

Interpersonal Communication (Person to Person)

Interpersonal communication is the communication that occurs between people who have a personal relationship. These relationships may range from casual acquaintances to close personal friends or family members.

Stages of Relationships

- **Acquaintances**-are people you know and talk with when you happen to meet them. You do not make arrangements to spend time with them.
- **Friendships**-are relationships with people because you enjoy their company. They usually begin casually and grow when you find you like each other and the relationship is mutually satisfying. You deliberately plan to spend time together.
- **Close relationship**-is one in which people share their deepest feelings with each other. It is built on trust and commitment. They go out of their way to help each other; they are concerned about each other. Critical moments in life are shared together.

Building Relationships A good relationship does not just happen, it must be built through the efforts of both people in the relationship.

- **Approaching Others with Empathy.** To create a good relationship, people must approach each other with empathy. Empathizing is “walking in another’s shoes” to understand how that person feels. Since the world you see cannot be exactly the world someone else sees, being empathetic is not always easy. But when you empathize, others feel you are trying to understand what happens to them, and they are more likely to trust you.
- **Sharing Feelings.** It takes two people to have a relationship, and each needs to share in making it work. In a good relationship, each person needs to feel that the other person makes an effort to share feelings so that both people feel that the relationship is equally and fairly balanced.
- **Establishing Trust.** For relationships to grow, the people involved must begin to trust each other. When you trust someone, you feel that you can rely on that person. You have complete confidence in the other person. To establish trust, friends must approach each other with honesty—about themselves and about their feelings toward the other person. At the same time, they must feel secure that what they reveal about themselves will not be used to hurt them in some way.
- **Achieving Personal Growth.** As relationships develop, they also promote personal growth. When you take responsibility in a relationship, for example, you become a more responsible person in other areas of your life. When you improve your communication skills in a relationship, you can also transfer those skills to other areas of your life.

Maintaining and Improving Relationships The key to maintaining and improving relationships is good communication. Many people think that once they have begun a friendship it will last forever without additional effort. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Even after a relationship appears to be steady and settled, you need to continue the kinds of communication that helped it grow in the first place. When you are in a good relationship, remember to

- Empathize and be sensitive to the other person’s feelings
- Demonstrate your support of the other person in times of need
- Listen to the other person
- Share your feelings
- Speak with honesty, while respecting the other person’s feelings
- Enjoy your relationship

Responding to Others. Much of your time in interpersonal relationships is spent in responding to what others have to say. Those responses should reflect a sensitivity to the feelings and thoughts of others.

Respecting Others

Respect is a feeling of high regard, honor, or esteem that you have for other people. Here are some of the fundamental ways for showing respect.

- **Treat close friends with courtesy.** Don't make the mistake of thinking you can be rude to a friend and get away with it.
- **Respect the other person's opinions.** You may not always agree, but you should recognize that your friend has a right to his or her own opinions.
- **Be tactful.** Even though you may disagree with the other person, you should take care to do so without being offensive. Try to be sensitive to the other person's feelings.
- **Respect the other person's right to be heard.** Be aware of how long you speak, and do not dominate the discussion.

Checking Understanding

Effective responses are thoughtful as well as respectful, and these types of responses are dependent upon a clear understanding of what the other person is saying. A **misunderstanding** is a lack of clear communication that may come about if you

- Assume, or take for granted, that you know what the other person means
- Do not pay close and careful attention to what the other person is saying
- Do not take time to make sure that you understand what is being said.

Questioning and paraphrasing are two techniques for making sure that you understand.

Questioning to be sure. You have been asking questions since you learned to talk. Generally, you ask questions to obtain information or to engage someone in conversation. To communicate effectively person to person, you also ask questions to make sure that you do not misunderstand what the other person is saying. Here are some examples of questions that attempt to clarify.

- "Are you saying that ____?"
- "Do you think that ____?"
- "What did you mean when you said ____?"
- "Would you mind repeating what you just said? I'm not sure I understand."

Paraphrasing to Understand Meaning. Paraphrasing means using your own words to restate what another person has said. By paraphrasing someone's words, you let that person know what you think he or she said. In that way, you give the person a chance correct you if you are mistaken. You can introduce your paraphrase with comments like these:

- "So, what you're saying is ____."
- "I take it that you believe ____."
- "What I heard you say is ____."

Communicating Your Thoughts and Feelings. In addition to responding to what the other person says, you must share things about yourself—your thoughts, your feelings, and your ideas.

Judging What Is Appropriate to Share

Your **private self** is that part of yourself which is most true to your self-concept, while your **public self** is that part of yourself which you choose to share with others. The following suggestions should help you to judge what to share with others.

1. **Increase the level of sharing gradually.** When you first get to know someone, share information about topics that are of general interest—hobbies, sports, and current events. Wait until you have developed an ongoing relationship to talk about your feelings, attitudes, and private thoughts.
2. **Share private information only with someone you trust.** There is some risk involved in telling about yourself, so share your fears, deep feelings, and secrets with those whom you know you can rely on to keep your confidences.
3. **Continue to share only if the other person confides in you.** You may misread someone and tell more about yourself than the other person shares about himself or herself. If that happens, you might want to avoid sharing too much until your friendship has developed into a closer relationship.

