

Tips for better communication and conflict resolution

1. Never assume the other person knows there is a problem

What you experience may not be the other person's experience.

2. Nip it the bud

Consider working on the problem sooner rather than later before the situation escalates and turns into a dispute.

3. Plan what you want to say beforehand

If you were the other person, would you be receptive to your words, statements, your email etc? Practice and rehearse by yourself or with a friend before approaching the other person.

4. Talking together face-to-face

As long as you feel safe, try to talk face-to-face. In-person may make your meaning clearer and fix any misunderstandings before they get worse.

5. Respectful Language

Avoid language that contains blame, assumptions, judgements, threats or exaggeration. If the other person becomes hurt, defensive or angry, it will be harder to solve the problem. They will respond better if you stick to explaining how you are feeling and why. Lead (and continue to lead) by example in setting the tone for communication.

6. Take turns when talking together

Give the other person a chance to tell their side of the story. You may not agree with them but let them know you hear what they're saying and that you are glad to be talking to them about it.

7. Written communication

If you feel more comfortable with written communication, it's best to draft what you want to say, leave it 24 hours and then re-read to ensure the content is following these tips. Avoid sending communications in the heat of the moment or being a keyboard warrior.

8. Focus on the problem not the person

What is important is to resolve the issue, not 'fix' the other person. Personal attacks, judgements, blame and ultimatums.

9. Listen to understand

Be prepared to understand and respect the other person's concerns. Now that you have started the conversation, first check you really understand the situation from their perspective and circumstances.

10. Ensure everything is covered

If you take the time to work on a problem, take the time to get it right. Get the whole problem out in the open. Don't leave out the part that seems "less important" or is the hardest to talk about. These are the things that may ruin the solution you come up with.

11. Acknowledge the other person's experience

Every thought and feeling is valid and valuable for you and the other person...and may give you further insight into what has been happening for the other person.

12. Reflect back your understanding

Repeat what you have understood their perspective, thoughts and feelings. Have you understood them? Have they understood you?

Seek clarification and confirmation from the other person to ensure you are understanding the situation.

13. Mutualise the issues

This is our problem to discuss and work on together. Reframe discussions so that everyone works together to come up with 'our' solution. A problem shared is a problem halved.

14. Create a problem-solving atmosphere

Try to make the discussion about the problem, not the people. Show you are open and prepared to listen to ideas for solutions. Two or more people working on a problem together are more likely to succeed than one person telling the other they have to change.

15. Limit people involved

The more people involved in the issues the more complicated the situation and the resolution may become. Gossiping and building negative coalitions creates a mob mentality. When you have resolved the issues with the other person, the people who have not been involved may continue with the dispute and gossiping. This may lead to ongoing and unnecessary conflict.

16. Timing is everything

Pick the right place, right time and enough time to talk. Avoid starting a conversation when the other person is on their way somewhere or you are in a hurry. Make time and space to be able to talk without distraction.

17. Be creative and open to ideas

Brainstorm and generate options for how the situation could be resolved. Test and retest how the idea might meet everyone's needs.

18. Work together on an agreement that will work

Make sure your agreement deals with everyone's issues. One-sided agreements are likely to fail. When you are making an agreement, be specific and try to agree on who is doing what and when. This can help avoid future misunderstandings and disappointments.

19. Don't leave anything out

Once you are communicating positively, don't leave out the issue that seems 'less important' or is the hardest to talk about. Those things are likely to come up later and may ruin the solution you came up with.

20. Acknowledge everyone's efforts

Having difficult conversations can be challenging. Acknowledge everyone's efforts in coming together to talk through the issues, share their perspectives, discuss options for resolution, and develop resolutions.

21. Follow up

Agree to check with each other at a specific time in the future to see how things are going. Talk about what is working and why...and perhaps the areas which need some changes.

22. At first you don't succeed try again

It may take a few attempts using some or all of these steps to get on the right path to better communication and conflict resolution.

23. Find your wise owl!

Seek assistance from someone who can be impartial with their counsel, perspective, and feedback (without fuelling the fire).

For more information about CJC and the contents of this factsheet

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