

Guidance Guide

Healthy Communication

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Modeling healthy communication skills is an essential ingredient to raising kids who thrive emotionally, academically and socially. It certainly can be challenging considering the cultural climate that surrounds us today. It's hard to avoid the gossip magazines that line the grocery aisle, the TV's blazing uninformed that now seem to haunt us at airports, restaurants, doctors' offices etc. The use of social media also poses a challenge and the misuse among our young people often stems from poor communication skills.

Communication is learned. We carry the skills we learned from our parents. And now we are the torch carriers. Whether we are aware of it or not, our children are learning, absorbing and integrating how to communicate and navigate relationships from you.

How are you modeling communication?

- Do you find yourself saying yes when you really want to say no?
- Do you gossip?
- Do you speak your truth?
- Do you avoid people because interacting with them would require an uncomfortable conversation?
- Do you know how to speak your truth?
- Do you let things build up internally and then explode?
- Do you avoid talking about your feelings?
- Do you internalize your emotions?
- Do you yell at people and say mean things and later regret it?
- Do you avoid communicating by numbing out with TV, alcohol, shopping, food, exercise, etc.?
- Do you send things/post on social media that you would never say in person?

If you found yourself saying yes to any of these, you are not alone. The good news however is that unhealthy communication patterns can be unlearned. Recognizing your patterns, taking personal responsibility and committing yourself to positive changes can shift the legacy you leave your children. As we all know, it's impossible to be happy if we do not know how to communicate in a way that is clear and productive.

3 Roadblocks to Healthy Communication

Aggressive: This is the "I win, you lose" style. On the extreme end, aggressive people are violent. Bullies fall under this category. People with this style do not listen. They can be controlling and do not invite others to have thoughts, opinions or ideas. They tend to be micromanagers when in a leadership position. Their parenting style is domineering. Name calling would also fall under this category.

Example: "You are such a problem kid. You never listen. You should work harder. What are you... dumb? I mean really, all the other kids in your class have it together. And then there is you. When are you going to grow up? I don't care if you are 9. You should be the best in your class."

"There is no discussion. I am the boss and you will do what I say. Or you're fired."

"You are a loser Dave. Nobody likes you and no one ever will."

Passive: This is the "You win, I lose" form of communication. On the extreme end these individuals

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are victims. Because of their passive behavior they are often referred to as “door mats.” They do not share their thoughts, opinions or ideas. They are often fearful. Individuals with this style put others needs above their own. As a parent, the children often rule the household.

Examples:

“I will do whatever will make you happy. Your happiness is the most important thing in the world to me.”

“My opinion doesn’t matter. I just want my friends to like me.”

“I love helping people and putting a smile on everyone’s face! It’s much more fun to buy and do things for everyone else. I can’t stand spending money on me. It just doesn’t feel right. It’s simply selfish.”

Passive Aggressive: “I lose, you lose.” Passive tendencies inevitably lead to passive aggressiveness. Because passive people struggle with communicating their needs, they are often angry and resentful which then leads to passive aggressive behavior. On the extreme end, people with this style can engage in cyberbullying, talking behind peoples back, spreading rumors and creating drama. Being chronically late, pushing people’s buttons, avoiding others, not returning phone calls, ignoring others, sarcasm and “suffering in silence (which can lead to ongoing illness)” or out loud can also be consequences.

Examples:

“John can’t come to my birthday party. I just won’t talk to him for a week. That will show him.”

“Must be nice to be going to Florida for vacation. I guess I will stay here in the cold. Some of us have to work for a living.”

“Dan’s kid is out of control. He should take some parenting classes, clearly he has no idea what he is doing.”

“I can’t stand Chris. Such a teacher’s pet. I am going to post something nasty on Instagram. Maybe people won’t think she’s “all that” anymore.”

“I am so nice to everyone. I sacrifice so much time and energy. And no one even thanks me. People are so inconsiderate. No one ever appreciates me.”

Helpful Communication Style

Assertiveness: “I win, you win” style of communicating. People who are assertive are inclusive. They take personal responsibility and acknowledge others. They state their needs/concerns in a way that is respectful. They do not blame others however they do discuss how they were impacted by others. They speak their truth and also listen to the person they are talking too. It is a two way conversation that remains respectful.

Assertiveness Formula:

Acknowledgment/Appreciation: You authentically acknowledge something about the person you are talking to.

When you...clearly state what happened. Be clear and concise. When we talk too much our message can get lost.

The impact was...state the consequences.

I felt/feel....this is the most important part of the step. Most people are more open to listen when people are expressing emotions.

I prefer.....tell the person what you would like. Be clear.

Tips when practicing the Assertiveness Formula:

- Expect yourself to be messy. It sounds a lot easier than it is. The next time you find yourself initiating or engaging in gossip or notice the sarcastic tone in your voice, ask yourself, “is this helpful?”
- Use “I” messages. The minute we move in to “You did this” or “You always” the communication gets lost. It moves in to blaming. Instead refrain from saying “You” and plug in the “I.” “I” connotes personal responsibility.
- You won’t always get the response you want. However at least you communicated your feelings in a healthy way. This can prevent a build-up of resentment. It can also move you in to being more proactive in your life. If we don’t like a situation in our life, it is often indicative that

Erie Day School Motto

May I live each day being mindful of the goodness that surrounds me.

May I always stretch my mind and heart so that I live my life in wisdom and love.

May I be a loyal friend to others and willingly help those in need, and may I always honor and respect the earth of which I am a part.



Erie Day School

Learning today, leading tomorrow.

Erie Day School
September 5, 2014

If you have any questions, comments or additions to the *Guidance Guide*, or know someone that should be included on the email distribution list, please contact Allison Parr-Plasha at 814-452-4273 or via email at aplasha@eriedayschool.com

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things need to change.

- The formula is a guide, but not a “have to.” Use your own words. You don’t always have to use the whole formula.
- People love to be acknowledged. This is always a great way to get people to listen to you.

Examples: “ I really appreciate what a great big brother you are. That’s why I was surprised when you called me “loser” in front of your friends at school this morning. I felt hurt and embarrassed. I had a hard time concentrating on my studies the rest of the day. Please don’t say to me, especially when we are at school.”

“I have always looked at you as a good friend. I was shocked to see that you posted something nasty about me on Instagram. I felt hurt and confused. I spent a big part of my night last night in tears. In the future, I would prefer that you talk to me in person if I have upset you. “

“I am honored that you asked me to join your committee. However, I am not available at this point in my life to take on another commitment. Thank you. “

Healthy communication skills invite us to be more proactive. Poor communication skills keep us stuck. Instead of complaining about a co-worker, partner, family member or a friend, talk to them in a healthy way. If we approach people assertively, positive change is more likely to happen. By modeling this to your children, they will be able to focus on their academic life and social life without being constantly sidetracked by the consequences of toxic communication.

Be gentle with yourself. This is not an easy process. Since starting this article last week, I have caught myself more than several times engaging in communication patterns that were not helpful. Remember, the most selfless thing you can do is self-care. Practicing assertiveness is a part of this regime. Have fun, teach your family and friends these skills and hold each other accountable in a loving way.