

Communication & Boundaries

Levels of communication

Surface: *Daily pleasantries*

- Builds comfort and a sense of safety
- Day-to-day greetings, making initial connections with people

Facts: *Objective information sharing*

- Current events, the weather and sports are some examples
- Personal facts about yourself, age, family structure and height are some examples

Opinions: *Judgement and/or analyzing information or situations*

- Good/Bad, Right/Wrong, Helpful/Unhelpful
- Our interpretations, preferences, values and judgements

Feelings: *Identifying emotions and sharing them openly*

- Becoming curious about our emotional experience
- Identifying and accurately naming our emotions
- Emotions provide information; they are not instructions
- Practicing courage by sharing our emotions

Needs: *Clarity about what we need from ourselves others*

- Identifying what is needed for your physical and emotional well being
- Learning to communicate need respectfully
- Types of needs are: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual

The Anger Iceberg



Anger is an important emotional signal, inviting us to look beneath the surface. Often experienced as a secondary emotion, anger can serve a protective function when more vulnerable emotions feel difficult to recognize or express.

Boundaries: Loving you and loving me

Setting boundaries can be a confusing process. Getting to know ourselves is the first step in being able to set protective limits, i.e. boundaries. Following this process will help you gain clarity and be able to express love for yourself and those around you.

Learn to identify your emotions:

- Identify and accurately name your emotions
- Emotions provide information; they are not instructions
- Anger is a protective emotional experience, please see the Anger Iceberg handout.

Explore your needs:

- Identifying what is needed for your physical and emotional well being
- Learning to communicate your needs respectfully
- Types of needs are: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual

Have a meaningful conversation:

- Be sure you check for appropriate timing
- Share your feelings and needs openly
- Use “I” statements whenever possible
- See example phrasing on the next page

Set limits:

- If a meaningful conversation isn’t effective, boundaries define what YOU will do to protect yourself
- Consider actions you are willing to follow through on, discuss your options with a loved one or a sponsor
- Boundaries are meant to protect your well being, not to control someone else’s behavior.
- See example phrasing on the next page

Meaningful conversation:

I feel _____ when _____.

I need you to _____.

Meaningful conversation with boundary:

I feel _____ when _____.

I need you to _____.

If this situation continues, I will change my behavior by... (explain how you would show up differently).

Practice writing some out:

I feel _____ when _____

I need you to _____

If this situation continues, I will change my behavior by...

I feel _____ when you _____

I need you to do/not do _____

If this situation continues, I will change my behavior by...

Revisit: Be sure to revisit your boundaries from time to time, especially if it seems that they were not effective or if you feel your feelings or needs in the situation have changed. We are allowed to change our minds and adjust our boundaries as we learn and grow in our relationships.

Check in: Check in with yourself about the needs you identified in the second part of the process. Are your needs being met? If not, you now have all the information you need to ensure that they are met. If the person you initially identified is unable to or unwilling to meet your needs, then take the time to find another person or another healthy route to get your needs met. No one person can meet all our needs and it's healthy to have a well-rounded group of supporters that we can reach out to and rely on in a sense of interdependence.

Acknowledge your progress: Take a moment, a deep breathe, and acknowledge the work you have done to go through this process. Knowing ourselves is one of the greatest gifts of this process. Appreciate your progress and remember to reach out for support from others when you struggle in this practice. Setting boundaries is a practice!

How We Listen

Healthy communication includes listening with intention, not just expression. Recognizing how you're listening can help reduce conflict, increase understanding and strengthen meaningful relationships.

Listening to Comprehend: You are working to accurately interpret and gain understanding. The overall goal is to store information you receive so you can recall it later.

Listening to Discern: You are paying close attention to tone of voice, emotions and other subtle cues to better understand another person's experience or assess your own level of safety.

Listening to Analyze: You are carefully evaluating the message you are receiving and asking whether it is accurate, logical, helpful or consistent with the facts.

Listening to Appreciate : You are simply listening to enjoy what you're hearing and to appreciate the experience.

Listening to Support: Your goal is to provide comfort and validation so that the person you're speaking with feels heard, understood and supported – not necessarily to solve problems or issues.

Which listening style do you use most often? Which one is most challenging for you? Talking it over with loved ones can increase our self awareness.