



# Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services

2 Oak Street • Norwalk, Ohio 44857 • 419-681-6268

## Positive Family Communication

Families shape individuals throughout their lives, and family communication is the foundation of family life and functioning. It is through communication that families are defined and members learn how to interact with others. When individuals come together to form family relationships, they create a system that is larger and more complex than the sum of its individual members.

Family communication is the mechanism for most early childhood socialization experiences. It is by observing and interacting with family members in childhood that most people learn to communicate and construct their own personal and relational identities as communicators. Early models of interaction become the basis for learned communication skills and lay the groundwork for an individual's future interpersonal interactions.

Families are formed, maintained, and dissolved through the use of communication. It is through communication that we convey our thoughts, feelings, and connection to one another. Family communication helps create and maintain an effective emotional home environment. It also encourages its members to be able to express their emotions, feelings, and concerns in a healthy way.

*Communication is the basic building block of our relationships and developing good communication skills is critical for successful relationships, whether it is parent, child, spouse, or sibling relationship.*

### **Family communication is synonymous with well-being**

Most conflicts and problems that arise between family members are caused by miscommunication or a lack of communication. If open communication lines aren't maintained, family members are less likely to have the confidence to express themselves which increases the likelihood of misunderstandings and arguments.

Families who lack positive communication skills may experience an increase in feelings of stress, aggression, burnout, blame, and resentment. These feelings over a period of time can negatively impact our wellbeing and damage relationships.

On the other hand, a family that manages to establish positive communication patterns at home will be able to resolve conflicts in a more effective and less harmful way. In addition, interpersonal relationships will improve, as family members will feel supported and understood by one another.

Families who possess strong and positive communication skills are more likely to form strong and trusting bonds between parents and children and create a network of trust and reliance on one another in good times as well as tough times. Positive communication is respectful, open, honest, straightforward, and kind.

Below are some ways to increase positive family communication:

**Listen.** It's easy to say we are going to listen and even think we are listening well, but actually listening and hearing what other people say can be difficult. It is sometimes challenging but try engaging in active listening. Active listening is when you are not listening to respond but listening to hear and understand.

**Be a communicator.** Talk, talk and talk some more. Really try to be a good and thorough communicator with your child and family. Talk about any changes to your daily routine, how your day was and anything else that is on your mind. Make sure talking goes two ways and ask questions. Talking about positive things instead of only focusing on the negative ones can help establish trusting and open communication, so when negative or emotional issues come up, children know you are willing to listen and communicate.



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**Exercise good nonverbal communication.** Pay attention to the tone and volume of your voice as well as your body language. The tone and volume of your voice can alter the meaning of your words, so use a calm and even tone when speaking. Using closed body language, like crossing your arms or turning away, tells your family member you are not really listening or you are angry or upset, which may prevent them from feeling like they can really share with you. Show them open body language and let them know you are ready to listen.

**Give your full attention.** It's important to commit when you are communicating with your family member. By showing them good eye contact and eliminating distractions, you are showing your family member you value them and are committed to positive communication.

**Don't judge.** Listening nonjudgmentally will allow your family member to really express themselves and be honest. A big part of positive communication is trust, and if you withhold judgement while you are listening, your family member will learn to trust that you will be open and dependable.

**Address issues.** When conflict or other issues arise in your family, address them quickly. Small problems that aren't dealt with often lead to bigger problems. Address any problems that come up early using open and honest communication, and that you can communicate to solve problems in a positive and constructive manner.

**Teach and practice I-statements.** I-statements are a great way to communicate feelings in a respectful and upfront manner. They are also helpful when having difficult discussions or when emotions are high.

*The formula for an I-statement looks like this:*

- I feel (state the feeling/emotion)...when (state the behavior)...because (state why you feel that way). What I want/need is (state the exact behavior that you want to see happen).
- For example, if your child hasn't cleaned up their toys even after you've asked twice, you can say: "I feel frustrated when you choose not to clean up your toys after I asked you to because it makes it difficult for everyone else in the family to get around the house. What I need is for you to listen to my instructions and clean up your toys."

**Model it.** Children learn by watching you and other important adults in their lives. If you show them open and honest communication by participating in it yourself, they are likely to learn it from you. Show them what good communication looks like when you are speaking to a family member, neighbor, wait staff at a restaurant or even the mail carrier.

**Own your mistakes.** Nobody is perfect, so if you find yourself not being a good communicator either with your child or with someone else, own it.

**Talk often.** Nowadays, finding free time to spend with your family has become increasingly challenging. However, we shouldn't consider family time as "free time." Instead, you should consider it a responsibility, making it a part of your daily life.

Working towards positive communication with your family early on will help build a strong foundation for the future. When you pay attention to your family member's concerns and wishes, you show them that you care, which makes them feel valued and appreciated at the same time. Striving to establish good family communication brings numerous benefits. Overall it helps improve relationships, it makes the family members trust each other more, it increases each family member's self-esteem and family satisfaction, and leads to better problem-solving.

Sources: <https://www.udel.edu/canr/cooperative-extension/fact-sheets/communications-skills-your-family/>

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