Disclosing Your Feelings. It is sometimes difficult to handle the sharing of feelings. Unless you can learn to share feelings with others in a positive way, you will not be able to maintain a relationship of mutual trust.

Avoid Always Withholding Your Feelings. Sometimes it is so uncomfortable to disclose your feelings that you withhold, or keep your feelings inside. Although withholding feelings may be wise in some situations, always doing so can have negative effects on relationships. If you care about someone, make it a point to communicate how you feel about what they say and do.

Avoid Displays of Negative Feelings. People share their feelings not only with words, but also with actions. Cheering at a pep rally, patting a friend on the back, and sharing a hug are all positive displays of emotion. But displays of negative feelings can actually interfere with communication. Slamming a door, sulking, and shouting certainly show feelings, but they don't tell the other person exactly what you are feeling or why. It is much better to describe your feelings than to display them with negative, or aggressive, behavior.

Describe Your Feelings. Instead of withdrawing or displaying your feelings in a negative way, learn to describe them. When you describe your feelings, try to put your feelings into words in a calm, nonjudgmental way. Describing your feelings in this way will give other people knowledge that will be helpful in future interactions with you.

When you describe your feelings, try to describe honestly and accurately, what you are experiencing. To begin with you might find it easier to describe positive feelings. However, as a relationship develops, it becomes important to describe your negative feelings as well. Then, as you experience success and develop trust in the relationship, learn to describe what bothers you about what the other person has said or done. Remember to describe the situation as it affects you and your feelings.

- “When you criticize how I play when I am trying my hardest, I feel defeated.”
- “When you told him about our conversation, I was angry. I didn't want anyone else to know.”
- “I waited for your call before I made plans. I feel left out when you don't let me in on your arrangements.”

Speaking Up for Yourself

Even within caring relationships, people sometimes seem to take advantage of you and to ignore your feelings. It may even seem as if they do not listen to you at all. Sharing your thoughts and feelings under these conditions can be very difficult, but it is sometimes necessary to let another person know exactly what you want.

Psychologists define **assertiveness** as the practice of exercising your personal rights. When you are assertive, you give the reasons why you feel or believe or think as you do and suggest a responsible action from someone in response. It is often difficult for quiet people who normally keep things to themselves to speak up. Asserting yourself does not mean being aggressive, but it does mean letting someone know what you want.

HOW TO ASSERT YOURSELF

1. **Avoid language that can lead to arguments.** Do not threaten or criticize. In fact, do not focus on the other person at all; talk about yourself

2. **Be specific about what you want.** Sometimes you know someone so well that you think the person can read your mind. However, the only way to make sure that the person knows what you want is to say exactly what it is.
3. **Keep a firm but pleasant tone of voice.** Although it is difficult when you are upset, it is very important to control the tone, pitch, and volume of your voice. If you get off to a bad start, stop for a moment and gain control of yourself.

GIVING and ACCEPTING CRITICISM

In any friendship or close relationship there may be a need for **constructive criticism**, criticism that is beneficial and helpful rather than disapproving. Since people, at one time or another, all find criticism difficult to accept, it is important to express and receive criticism with discretion and care. The information in the following chart will help you to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism.

HOW TO GIVE and ACCEPT CRITICISM (always start with the positive)

Giving Criticism

1. **Choose an appropriate time and place.** Try not to criticize someone in front of others. When you discuss a problem, try to choose a time when the other person is relaxed and willing to listen. After you are sure that you have the other person's complete attention, be brief and to the point.
2. **Choose only one or two specific points for criticism.** Do not attempt to recite an entire list of problems. Instead, identify only one, or possibly two, specific actions or statements that you feel need to be changed.
3. **Describe the person's behavior carefully and accurately.** Talk about specific actions, not personality, character, or values. For example, you might say, "I wish you would not interrupt me," rather than "You are the rudest person I know."
4. **Respond to the present, not the past.** Sometimes it is tempting to bring up unresolved, bad feelings from the past and to rehash old arguments in an attempt to resolve them. However, this is usually not very effective in changing behavior.
5. **Try to include ideas for solutions.** It is usually possible to come up with positive suggestions, and such suggestions show the other person that your intentions are positive.

Accepting Criticism

1. **Think of criticism as an opportunity for improvement.** When you receive a negative review from someone, try to see it as a chance to learn something about your behavior that you did not know before. Constructive criticism is in your best interest.
2. **Make sure that you understand what you hear.** Don't jump to conclusions about what you think someone means. If you are confused, ask for clarification.
3. **Recognize those who use constructive criticism.** Since giving constructive criticism is not easy, thank the people who take the time to do so.

Packet # 2 Interpersonal Relationships Questions over Notes

1. What is interpersonal communication?
2. What are the three stages of relationships?
3. When you begin friendships, what are two methods that will help you to build good relationships?
4. What is the importance of trust in a relationship?
5. Why is it important to continue good communication skills as a relationship grows?
6. What are four good ways to show respect to another person in a relationship?
7. What are two methods that can help you to determine whether you understand what another person is saying?
8. What are three techniques for determining what is appropriate to share with someone?

9. What are two positive ways to reveal your feelings to someone else? Why are these methods more effective than withholding feelings or acting them out?
10. List three or four good hints for giving and receiving constructive criticism.