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# GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION

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## **Get Specific**

Use videotalk. Describe what you are talking about so clearly that the other person could imagine seeing or hearing it on a videotape. If the person can't picture what you are saying or can't imagine hearing it, you aren't being specific enough to ensure that your message will be heard. There is too much room for misinterpretation when you use vague words. Avoid giving your opinions, interpretations, or generalizations when you are having communication problems. These are invitations to misunderstandings and conflicts.

## **Avoid the “Blame Game” or Deciding Who is Really Right**

Relationships are either win/win or lose/lose. If either of you loses, you both lose, because the relationship suffers. While it is tempting to get righteous or prove the other person wrong, it sets up a barrier to understanding and listening. Instead, imagine for a moment that there is another way of seeing the situation that might be different.

## **Be Accountable for What You Say or Do**

Each of us has a choice about what we say and do, no matter how we feel. Don't excuse your behavior or blame it on others or your childhood.

## **Stick with the Recent Past When You Talk about Problems**

It is harder to change the past than the present and the future. People forget and disagree about what happened in the distant past.

## **Acknowledge the Other Person's Feelings and Points of View**

Listening to and acknowledging the other person's feelings and points of view can bypass many arguments and misunderstandings. Don't try to correct them or dispute their points of view or feelings. Just listen. See if you can understand what the other person is trying to communicate. You don't have to agree with what they are saying, but don't dismiss or minimize their feelings or tell them what is wrong with them for feeling that way.

## **Notice and Give the Other Person and Your Relationship Credit for the Good Stuff**

It's all too easy to focus on the problems in relationships. Did the other person talk to you about something he or she would usually have avoided? Give them credit for that, even if you are upset about what they said. Did you two talk out something that you usually would have gotten stuck on? Mention it and acknowledge it to each other.

## **Break Your Patterns**

It takes two to tango, so start doing the fox trot and find out what happens. Change your part of any pattern that isn't working. Do anything that is not cruel, unethical, or distasteful that would be different from what you usually do in the situation. Remember: Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. You can change your part of the pattern and invite the other person to change.