

## Communication and Conflict Resolution Thoughts and Ideas

Communication is an amazing thing. As a race we have made extraordinary advances in our ability to communicate with each other across vast distances, including outer space! We can sit at our computer and see as well as speak to someone 12,000 miles away. Despite all of the advances in communication the lack of effective communication contributes greatly to relationship breakdown between countries, politicians, neighbours, family members and friends.

*We cannot NOT communicate! Much of our communication is non-verbal so choosing not to say something doesn't mean we are not giving a loud and clear message.*

Communication breakdown between parents and teenagers is very common. Communication breakdown between couples is very common. Virginia Satir defines communication as "The giving and receiving of meaning between any two people". If we held this in mind as we speak we may be less likely to let the barriers to effective communication get in the way.

### **What are some of the barriers?**

Barriers can be varied and related to environmental factors, personal factors, or other. Some environmental factors have to do with noise, setting etc. Some personal factors have to do with filters that we each hear things through. Words will mean different things for different people, and are influenced by their culture, family of origin experiences and their own way of viewing the world. So what leaves one person's mind via their language can seem to do a 360 degree flip in mid-air and arrive in the other person's mind through the channel of their hearing as a totally different event in terms of meaning.

The way we listen has a lot to do with that; we can block listening by preparing our answer to the argument while the other person is speaking. It is impossible to give full attention and therefore effective listening such that we understand the MEANING of what the other person is saying if our mind is focused on what we are going to say next. We can **hear** reasonably well what they are saying at the same time as we are thinking but we are not **listening** and there is a big difference! It might be that you are not so much planning your own response; it might be as simple as wondering where they get their hair done or noticing some physical attribute about them that you like or don't like. I invite you to think about all

of this next time you are in a conversation with someone. **Notice where your mind is.** Is it 100% on what they are saying in an effort to understand the meaning they are making or is it wandering to other matters??

People tend to think that the absence of conflict is a sign of health in a relationship; this is not necessarily so. People will have different ways of seeing things and different ideas and opinions. Speaking about this is important, particularly when it comes to intimate, close relationships. Listening plays a vitally important part in managing conflict. Clarity in your communication is important; no hidden messages. Say what you mean and mean what you say!

### **Some tips for good listening:**

- Know that you have the time to give to the other person; if you are rushed, don't do it, but advise the other person of this and set a more suitable time for you both.
- Respect yourself **and** Respect the other person as being of value and of having something worthwhile to say
- You don't have to agree with the other person; you just have to listen to their point of view as valuable; (listening to theirs doesn't make yours any less valuable!)
- **Listen to Understand : Speak to be understood** (Gurgone,A)

### **When using conflict resolution skills it is important to be fair**

*Below are some tips taken from the video/DVD set produced by Aldo Gurgone of the William St. Family Therapy Centre, Mt Lawley, WA and titled 'Fair Fighting' The DVD set is available for purchase through the Centre by phoning (08) 9227 8038:*

## Don'ts of Fair Fighting

- NO VIOLENCE
- Absolutely NO physical or emotional abuse, hurting, intimidation, menacing or any other action to inflict pain or fear on your partner
- Don't threaten to abandon your partner, or leave your partner in the middle of the fight. You can ask for a time-out, but that's different from abandoning your partner
- Don't bring up past history – stay focused on the issue discussed. Remember that you're trying to resolve the conflict, not push your partner into a hole
- Don't start statements with: "You always..." or "You never..."
- Don't call each other 'names', or 'label' each other. Respect the person you've chosen to share closeness with
- Don't attempt to resolve conflict when under the influence of alcohol, or other drugs. Wait for a time when both of you are able to be there and concentrate properly.

## Do's of Fair Fighting

- ✓ Fight, but fight fair – express yourself, and don't bottle it up
- ✓ Stick to the subject of the argument
- ✓ Say what you think, feel and want, by: "I think..." "I feel..." "I want..."
- ✓ Get used to noise. It's alright for people to speak loudly, as long as both of you are clear that there will be NO ABUSE AND NO VIOLENCE. If one of you becomes fearful then you may need space to get back to a feeling of safety before continuing
- ✓ Repeat back what your partner has said so that your partner knows that you've heard
- ✓ **Respond**, don't **react**. After repeating what you've heard your partner say, respond with your thoughts, feelings, and wants, rather than react by going into a "grown-up tantrum".
- ✓ If you need time or space, you should say so, and then make an agreement on when to resume the 'fight'.

So, best of luck with your ability to learn a new “fight-style’ and that has the potential to contribute in a very positive way to your communication and your relationship well-being.

*Keep tuned in for occasional posts such as the above. We are just launching the website so will update and add more throughout the year. Once again don't hesitate to connect with any of the team if you would like more information about any aspect of what we do or to make an appointment. I leave you with a quote for reflection from the author the late John O'Donohue: “**Put all that you are into the least that you do**”*

**Prepared and written by: Rosemary Watkins; Psychotherapist; Supervisor & Trainer**

References:

Bolton R. (1987) *People Skills – How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts*; Australia: Simon & Schuster

Satir V. (year unknown) *Making Contact*; USA

O'Donohue John. (1998) *Eternal echoes- Exploring Our Hunger To Belong*; London: Tansworld Publishing.

*Disclaimer: The information outlined above is provided as a general guide only. For specific issues and situations pertaining to communication or conflict resolution please contact an appropriately qualified practitioner.*