

## ***Skill #4***

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# ***Communication***

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Here is a quote that sums up the importance of communication in our lives.

*I see Communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on between human beings. Once a human being arrives on earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he/she makes with others and what happens to him/her in the world.*

— Virginia Satir

Did you know that Communication is:

- 7 % Verbal
- 35 % Facial Expression
- 35 % Body Language
- 23 % Tone Of Voice

Communication is simply the sending and receiving of messages, intentional and unintentional, verbal and nonverbal. Being able to communicate well is a skill that most of us have not learned about and yet it is an essential part of good coping. It affects our feelings and our health. In dealing with cancer, it can affect the treatment we receive and our quality of life. No wonder then that communication is basic to every human relationship.

## **Tools For Successful Communication**

### **1. Being Committed**

- Wanting to develop a clear and healthy relationship.

### **2. Allowing Growth**

- Realizing that every relationship is changing and growing.

### **3. Feeling Equal In The Relationship**

- Feeling as if you share a common goal, with equal responsibility and authority.

## Assertive Communication

Another step to good communication involves knowing how to be assertive. There is a clear difference between being assertive and being aggressive. Assertive communication is expressing yourself — your needs, your feelings, perspectives — in a manner which is clear, direct and neither threatening nor attacking.

### *Assumptions*

- Your feelings are legitimate.
- You have the right to ask questions, state feelings.
- It is OK to negotiate for change.
- It is your right to set boundaries, to say “no.”
- You know better than anyone what you think, feel, and want.

Here is a specific technique for good communication in a situation where the other person is disagreeing with you — it may be a child, a spouse, a nurse or doctor, etc.... It works !

- Step 1.** Listen and find some truth in what the other person is saying.
- Step 2.** Listen and put yourself in the other person’s shoes and try to see the world through his or her eyes.
- Step 3.** Listen and ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.
- Step 4.** Find something positive to say to the other person.
- Step 5.** Express your feelings with “I” statements.

*Note how important listening is and how often it is used.*

## About anger

There is always another feeling behind anger. An old proverb says that if you can be patient in one moment of anger, you will escape 100 days of sorrow. Anger is an off-the-mark judgment that affects everyone around in a negative way. When you are angry count to 10; when you are very angry, count to 100. Compare being angry to being assertive.

The most important step in good communication is being able to use "I" statements.

"I" messages have 3 parts:

- I think.
- I feel.
- I want.

"I" Messages Are Used To:

- A. Disclose thoughts, feelings and wants.
- B. Assert self: say yes/no.
- C. Prevent disappointment in the future.

"I" messages are a healthy way, as Shakespeare wrote, "to give sorrow words."

On the next page is an example of how you can turn a message into an "I message" that communicates how you think, and feel and what you want.

Try to avoid blaming others. Try not to use "you" messages.

### **A. Disclosing thoughts, feelings, wants**

eg: "I am frustrated when I trip over school bags in the entrance hall..."

"I need help carrying in the..."

"I want to have 10 minutes to myself before..."

**Exercise: Using “I” messages**

<b>SITUATION</b>	<b>“YOU MESSAGE”</b>	<b>“I MESSAGE”</b>
	Blame	Ownership
Your mother calls everyday to ask you how you are doing.	“You are driving me crazy, — stop asking how I feel.”	“Mom, I feel frustrated having to report about my health everyday. I’m really trying to live a normal life.”

**Fill in an example of your own here:**

<b>SITUATION</b> <i>example</i>	<b>“YOU MESSAGE”</b> <i>example</i>	<b>“I MESSAGE”</b> <i>example</i>

The scenarios with “I” messages let us avoid problems by telling others what our needs are, and how others can best help. You will notice that the message is given in a clear and non-threatening way.

## B. Asserting self: yes/no

How many people say “yes” when they really want to say “no”?  
What is our “yes” worth if we never say “no”?

### **Making And Refusing Requests**

When making requests be clear, specific and factual. In order to appear confident, expect your requests to be accepted. Avoid long apologetic statements...

“Do you suppose... Kind of... Maybe... Perhaps... ”

### **Saying “No”**

**Brevity is crucial.** Be as brief as possible, i.e. give a legitimate reason for your refusal, “I don’t have the time”. Avoid long elaborate explanations, justifications.

**Actually say the word “no” when declining.** The word “no” has more power and is less ambiguous than “well, I just don’t think so...” ,  
“I really can’t just now...” etc.

**Broken record technique.** Repetition and persistence may be necessary. You may have to decline several times before the person “hears” you. It’s not necessary to come up with a new explanation each time; you can use your original reason over and over again.

