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Minimising conflict with effective communication

By Lee Hopkins

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Did you know there are 5 types of communication that lead to conflict?

Let's look at them...

Definition of 'Conflict'

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It helps if we first define what we mean by 'conflict'

\* Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two parties, both of whom perceive interference from the other towards achieving their goals

\* A conflict can only exist when both parties are aware of a disagreement

The 5 types of negative communication that lead to conflict

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* Negative communication

We all know a 'Negative Nigel/Nancy' in every team -- they exist and we find it near impossible to remove them. But constant negativity drains the other team members of enthusiasm, energy and self esteem. So Nigel and Nancy need to be confronted with their behaviour.

This can best be achieved if all of the other team members individually feedback the effect of this behaviour on them. An 'I message' is the best approach

for this—such as, "Every time I put forth a suggestion your negativity frustrates me and I find it hard to work with you."

* Blaming communication

Blamers spray blame around, effectively stopping reflection and scrutiny of their performance and behaviour. However, their impact can be reduced by fostering a learning environment, as well as the use of 'I messages', peer pressure and individual feedback.

Find out what the blamer's issues are and try to

address them one by one.

* Superior communication

'Superiors' frequently order people about, direct, advise and moralise. They are also very skilled at withholding information. Such behaviour sets up team members for frustration, resentment and sabotage. But 'superiors' and their behaviour can be addressed with individual assertiveness and 'I messages'

* Dishonest communication

Dishonest communicators frequently fail to practice listening to understand and fail to display empathy. They also display circumlocutory communication — also known as 'talking around the issue, not addressing it'.

It's kind of like casually wandering around the outside edge of a garden when what's really required is to walk confidently through the middle of it. Dishonest communicators also often use royal or imperial 'WE' statements — as in, "We are not amused" — when in reality it is just they who are not amused.

They also deliberately choose to not address unprofessional behaviour or behaviour that is damaging to the team and its mission. All of which leads to a dysfunctional team. But it can be addressed: everyone in the team must insist on open, honest communication, foster mutual respect, stop blaming, bullying and harassment.

* Selective communication

Selective communicators only tell what they think others need to know, hence keeping themselves in a position of power over the other team members. Such behaviour can be effectively addressed through assertive requests for having access to all the information.

The importance of a team's values to communication

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There are negative team values that can actually sabotage good communication within a team. For example:

"As long as I do a good job that's all that matters to me" undermines team cohesiveness and co-operation.

"Problems are the result of other people's mistakes" is also unhealthy.

"If someone 'stuffs up' it's their problem" is really not helpful to anyone.

Such values induce competition, not co-operation and collaboration. These team values destroy teamwork!

Positive team values

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There are 5 key values that aid co-operation and cohesiveness within a team:

* We are all in this together

The performance of the team is seen as more important than individual performance. Note that blaming styles of communication lead to individual performance becoming the paramount object, resulting in little or no team work.

* No member is more important than another

When individuals consider themselves more important than another ('superior communication') then communication breaks down and competition takes over. But when everyone is seen as an equal, communication is open and there are high levels of co-operation and collaboration.

* Open, honest communication is essential

When you are thinking of a reply, instead of really listening to the other, you are engaging in 'dishonest communication'. Similarly, when you see something done that is not acceptable but you 'are polite' and ignore it you are equally being dishonest with your communication.

There is no room for dishonest communication in teams.

Open and honest communication requires the use of listening and empathy. Listening to understand gives us the other person's perspective—it allows us to hear their experience. Empathy reduces the need to judge the behaviours and beliefs of others. By listening and empathising we model open and honest communication.

* Everyone needs open access to information
Information facilitates collaboration and co-operation, and effective decision-making requires all the information. Decision-making always has an element of uncertainty attached to it, but having all the information available makes the decision-making easier.

* We all need to focus on the team's goals, aims and mission
Without a clear and sustained focus minor distractions become major blockages.

Managing personal criticism

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It is always discomfoting to be on the receiving end of criticism. It hurts! Ouch!

But there are ways of managing your feelings when someone 'has a go at you'.

#### 1. Listen to understand:

Listen with your ears, your eyes and your senses

Engage your mind and disengage your emotions — pack them up (remember, YOU are in control of what you think and feel)

Be flexible and accommodate another view of the problem or issue

Evaluate, discriminate and judge the decision you make

2. Don't go into 'defensive' mode

3. Use an 'I message' — such as, "When I am just simply criticised I feel angry and hurt and disregard the information. However, I would welcome constructive feedback."

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## **How to Stop Divorce Parental Conflict from Bursting?**

**By Ruben Francia**

It is not the divorce but the conflict arising after divorce the culprit of most psychological–adjustment problems the children are having. So, how to stop the post–divorce parental conflict from bursting must be given a premium importance by parents who want to have a healthy, happy and successful divorced children.

First let us identify the source of most post–divorce parental conflict. It is only when we are able to identify exactly the source of most post–divorce parental conflict that we are able to stop.

It is said that building or maintaining regular communication with your 'ex' is one of the most important keys to successful divorce parenting. If there exist an ineffective communicating relationship between spouses, one may be left the other uninformed of the important matters relative to their children and thus often become the major source of new parental conflict.

Effective parenting after divorce requires effective communication. Even if spouses don't like each other, or disagree on many issues, they still have to work together as a team as far as their children are concerned. Both should know what's going on.

With stronger co–parenting communication, there will be less chance of misunderstandings and conflicts between the ex–spouses — and a better chance of a healthy upbringing for the children.

Here are the five goals you can set to improve co–parenting communication:

1. Have a clear, consistent schedules and rules.
2. Keep each other abreast of any parenting–related developments or important issues.
3. Set an appointment to speak with your ex about any problems, then be polite but firm while trying to solve them.

4. Develop a trust level between each other.
5. Be civil and reasonable at all times.

To keep communication healthy, use these guidelines when you communicate in person with your 'ex'.

1. Be consistent. Make sure your facial expressions and body language are consistent with your words.
2. Relax. If your emotions become too overwhelming, learn to relax and breathe slowly or ask that the conversation be continued later. Leave if you have to.
3. Bring a friend. If in the past talking to your 'ex' has resulted in violence or verbal attack, take another person with you.
4. Back off. If your 'ex' is emotionally closed, back off. Keep on talking and explaining will get angry while your 'ex' gets irritated. Just wait for a better time or write a letter. Letters are a perfect option for communicating clearly and without emotions. They also allow the other person time to digest what you say.
5. Bounce it back. If your 'ex' attacks you verbally, reply, "I refuse to receive that. I need to be respected in this conversation and, if you're not able to do that right now, we should continue this later." Don't act snotty, superior, or self-righteous. Be kind. If your 'ex' continues to bait you into an argument, leave calmly and quietly.

Remember your children's welfare must always be your first priority. Think about the long-term effects on your children of everything you and your ex say and do. Follow the above goals and guidelines. Strive to improve your co-parenting communication then you can create the best possible co-parenting relation. Do all these for your children sake.

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Ruben Francia is an author of an indispensable divorce parenting guide ebook, entitled "101 Ways To Raise Your 'Divorced' Children To Success". Discover the ways to raising healthy, happy and successful children even if you're divorced. Visit his web site at

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