

## Effective Talking

As we learn how to live in healthy and loving relationship with one another, we practice healthy ways of communicating that create peace and safety for all. We all act as if others understood our intentions or reasons for doing what we do and they don't. We assume others do things based on why we would do them, and that is often not the case. Many relationships can benefit from clear communication that gives the other person the benefit of the doubt, finds out what is really going on, and clearly communicates what we're experiencing.

*... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* (Excerpts from Ephesians 4)

*But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other ... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.* (Excerpts from Colossians 3)

Our basic attitude must always be to affirm the good behaviour we see and want. We let the person know how we feel and what we experienced. At the same time we give them an opportunity to explain why they did what they did. A technique for doing this effectively is "I" messages.

1. **Name the behavior or situation you want changed.** Aim this statement at the behavior, not the individual or their personality. Start with "When you..." Example: "When you leave the kitchen in a mess..."
2. **Say how you feel about the situation.** People often believe the emotion they are feeling is anger. If they examine the emotion more closely they realize it is usually closer to something else like: fear, hurt, disrespect, worry, etc. Start with "I feel..." Example: "I feel taken advantage of..."
3. **State your reason or the consequences to you.** Everyone wants a reason for changing his or her behavior. Give the individual a reason. Begin it with "because..." Example: "... because then I have to spend my time and energy cleaning up after you".

At this point it is often helpful to give the other person a chance to respond to what has been shared. If someone is bringing this kind of communication to you, it is probably a good place to offer both an apology and an explanation. We sometimes hurt people unintentionally and it is healing to apologize even if our intentions were misunderstood. We can then continue to find ways to co-operate and work with each other. One of the first ways to move forward is to forgive those who have hurt us by their behaviour. With forgiveness in place, we can more easily and effectively come to mutually agreeable ways to do things differently in the future.

4. **Say what you would like.** Be explicit. Start with "I would like..." or "I would find it helpful ...." Example: "I would like you to put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink". Complete "I" Message: "When you leave the kitchen in a mess, I feel taken advantage of because then I have to spend my time and energy cleaning up after you. I would like you to put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink".
5. **Ask for agreement.** Follow your "I" message with a request for agreement and commitment. Example: "Will you put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink when you make yourself something to eat in the kitchen?"

Once in a while healthy boundaries need to be established because one party is unwilling to change harmful behaviours. In that case state personal actions that will be taken, consequences that will be applied, or boundaries that will be established if inappropriate behaviors continue. However, When our intentions are to work together rather than to blame or accuse, many good results can come from our communicating clearly together. God is honored when the truth is spoken in love, when people honor one another with their co-operative attitudes, and when we continue to live in loving relationship. It's a challenge to speak the truth in love but it brings great safety and freedom in our relationships. God will help us.

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

- What's the hardest part of "speaking the truth in love" for me?
- What happens when I avoid "speaking the truth in love"?
- How have relationships improved when I have practiced some of these principles?