Conflict can happen in any relationship. In itself, conflict isn’t always a bad thing; how it’s handled, however, can bring people together or tear them apart. Poor communication skills, disagreements, and misunderstandings can be a source of anger and distance. Good communication skills can help build a stronger relationship and happier future. Next time you’re dealing with conflict, keep these tips in mind to help create a more positive outcome.

Positive Ways to Handle Conflict

Stay Focused. Try not to bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, your feelings, understanding one another, and finding a solution.

Listen Carefully. People often think they’re listening, but are really thinking about what they’re going to say when the other person stops talking. Just hear the person out and reflect back what you’ve understood so he or she knows you value what’s been said.

Try To See the Other Person’s Point of View. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. If you don’t understand, ask more questions until you do. Others will be more willing to listen if they feel heard.

Respond to Criticism with Empathy. When someone comes at you with criticism, it’s easy to feel the person is wrong and to get defensive. Criticism is hard to hear, but it’s important to listen to the other person’s pain and respond with empathy. Also, look for what’s true in what the person is saying.

Own What’s Yours. Good communication involves saying when you’re wrong. It often helps the other person do the same, leading you both closer to understanding each other and finding a solution.

Use “I” Messages. Rather than saying things like, “You really messed up here,” begin statements with “I” and make them about yourself and your feelings, such as, “I feel frustrated when this happens.”

Look for Compromise. Instead of trying to win the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody’s needs.

Take a Time-Out. If you feel yourself or the other person starting to get too angry to make any progress, take a break from the discussion. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break.

Don’t Give Up. While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it. If you both approach the situation with a “fix-it” attitude, respect, and a willingness to see the other’s point of view, you can make progress toward resolving the conflict.

Ask For Help If You Need It. If you’ve tried resolving conflict and the situation doesn’t seem to be getting better, it might help to get someone else involved.

• Remember, the goal of good communication skills should be finding a solution that pleases both people, not winning the argument or being right.
• If you’re having a conflict in a romantic relationship, it helps to hold hands or be touching as you talk.
• Keep in mind it’s important to remain respectful of other people, even if you don’t like their actions.
Negative Ways to Handle Conflict

Avoiding Conflict Altogether. Some people don’t say anything to the other person until they’re ready to explode, and then blurt it out in an angry, hurtful way. Instead of avoiding it, talk through conflicts when they happen.

Being Defensive. Defensive people deny doing anything wrong and avoid looking at the possibility that they could be a part of a problem.

Overgeneralizing. Avoid starting sentences with, “You always…” and “You never…” as in, “You always come home late!” or “You never do what I want to do!”

Being Right. Don’t demand the other person see things the way you do, and don’t take it as a personal attack if they have a different opinion. Look for a compromise or agree to disagree, and remember that there’s not always a right or a wrong; two points of view can both be valid.

Psychoanalyzing and Mind-Reading. Instead of asking about the other person’s thoughts and feelings, people sometimes assume that they know what the other person is thinking and feeling. This can create hostility and misunderstandings.

Forgetting to Listen. Some people interrupt, roll their eyes, and rehearse what they’re going to say next instead of truly listening and trying to understand the other person. Listen and empathize with the other person.

Playing the Blame Game. Some people handle conflict by criticizing and blaming the other person for the situation. Instead, try to view conflict as an opportunity to analyze the situation objectively, assess the needs of both people, and come up with a solution.

Trying to Win the Argument. If you’re making a case for how wrong the other person is, discounting their feelings, and staying stuck in your point of view, you’re not cooperating and working toward a solution.

Making Character Attacks. Sometimes people take any negative action from someone and blow it up into a personality flaw. For example, if someone forgets to put something away, the person may be labeled as inconsiderate and lazy. This creates negative perceptions on both sides. Respect the person, even if you don’t like the behavior.

Stonewalling. When someone wants to discuss troubling issues in the relationship, they may defensively stonewall, or refuse to talk or listen to the other person. This can be seen as disrespect and, in certain situations, even contempt. Try to listen and discuss things in a respectful way.

Huntsman Cancer Institute’s Patient and Family Support team is a resource for more information about communicating with loved ones.

Our team is available Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

To learn more or make an appointment, call 801-585-9755.

www.huntsmancancer.org/pfs