

Communicating in Conflict

Communication seems like such a basic tool we have as humans. And yet, it is often very difficult to communicate when conflict arises. We have the tendency to avoid talking to someone when we do not agree in order to avoid conflict. Or we may have the tendency to brush aside a relationship instead of having some sort of confrontation. What we need to remember is that conflict is normal, it is going to happen, and we need to deal with it when it occurs in an appropriate way.

There are some simple tools we can use to help us deal with conflict effectively. The first tool is the "I statements." Let's pretend that your friend listens to their music loudly and doesn't seem to get your hints about turning their music down. Think about how you feel about the situation and start with that. You might say "I feel annoyed..." The focus needs to be on your own feelings and not the other person's behavior. The next step is to verbalize the situation that made you feel annoyed. "I feel annoyed when the music is so loud I can't seem to concentrate on my work." You might follow that statement with a follow-up question: "Would you mind lowering your stereo between the hours of 6 – 8 so I can concentrate better?" Chances are, your friend will be willing to help you out because of your focus on your feelings and not your friend's faults. If you had started out talking to your friend by saying "You are playing your music too loudly and it is driving me crazy!" you might hurt your friendship.

The use of I statements may seem unnatural at first, but it enables the speaker to take the responsibility of his own feelings and does not make the listener feel as if someone was pointing a finger at their difficult behavior.

Try it today: it may just help you deal with conflict in a more positive way!

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