

The ways we communicate

What is communication?

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one person to another. We communicate through:

- body language
- how we listen
- how we talk

Body language tells us a lot

We communicate with others even when we are not speaking. Our body communicates with others, through:

- posture
- facial expressions
- eye contact
- gestures
- touch
- appearances: manners, hygiene
- use of personal space
- tone of voice
- pain behaviours

How we listen says so much about us

Poor Listener

- Inappropriate body language
- Interrupts
- Changes topic
- Thinking of counter argument while person still speaking
- Day dreaming
- Selective listening

Good Listener

- Appropriate body language
- Shows interest
- Clarifies questions
- Appropriate eye contact, facial expressions, no distractions
- Summarize in your own words what you have heard

How we say it helps us talk effectively, through:

- Using 'I' statements
- Checking in with listener
- Giving good feedback
- Appropriate body language and tone of voice



Note: Only about a third of communication is talking.

3 important aspects of effective communication

1. Making statements match intentions
2. Assertiveness
3. Active Listening

1. Making statements match intentions

- Be clear about what you really want to say to others.
- In many interactions, we wish to receive: information, analysis, advice, understanding, reassurance. Make it clear which one(s) you are looking for.

2. Assertiveness

- Gives you the ability to stand up for your rights.
- Means you have the understanding that your truths are not the only valid truths.
- Does not mean always getting your way.

When being assertive, you are:

- Expressing your thoughts and feelings in an open, honest and direct way.
- Communicating your need to others.
- Taking responsibility for your own feelings, thoughts and emotions.
- Compromising and problem-solving communication is a two way street.
- Listening to others.
- Always being respectful.
- Maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries.
- Not manipulating.

Are you passive, aggressive or assertive?

Our attitudes have power and influence on how we communicate. On the next page see how you fit.

	Passive	Aggressive	Assertive
Verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Apologetic words <input type="checkbox"/> Hedging <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive qualifications <input type="checkbox"/> Rambling, disconnected phrases <input type="checkbox"/> At a loss of words <input type="checkbox"/> Failing to say what you really mean <input type="checkbox"/> Use of phrases like "you know"	<input type="checkbox"/> Accusations 'you' messages that blame or label <input type="checkbox"/> 'Loaded' words that incite	<input type="checkbox"/> Direct statement of wants <input type="checkbox"/> Honest statement of feelings <input type="checkbox"/> 'I' messages
Non-verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Hoping someone will guess what you want <input type="checkbox"/> Looking as if you do not mean what you say	<input type="checkbox"/> Exaggerated show of strength <input type="checkbox"/> Sarcastic style <input type="checkbox"/> Air of superiority	<input type="checkbox"/> Attentive and really listening <input type="checkbox"/> General assured manner <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating caring
Voice	<input type="checkbox"/> Weak, hesitant, soft, wavering, mumbling	<input type="checkbox"/> Tense, shrill, loud, shaky, cold, demanding, superior, authoritarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Firm, warm, well controlled, relaxed
Eyes	<input type="checkbox"/> Averted, downcast, teary, pleading	<input type="checkbox"/> Expressionless, narrowed, cold, staring, not really seeing you	<input type="checkbox"/> Open, frank, direct eye contact but no staring
Stance and posture	<input type="checkbox"/> Leaning for support <input type="checkbox"/> Stooped, excessive head nodding	<input type="checkbox"/> Hands on hips, feet apart, stiff and rigid	<input type="checkbox"/> Well-balanced, straight on, erect, relaxed
Hands	<input type="checkbox"/> Fidgety, fluttery, clammy, limp	<input type="checkbox"/> Clenched, abrupt gestures, finger pointing, fist pounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed motions, firm handshakes
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Denies self-worth <input type="checkbox"/> Inhibited <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt, anxious <input type="checkbox"/> Allows others to choose <input type="checkbox"/> Does not achieve desired goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-enhancing at expense of others <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive <input type="checkbox"/> Depreciates others <input type="checkbox"/> Often achieves desired goal by hurting others	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-enhancing <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive <input type="checkbox"/> Feels good about self <input type="checkbox"/> Chooses for self <input type="checkbox"/> May achieved desired goal

Some examples of when to be assertive

- When you need to say no
- When you are uncomfortable with a request
- When expressing your feelings or concerns to others
- When you ask for help
- When advocating for yourself — you stand up for your rights



How you communicate will directly impact how you feel about yourself. Assertive communication improves self-esteem and self-confidence.

By respecting yourself and your needs, others will also start to respect you.

Practice

It takes practice to learn how to express your thoughts and needs. Here are some ways to get started.

Fill in the blanks:

I feel _____ when you _____
because _____ I need _____.

I feel: label the feelings: are you frustrated? Disappointed? Fearful? Other?

When you: Identify the specific behaviour — forgot to take out the garbage, arrived late for dinner, drove too fast on the highway. This allows the other person to know exactly what you are referring to.

Because: Let them know why the behaviour is a problem for you — they might not know because when I trip over it my pain goes up, because I worry about where you are, because I am nervous in the car.

I need: Let the other person know what they can do to fix the problem, or meet your need — you to take out the garbage before I get home, you to call or text me when you are going to be late, to slow down and leave more space between cars.