**Shake your head when saying “no”.** Often people unknowingly nod their heads and smile when they are attempting to decline or refuse ... this is a double message. Make sure your non-verbal gestures mirror your verbal messages.

**Limit the words “I’m sorry” when saying “no”.** Try to be conscious about using this phrase to excuse your refusal or to otherwise weaken your credibility. (Habitual use of this phrase can be distracting to your real intent.)

**Buy time for yourself.** Say, "let me get back to you on that," or "I'll think about it."

#### **Practice:**

Turn to your neighbour or friend and practice declining:

- an invitation to dinner
- being on a committee
- buying something

**C. Preventive I messages: to prevent disappointment in the future**

“I am going out tonight and do not want to find dirty dishes in the sink when I return.”

“I would be so happy to celebrate my birthday next Wednesday by going out to dinner.”

“I would really appreciate getting an early morning phone call on Mother’s Day.”

## Family Communication

How families function is important to health and coping. Good communication is one of the best ways to have a family that functions well.

What is important to you and your family?

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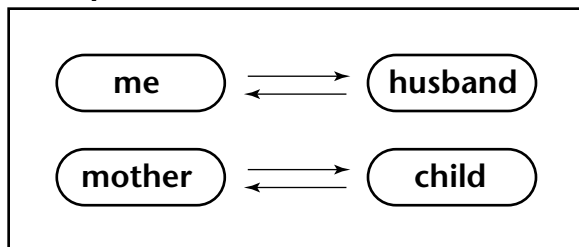
What are your strengths as a family?

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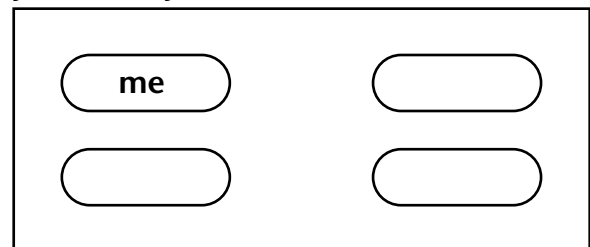
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How do you communicate with each other?  
Read the example, then complete your own diagram.

**example:**



**your family:**



"me" and my husband talk freely to each other. I don't communicate as easily with my mother or my child, but there is good communication between the two of them.

Who in your family is most supportive to you?

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Family functioning is determined by three factors:

- how cohesive or "together" the members of the family feel, and how they support each other.
- how members can express what they feel and think.
- how problems are talked about together and solved.

Good family communication is an important part of good coping.

***Practice your communication skills at home too!***

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## **Doctor-Patient Communication**

Remember to use the strategies in this section in the important relationship between your doctor and you !!! Here are more tips;

1. Write down a few questions or make a list of what you want to talk about. This can be your "prompt sheet."
2. Let the doctor know what is most important to you. He/she needs to know to help him/her choose the best treatments with you.
3. Ask a friend or family member to be with you to take notes.
4. Ask your most important questions first.
5. If you don't understand, ask your doctor to repeat in a way that is clearer to you.
6. Take a small tape recorder with you and tell your doctor you would like to record the visit to help you remember.
7. Regard your doctor as your ally and partner.

*Following are some assertive rights which we have:*

## **Assertive Bill Of Rights**

### *I have the right...*

To be responsible for my own life.

To accept and respect myself and others.

To feel happy, satisfied, and to allow inner peace.

To take good care of my whole being; my body, my mind and my spirit.

To be imperfect.

To be aware of and to fulfill my own needs.

To have dreams, goals and ideals... and to make them happen.

To have and to express all my emotions.

To tell others how I want to be treated.

To allow people to help me without feeling guilty, unworthy or dependent.

To set my own priorities about my use of time, money, space and energy.

To get what I pay for.

To have healthy, life-enhancing relationships, where clear communication is valued and to make conscious decisions to change relationships.

To change, emerge, expand in new directions.

To have my own beliefs, ideas, values without apology to anyone.

To live in the present moment, free of guilt about the past and worry about the future.

To relax, to let go... and "DO NOTHING."

...and to remember that when I accept these as my rights,  
I also accept them as rights of others!

*Adapted from POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES  
123 Queen St. West, Brampton, Ontario, L6Y 1M3*

# S U M M A R Y

## ***Skill # 4 Communication Skills***

1. "I" messages start with "I" \_\_\_\_\_, or "I" \_\_\_\_\_, or "I" \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Being assertive means \_\_\_\_\_ yourself in a clear, non-aggressive way.
3. Two tips to use when visiting your doctor are:
  - \* Write down a few \_\_\_\_\_ before your visit  
and \_\_\_\_\_ them with you.
  - \* Let the doctor know what is most \_\_\_\_\_ to you.

*My notes:*