____ [*make request and offer compromise*].”