

***This article is adapted from an article that appeared in Homeschooling Today Magazine Sep/Oct 96**

Are You Blocking Effective Communication (Part I)

Dr. Dale Simpson

You hear it everywhere. People say, "we just don't communicate." This situation reflects the typical frustration when two people have difficulty feeling understood and peaceful with each other. Actually, what is going on is not a lack of communication, but almost always a problem in the communication process. In fact, when engaged in a relationship one can really not eliminate communication. Isn't it true that silence can scream at a partner?

In our relationships within the family, strong emotions will be tapped and brought to the surface through a variety of ways. This strong emotion can make it difficult to see one's way through and can make it difficult to keep a steady, healthy communication. Strong emotion also makes it difficult for us to listen effectively and to stay on the course of understanding the other person. Strong emotion can aggravate the fight or flight response and make us become, at the moment, self-protective and self-centered. There are a number of blocks to effective communication we must overcome. Read over the following list and ask yourself how many times you engage in this kind of behavior and whether or not you have thought of it as effective or ineffective communication.

Advice - Advice is best used when it is asked for and after showing understanding of the person. In fact, most people will not ask for advice if they do not feel understood. Many of us assume that when a person shares feelings, we are being asked for advice and that telling people what they need to do is the primary goal of the encounter. This is rarely the case and rarely what the other person needs.

Criticism/Judgment - Criticism and judgment comes from strong emotion that we are not managing effectively. Ask yourself what happens if you feel criticized by someone else. Defenses usually go up and openness to the information goes down. This is an olympic size communication killer.

Use of Absolute Words - Words such as "never", and "always" exaggerate and exaggeration usually inflames emotions. Absolute words often hide the truth since rarely is it the case that something never happens or always happens. It is much better to say "frequently I feel ignored" rather than "you never listen to me."

Twenty Questions - Some people confronted with an issue ask one question after another, trying to get to the facts or uncover who is to blame. This strategy does not work well and should be avoided. A question or two, sincerely trying to understand, that follows the acknowledgment of the person's emotion is the best strategy. "You must be real upset with Mrs. Johnson, your Sunday

School teacher. "What sort of thing happened today?" would be a well-placed question after the acceptance of the emotion.

Talking too much about ourselves - Often when someone shares something in a conversation, the other person says something like "Oh yeah, I felt that way back in 1984" and they tell you their experience. Taking the attention off the other person and drawing it back onto us, is a sure-fire communication stopper if it is right after an initial sharing.

You may wish to review your communication patterns and chase out any habits that are hurting your ability to communicate. Working on communication skills is one of the wisest things you can do since much of life is shaped by the use of words. Stay tuned for part two in the next issue of the Almanac.

Dale Simpson, PhD, is the father of five grown children. As a practicing psychologist for more than 36 years, he has counseled children, teens, adults and couples and is currently practicing in Venice, Florida. Dr. Simpson was a co-founder and publisher of Homeschooling Today Magazine, wrote a column called Inside the Family for the magazine, served as a featured speaker at numerous state homeschooling and parenting conferences, and is the publisher of Learning for Life Press. A Study in Wisdom, Homeschooling for Life, The Easy to Make Paper Airplane Book, and the **Think It, Feel It, Say It Board Game** are published by Learning for Life Press. Sign up for our free newsletter and also drop by for free articles on family life. www.learningforlifepress.com

You may republish this as long as you show author credit and include our webpage.