

UNDERSTAND FIRST

LESSON NINE

Follow-up *(As a family discuss the assignment for the lesson Traditions.)*

1. What new tradition did our family start?
2. Do we all enjoy the new tradition? If not, let's talk about how we can make it better.

Concept

Good communication is understanding and being understood. In our family we should be able to talk to one another easily. We should know that we can share our feelings in confidence, know that we won't be laughed at, and feel understood.

Trying to first understand before being understood means that we are more interested in others than in ourselves. It means that we really want to communicate, not just tell how we feel.

We can understand in three ways. First, we think about how the other person is feeling, with their life experiences and needs. We try to "be" that person for a moment. Second, we watch their body language (facial expression, posture) for clues which tell us how they're really feeling. Third, we listen to them very carefully, concentrating on what is being said, not on what we're going to say next.

When we make a real effort to understand before we try to be understood, usually our efforts will be appreciated, our communication will improve, and our relationships will become stronger and more loving.

Family Survey Review

Statement #9. **We try to understand one another's feelings.**

- Why is it important to understand one another's feelings?
- When people really try to understand you, how does it make you feel?

Story

To make communication work, we have to understand what people are trying to tell us. Here is the story of a man nobody understood.

A construction worker approached the reception desk in a doctor's office. The receptionist asked him why he was there. "I have shingles," he said. She took down his name, address, medical insurance number, and told him to have a seat.

Fifteen minutes later a nurse came out and asked him what he had. "Shingles," he replied. She took down his height, weight, and a complete medical history and told him to wait in the examining room.

A half hour later, a nurse came in and asked him what he had. "Shingles," he replied again. She took his blood pressure and temperature, then told him to take off his clothes and wait for the doctor.

An hour later, the doctor came in and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles."

The doctor said, "Where?"

He said, "Outside in the truck. Where do you want me to put them?"

Discussion

1. Did the people at the doctor's office assume they knew why the construction worker was there?
2. What could they have done to understand him better?
3. Did the construction worker do a very good job helping the people understand why he was there?
4. What could he have said to be better understood?
5. Are we sometimes like the construction worker in our family by not explaining the details of what we're talking about? Does it cause misunderstandings sometimes?

Activity

This activity teaches how to help people understand us when we communicate. The method is called "I messages." This is how it works:

"I MESSAGES"

1. Start with the word "I."
2. Add what you're thinking, feeling or needing.
3. Explain WHY.

EXAMPLE

"I....."

.....need some help getting these dishes done.....

.....because I have to leave for work."

Now let's all take a turn. Let's each think of one "I message" to share with the family.
Suggestions:

- "I'm feeling upset when you're late, because we all agreed to be home for dinner at 6:30 each night."
- "I appreciate it when you're on time...it shows me that you care about our rules."
- "I feel angry when you disobey, because you know better."
- "I feel sad when you disobey, because you helped make the family rules."
- "It makes me happy to see you share, because I know you're doing the right thing."

Assignment

The first part of the assignment is to make a real effort to understand people (especially family members) before you try to be understood. Also, read the following:

ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO PRACTICE

It's not always WHAT is said, but HOW it's said, that creates happiness or unhappiness.

SAY

"I've noticed that sometimes you...."
 "I feel upset when you..."
 "Help me understand what you're thinking...."
 "You seem upset..."
 "I'm feeling annoyed when you..."
 "I appreciate it when you do...
 but it bothers me when you..."
 "I understand that you're feeling_____,
 but I'd like to share with you my thoughts..."

DON'T SAY

"You always" or "You never..."
 "You make me angry when you..."
 "Why do you..."
 "You are angry, so..."
 "I hate it when you..."
 "It bothers me when you..."
 "Listen to me!"

You may also participate in the additional activity and/or read the Additional Solution For Success:

- Who's Who in the Family.
- Communication Skills To Strengthen Family Relationships.

ACTIVITY

WHO'S WHO IN THE FAMILY

Name_____ Age_____ Sex_____

Position in the Family_____

What do you like about being in this position?_____

What don't you like about being in this position?_____

What do you like best about yourself?_____

What would you like to change about yourself?_____

What things do you like best about your family?_____

What things do you wish were different about your family?_____

Thoughts I would like to share with my family:_____

ADDITIONAL SOLUTION FOR SUCCESS

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- 1. Communicate and listen.** Focus on attentive listening and “hear” the feelings behind the words. Parents, listen to your children talk about how things are today. Try to see through their eyes and help them see through yours.
- 2. Affirm and support one another.** Parents, recognize that your role is to guide and influence, and that your child may decide to live differently than you. Allow for differences without withdrawing your love and acceptance.
- 3. Respect each other.** Show respect for one another’s ideas and each person’s contributions to the family.
- 4. Develop trust.** Build a base of friendship and trust with one another. Minimize nagging and yelling; maximize friendly discussion.
- 5. Have a sense of play and humor.** Set aside time for fun with your family such as walks, listening to music, playing games together.
- 6. Share the responsibilities.** Build important skills by having all family members participate in decision-making whenever possible.
- 7. Teach a sense of right and wrong.** Parents, teach your children by setting good examples for them. Make sure your children play a part in making the family rules and deciding on consequences. One way we gain a sense of right and wrong is by experiencing the consequences of a broken rule.
- 8. Nurture rituals and traditions.** Find ways family members can feel important and part of the family structure: sharing chores, cooking, planning a trip; or simply telling family members what makes them special in your family.

9. Foster family table time and talks. Have family meetings where everyone can share their ideas and be heard. Eat dinner without the TV.

10. Admit to and seek help for problems. Don't hesitate to get help. Families are finding help and solutions in support groups and local agencies throughout the country.