

Tips for effective communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

We may need to be practicing social distancing & self-isolation, but now more than ever we need to be able to talk about how we feel & support each other during these unprecedented times. Communication is the key. However, given we are all feeling the stress & strain of having our daily routines turned upside down, it can be difficult to maintain a sense of calm & be able to really communicate in an optimal way.

The following is designed to help you make the most of the support you have by communicating in an effective way:

Levelling: *“If you have something to say, say it”*



Being on the level means being honest about what you think, how you feel & what you want & need. In essence it refers to being open about what is on your mind, rather than bottling it up.

Levelling or XYZ statements are a useful way of expressing how you feel in a non-threatening & non-accusatory way. It takes the form of *“I feel X when you do Y in situation Z”*

Examples:

- “I feel angry that you don’t wash your hands when you come in the house”
- “I am feeling really scared about our financial situation. I know you say not to worry but I can’t help how I feel”
- “I feel as though you are putting money over the health & safety of our family by continuing to go to work & be around people”
- “I’m afraid I will get sick & I won’t be able to look after the kids”
- “I am feeling really unsure as to whether or not we should let the kids continue to go to school”

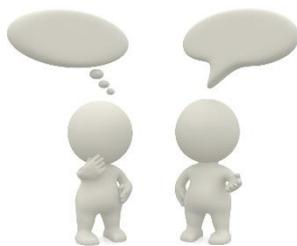
The general idea is to say how you feel in a direct, concise & non-threatening way. This lends itself for the start of a potentially fruitful conversation.

Listening: *“Are you really listening or waiting for your turn to speak?”*

Communication cannot exist if you are not really paying attention to what is being said. If someone is telling you what they think & how they feel, make sure you pay attention. Set aside whatever it is you are doing; look at them & let them know you are listening. Show them you are listening. Tell them you are listening.



Understanding: *“Don’t assume you have understood what’s been said. Think about it”*



It’s one thing to pay attention & hear what someone is saying, it’s another to accurately interpret & understand what has been said. Miscommunication & misunderstanding often occurs when we fail to correctly interpret what has been said, especially if the levelling statement is layered with strong emotions.

Reflecting statements can be useful in helping us to accurately interpret what has been said. This involves “reflecting back” what you have heard. For example:

Levelling statement: “I understand it’s easier for you to work from the office, but I am feeling scared that you will catch the COVID-19 virus if you keep going to work, instead of working from home. I would rather you stayed home.”

Reflecting statement: “It sounds like you are scared I will get sick if I keep working from the office.”

Many people find reflecting statements are artificial & overly contrived. Remember you don’t have a precise prescription to follow. It’s more about the general ideas & principles governing how you act & what you say.

Validating: *“We all need to feel heard & understood”*

Validating refers to acknowledging how someone feels whether you agree or not with what they have said. It is considered to be the hallmark characteristic of a balanced & healthy relationship. It goes without saying that we are inevitably going to disagree with each other & share different opinions, feelings & needs. Before we can try & find a solution to our differing points of view, we need to be able to respect how others are feeling.



Validating statement: “I can hear that you are scared that I will get sick if I keep going to work & you would rather, I stay at home. I realise this makes you feel anxious. But I feel I need to keep working right now & that it is safe to do so”.

Remember:

- The time to level is when you are feeling something strong & of significance
- The time to listen is when someone is levelling with you
- It is always the time to be understanding
- It is always the time to validate others for how they feel