

Ask Your Therapist

By Krishnabai, MSW, LICSW, the Ashby Center for Counseling

How To Communicate: Speaking Clearly

Last month I wrote about how to listen and this month is about how to speak. There are 2 important points to speaking: what you say and how you say it.

Although no formulas work for everyone, there are certain things that do work well for most people. One of them is this: speak in “I” statements. Examples of “I” statements are: “I liked talking with you today”, “I felt mad at you for what you did” and “I want your help with the kids”. Each of these sentences tells the listener something about you. They are clear and easy to understand.

Here are some sentences that start with “I” but are not “I” sentences: “I feel she is a jerk” and “I know you don’t care about your kids”.

Let’s look at “I feel she is a jerk” sentence. First of all, thoughts are not feelings. You may think she is a jerk but you don’t feel it. Secondly, it says nothing about you. If you said “I have been disappointed by her” or “She has lied to me in the past” the unbiased clarity of your experience would show.

Telling someone else what they think or feel is always trouble. Telling someone they don’t care about their kids is not helpful and can only lead to a shouting match. “Yes, I do!” “No, you don’t!” can go on for a long time. However, if you said “I love our kids so I spend time with them and when you don’t choose to make spending time with your kids a priority, it makes me wonder how much you love the kids”, this clearly says the point you want to make. It reveals your assumptions about love (love = spending time together) and asks for information rather than assumptions.

The tone you use in your voice will determine whether or not you are listened to. Most people have played the trick on a pet of saying something unpleasant in a “fun” voice and had the pet respond happily. “I’m going to give you a bath today!” (waggy, waggy tail). It is the same with people. If you say “SO?!!” it sounds sharp. If you say “Sooooo?” you sound as if you are asking a question, not making a statement. Try listening to your tone of voice as you are speaking and discover the attitudes that other people are getting from you. You might be surprised!

Next month: Your Questions

If you want to ask a question that may be answered in a generalized way in a future column, if you would like to read my old columns, or if you want to reach me via the Internet, go to my web site www.Krishnabai.com or email me at csaccfc@aol.com.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information.

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