

Good and Bad Communication

Good communication has two properties: you express your thoughts and feelings openly and directly, and you encourage the other person to express his or her thoughts and feelings. The ideas and feelings of both people are important.

The list of “characteristics of bad communication” below may help you recognize some bad habits you may have in the way you relate to people, and avoiding these behaviors may help you resolve conflicts.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BAD COMMUNICATION

1. **Truth** – You insist that you are “right” and the other person is “wrong.”
2. **Blame** – You say that the problem is the other person’s fault.
3. **Martyrdom** – You claim that you’re an innocent victim.
4. **Put-down** – You imply that the other person is a loser because he or she “always” or “never” does certain things.
5. **Hopelessness** – You give up and insist there’s no point in trying.
6. **Demandingness** – You say you’re entitled to better treatment but you refuse to ask for what you want in a direct, straightforward way.
7. **Denial** – You insist that you don’t feel angry, hurt, or sad when you really do.
8. **Passive Aggression** – You pout or withdraw or say nothing. You may storm out of the room or slam doors.
9. **Self-blame** – Instead of dealing with the problem, you act as if you’re an awful, terrible person.
10. **Helping** – instead of hearing how depressed, hurt, or angry the other person feels, you try to “solve the problem” or “help” him or her.
11. **Sarcasm** – your words or tone of voice convey tension or hostility which you aren’t openly acknowledging.
12. **Scapegoating** – You suggest that the other person has “a problem” and that you’re sane, happy, and uninvolved in the conflict.
13. **Defensiveness** – You refuse to admit any wrong-doing or imperfection.
14. **Counterattack** – Instead of acknowledging how the other person feels, you respond to their criticism by criticizing them.
15. **Diversion** – Instead of dealing with how you both feel in the here-and-now, you list grievances about past injustices.

Secrets of Good Communication

Listening skills

1. **Disarming:** You find some truth in what the other person is saying, even if you feel convinced that what they are saying is completely wrong, unreasonable, irrational, or unfair.
2. **Empathy:** You put yourself in the other person’s shoes and try to see the world through his or her eyes.
 - a. **Thought empathy:** You paraphrase the other person’s words.
 - b. **Feeling empathy:** You acknowledge how they’re probably feeling, given what they are saying to you.
3. **Inquiry:** You ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.

Self-expression Skills

1. **“I feel” statements.** You express your feelings with “I feel” statements (such as “I feel upset”) rather than with “you” statements (such as “You’re wrong” or “You’re making me furious”).
2. **Stroking:** You find something genuinely positive to say to the other person, even in the heat of battle. This indicates that you respect the other person, even though you may be angry with each other.