Other phrases that you might find helpful include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I agree• I'd like that• I have a different opinion• May I make a suggestion• I'd like to think about it• I don't appreciate• No• I'm not able to fit that into my schedule• How can we find a solution• I have an issue I would like to talk to you about | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I disagree• Not right now thank you• I think that• I have mixed reactions• I would appreciate• I guess we see it differently• That's unacceptable• Would you be willing to try
I need your help• That does not seem reasonable |
|--|--|

3. Active listening

Active listening is often used to help calm or deescalate many emotional exchanges. It involves truly hearing what someone else is saying. There is no judging, parroting, questioning, supporting, rationalizing or defending. To help understand these terms here is an example:

Suppose your spouse announces, "I'm fed up with how the house always looks." This is a loaded statement because you may already be feeling uneasy about your ability to keep up with things because of a pain problem.

Responses that can escalate the situation:

Judging: You shouldn't feel that way.

Parroting: So you don't like the way the house looks.

Questioning: Really? Do you have any big ideas on how to keep up with it?

Supporting: Things will get better. I'll try harder.

Rationalizing: You've had a hard day at work. Sit down and cool off.

Defending: I do the best I can, but you're never satisfied.

Practice

Some of these statements sound more reasonable than others, but each one ends the discussion early – either by jumping to conclusions, not allowing for more information, or putting off the conversation.

Respond to help the situation: fill in the blanks:

“You sound _____ about _____.”

Example: You sound upset about the housekeeping.

Possible responses could include:

“Oh, it's not just here; it's the chaos at work. I feel so overwhelmed because I can't get things done. I have 2 projects due....”

“You better believe I'm upset. I work all day and I don't like coming home to a messy house.”



With active listening, you buy time and get a better idea of what the other person is feeling. Hence you can make a choice about how you are going to respond.

Setting boundaries

Boundaries

- An invisible barrier between you and other people.
- Limits beyond which you will not go and others are not welcome.

Identify your boundaries

- Identify how you want to be treated/spoken to.
- Decide which behaviours are acceptable/unacceptable and which are more flexible.
- Take notice of your feelings and your pain — they are your guidance system.
- Assert and empower yourself by responding appropriately.

Express your boundaries

- Be clear — educate others in how to act in your presence
- Be assertive — tell others how you expect to be treated
- Express — your emotions appropriately when boundaries are crossed; keeping quiet will only hurt yourself, causing stress and increased pain.

Words for setting boundaries

- I have a problem with that
- I don't want to
- I've decided not to
- This is what I need
- This is hard for me to say
- I'd rather not
- Yes, I do mind
- I'd prefer not to
- It's important to me to

Benefits of setting boundaries

- Healthier relationships with family and friends
- You learn to take care of yourself, no matter what the situation
- You learn to value, trust and listen to yourself
- You become in charge of your own life

Communication and pain

Many people with chronic pain become tired and frustrated when it comes to talking to others, especially when the conversation always seems to be about the pain. Often, people withdraw and isolate themselves to avoid this from happening. Unfortunately, this pushes our loved ones away and leaves us without the love and support we could benefit from.

Here are some suggestions on how to start to work on better communication with those you care about:

1. **Express what you are feeling.** The only way others can begin to understand how you feel is if you tell them. “I feel frustrated that every conversation we have is about my pain, I miss the talks we used to have about _____. Often, people’s actions stem from misguided intentions.
2. **Don’t lie about your pain.** People may not understand that you will always have some degree of pain. When someone close to you asks how you are, you could try “I still have pain, but I’m learning to manage it.” If you respond that you are just fine, they may expect you to do things you are not currently able to do or they will sense you are not being honest and they may feel hurt and rejected.
3. **Ask for help when you need it.** Asking for help is something that is very hard for most people to do. When you ask for help, those around you no longer guess what your needs are, and will be doing something that helps instead of frustrates you.

Remember to say “Thank-you”. When someone offers to help or gives you a compliment. The habit of putting ourselves down or pointing out the negatives promotes feelings of depression and worthlessness.

Ideas for family and friends

Here are some ideas of things you can discuss with your family and friends as a way to open up the lines of communication around your chronic pain.

- 1. Encourage your loved ones to learn more about your pain.**
Chronic pain is very hard to understand, but increased knowledge and awareness will help improve communication, expectations and support on all sides. Perhaps you could recommend a book or an article, bring them to a doctor's appointment, support group, or meet with the social worker while in the program.
- 2. Remind your loved ones that you are more than your pain.** Explain to them how you feel when conversations always gravitate to your pain.
- 3. Clarify your abilities.** Loved ones may assume you are unable to do many things, and they may hover over you. Clarify that you are able to do many things, although you may need to modify the activity. Encourage them to check with you first, before they assume you will not be able to do something.
- 4. Remind them that you are still able to have fun.** You may not be able to do things exactly like you used to, but perhaps you could with some modifications, or you could suggest new activities so that you can still enjoy their company.
- 5. Listen.** Sometimes you will need someone to just listen to what you are thinking and feeling. You can ask your loved ones to just listen without "solving your problems". However, they might remind you to think positively and to use the strategies you learned in the program. Just as you will occasionally need someone to listen to you, they will need you to listen to what they might be going through as well.