

10 Tips for Effective Communication by Liz Kingsnorth

LIZ KINGSNORTH explores the ways we can improve our relationships with others at home, at work and with friends, by improving the way we communicate.

1. An intention for connection.

Aim for a respectful and compassionate quality of connection, so that everyone can express themselves, be heard and understood. Trust that the connection is more important and more nourishing than being right, or even just having your say. Connection means to try to be open and stay in touch with what matters to the other person – and to yourself – in each present moment.

2. Listen more than you speak.

We have two ears and one mouth – a reminder of what is important! Listening is key to a healthy relationship. Often we are only half listening, waiting for our chance to speak, wanting to make our point. When our attention is with our own thoughts, we are not listening. Listening means to enter into the world of the other person, to intend to understand them, even if we disagree with what they are saying.

3. Understand the other person first.

When another person feels you understand them, they are far more likely to be open to understanding you. Willingness to understand involves generosity, respect, self-control, compassion and patience. Be ‘curious instead of furious’ about how others are different from you.

4. Understand needs, wishes and values.

Everything people say and do expresses an underlying need, longing or value. We can learn to identify and ‘hear’ these needs, even when they are not expressed explicitly. Because all human beings share these needs, they are our magic key to unlocking mutual understanding. For example, if someone says, “You are so selfish, you never do anything to help at home,” they are indirectly expressing a longing for consideration and support, but it is coming out as blame and judgment. If we can empathise rather than react, we will connect and the person will feel understood.

5. Begin with empathy.

Refrain from:

Immediately telling your own similar story

Interrogating with lots of data-type questions

Interpreting the other's experience

Giving advice

One-upping e.g. "if you think that's bad wait till you hear about what happened to me!"

Dismissing the person's feelings e.g. "Oh don't be angry."

Dismissing the person's experience, or telling the person that this experience is actually good for them!

Generally people appreciate receiving empathy more than anything else.

6. Take responsibility for your feelings.

What someone else says or does is not the cause for how we feel, it is the trigger. Our feelings are stimulated by what's happening. For example, if someone does not do what they say they will do, we might tell them, "You make me so angry, you are so unreliable!" This inflammatory accusation could be rephrased as, "I feel frustrated because it's important to me that we keep to agreements we have made."

7. Make requests that are practical, specific and positive.

Make requests that will help fulfil our needs. This stops us just complaining, and allows the situation to change. Don't ask things of others that are too vague or too big, or are expressed as a negative request, e.g. "Stop making so much noise." Be positive and specific, e.g. "I am working. Can you please use the headphones while playing video games?"

8. Use accurate, neutral descriptions.

When we are upset, we often interpret what has happened, using judgmental language, rather than accurately describing what has triggered us. This can get us into a fight immediately! For example, instead of simply stating, "You didn't call me," we might interpret and then accuse, "You don't care about me!" First describe the situation in a neutral, accurate way, free of judgments or blame. Then the communication can continue with sharing feelings, needs and requests. For example, instead of saying, "That's a really stupid idea!" you might say, "If we all go to a movie which ends at midnight [neutral description], I'm worried [feeling], because the children need to get a full night's sleep [need]. Can we go to the 2 p.m. show instead [specific request]?"

9. Be willing to hear “No”.

Even with these guidelines, our carefully expressed requests might still elicit a “No” from the other person. Why would this upset us? Is it that our request was actually a demand that we expect the other person to fulfil? We have a choice in how we hear that “No”. It could be that something else is important to the other person; that they had a different need or value alive in that moment. Maybe the “No” is their request for something else to happen. And then we are into the dance of giving and bending! “No” is not as threatening as we might imagine.

10. Ways we communicate other than words.

Everything that is in our heart and mind is expressed through our body, our facial expressions, the tone of our voice, and the vibrations that emanate from us. All these are intuitively picked up and understood by others. Are our words in harmony with these subtler elements? We are manifesting our consciousness at every moment. To have connection, understanding and harmony in our relationships, we need to nourish those aspects deeply within ourselves.

Useful references:

Nonviolent Communication – a Language of Life, by Marshall Rosenberg

www.cnvc.org

www.nvctraining.com