

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].”