

# COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

## Introduction

Open, honest communication should be part of every healthy relationship. It's okay to get angry in a relationship—everyone does at some point! What's important is to resolve conflict in a healthy way.

It is important to open up the channels of communication between partners. Communicating isn't always easy. Some of the tips that we will discuss in this lesson may feel unnatural or awkward at first, but they will help students communicate better and build healthy relationships.

**As you are discussing this lesson, you should highlight that if someone listening is in an unhealthy or an abusive relationship, they must be careful. Remind them that they know their relationship best and if any of these tips would put them in danger, don't try them.**

## Overview

Students learn how to properly communicate with others through various channels in order to build and sustain healthy relationships

Educators have an opportunity to guide students into understanding what is a healthy versus unhealthy relationship and how to communicate their needs effectively

## Scenario

Recently, you and your partner have been disagreeing a lot, and it often leads to arguments. Every time you try and talk to them about how you're feeling they say it's no big deal, you're overreacting, or they just don't want to argue anymore. You feel that the issues are important and want the chance to say how you feel without having to argue. After a day of not speaking, you text your partner and tell them you want to talk now or the relationship is over. They text back and say they will talk when they're ready.

## Questions

1. Is it ok to communicate by text to try and resolve a conflict? Why or why not?
2. Is not talking at all better than having an argument with your partner? Why or why not?
3. Does anger due to a disagreement excuse using insulting words or behavior?
4. Do you think it is ok to demand an immediate response or threaten to break up with your partner? Why or why not?
5. Is this behavior healthy, unhealthy or abusive?
6. What are healthy and unhealthy ways to communicate during a disagreement?

## Key Themes

For healthier communication, try to:

**Find the Right Time.** If something is bothering you and you would like to have a conversation about it, it can be helpful to find the right time to talk. Try to find a time when both you and your partner are calm and not distracted, stressed or in a rush. You might even consider scheduling a time to talk if one or both of you is really busy!

**Talk Face to Face.** Avoid talking about serious matters or issues in writing. Text messages, letters and emails can be misinterpreted. Talk in person or on the phone so there aren't any unnecessary miscommunications.

**Do Not Attack.** Even when we mean well, we can sometimes come across as harsh because of our word choice. Using "you" can sound like you're attacking, which will make your partner defensive and less receptive to your message. Instead, try using "I" or "we." For example, say "I feel like we haven't been as close lately" instead of "You have been distant with me."

**Be Honest.** Agree to be honest. Sometimes the truth hurts, but it's the key to a healthy relationship. Admit that you aren't always perfect and apologize when you make a mistake instead of making excuses. You will feel better and it will help strengthen your relationship.

**Check Your Body Language.** Make eye contact when speaking face-to-face. Sit up and face your partner. Let your partner know you're listening. Show them you really care. Don't take a phone call, text or play a video game when you're talking. Listen and respond.

**Use the 48 Hour Rule.** If your partner does something that makes you angry, you need to tell them about it. But you don't have to do so right away. If you're still hurt 48 hours later, say something. If not, consider forgetting about it. But remember your partner can't read your mind. If you don't speak up when you're upset, there is no way for them to apologize or change. Once you do mention your hurt feelings and your partner sincerely apologizes, let it go. Don't bring up past issues if they're not relevant.

## How to Communicate if You Are Angry

If you get angry with your partner, here are a few steps to take:

**Stop.** If you get really angry about something, stop, take a step back and breathe. Give yourself time to calm down by watching TV, talking to a friend, playing a video game, taking a walk, listening to some music or whatever helps you relax. Taking a break can keep the situation from getting worse.

**Think.** After you're no longer upset, think about the situation and why you got so angry. Was it how your partner spoke or something they did? Figure out the real problem then think about how to explain your feelings.

**Talk.** Finally, talk to your partner and when you do, follow the tips under Key Themes.

**Listen.** After you tell your partner how you feel, remember to stop talking and listen to what they have to say. You both deserve the opportunity to express how you feel in a safe and healthy environment.

