

General information about communication within the family

- Definition: exchange of information, thoughts, feelings, and messages among members of a family ; non-verbal and verbal forms of communication
- Important aspects
 - Fundamental role in shaping family dynamics, relationships, and overall well-being
 - Expressing love and affection: Verbal affirmations, hugs, and other non-verbal displays of affection ; essential for nurturing emotional bonds within the family.
 - Emotional support: seek comfort, encouragement, and understanding during challenging times
 - Family communication as a tool for problem solving: address issues and solve problems ; discussing conflicts, making decisions, and finding compromises
 - Communication within the family is influenced by cultural and social norms: vary widely among families ; how family members express themselves and interact with one another

Reasons that prevent communication within the family

- Lack of time: Busy schedules, work, extracurricular activities
- External stressors: Financial problems, work-related stress, health issues
- Poor listening skills: Not pay full attention, interrupt each other, fail to understand underlying emotions
- Misunderstandings, maybe also due to generational differences
- Emotional barriers: Fear, anger, embarrassment ; withhold feelings to avoid confrontation, judgement, abandonment ; fear of assumptions and stereotypes
- Lack of trust: Due to betrayals, broken promises creates a hesitance to open up and share thoughts/feelings
- Stonewalling: A family member withdraws from communication and gives the “silent treatment” ; can be hurtful and prevent the resolution of conflicts
- Ignoring or avoiding issues: Can lead to a buildup of resentment and frustration ; can damage relationships over time
- When children are forced to take on adult responsibilities or serve as emotional support for parents

How is communication within the family improved?

- Active listening: Giving full attention, avoiding interruptions, asking clarifying questions to ensure understanding and prevent misunderstandings, summarise what you have understood ; no distractions (phones, ...)
- Open and non-judgemental environment: Prevent fear of criticism or ridicule to encourage people to open up ; focus on being empathic
- Regular scheduled family meetings: Discuss important topics, concerns, plans ; ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard and to contribute in decision-making
- Using “I” statements instead of blaming or accusing someone with “you” statements
- Quality time
- Express appreciation to provide validation and acknowledgement
- Staying flexible: adapting to difficult situations and accepting the opinions of others

- Staying calm during conflict to avoid the escalation of the situation and so that one can focus on finding solutions rather than assigning blame or complaining
- Seek professional help if communication problems persist or deeper family issues arise (ex. family therapist or counsellor)
- Respect the boundaries of other people and your own boundaries

The role of the parents:

- Parents should focus on modelling effective communication so that younger family members learn how to communicate well (also goes for all other older family members) ; includes: active listening, not judging, empathising, using "I" instead of "you"
- Encourage children to be open and honest and that it is okay for them to express themselves, even if their opinions differ from the opinion of the parents
- Parents should set clear expectations for respectful and effective communication ; possibility of establishing rules for communication if necessary (ex. No shouting, no insulting, ...)
- Parents should make an effort to spend time with their children ; includes being present at home, not focusing on work
- Celebrate achievements of their children to foster a positives and encouraging atmosphere
- Respect the privacy of their children to build trust and maintain an open line of communication
- Be patient: Should not push their children to speak

Role of the children

- Active participation, including sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences and expressing needs, concerns and their opinions
- Active listenings, including paying attention to other people when they speak
- Participate in family activities to strengthen family bonds and allow for opportunities for communication
- Seek help and guidance from parents when needed
- Show support: Encourage family members and listen to their difficulties and triumphs

Games to play with children to improve family communication:

- Games, in general, help with communication because they encourage teamwork. Through games, people can additionally practise how to act in situations with pressure and competitiveness. People have to practise not using insults, not blaming their teammate if something goes wrong, not treating others with disrespect. Bonding and having fun
- Charades: Acting out words or phrases without speaking ; to improve non-verbal communication and creativity
- Family discussion cards: Create a deck of discussion cards with questions or topics for conversation. Each family member takes turns drawing a card and answering the question or discussing the topic. This can spark meaningful conversations.
- Would you rather: Ask "Would you rather" questions that encourage family members to make choices and explain their reasoning. It allows family members to get to know the opinions and preferences of others.

Conclusion

- Importance of trust and spending time together
- Active listening, empathy, respect and a willingness to understand and support one another
- Healthy communication leads to strong, resilient and harmonious family relationships
- Self reflection
- Games as a way to encourage team-work and practice not insulting/shouting at someone ; respect