

Say What You Mean... ..Mean What You Say!

By J. Kristin McIntyre, MS; LPC; NCC

“That’s not what I MEANT!” “I never said that!” “You never listen to me!” “You just don’t understand!” Do these sound like familiar statements to you? In your relationships, are these things that you either find yourself saying or hear others saying to you?

How often in your relationships do you find yourself in a state of irresolvable conflict or avoiding conflict as you fear it will only lead to a huge blow up and you still won’t have a solution in the end?

In your relationships, do you ever pretend nothing is wrong (when it really is) and then grow more and more angry and resentful about the very issue you are trying to hide or avoid?

Healthy communication is not about avoiding conflict or about not having any conflict in the first place, but rather it is about dealing with the conflict constructively. With the concept of “team work” at its core, constructive conflict resolution even has the potential to strengthen relationships. Whether your issue is with a spouse, a co-worker, a friend, or even a supervisor at your job, it helps to think of yourself as being on the same team with the other person. The “opponent” is not the person with whom you have a conflict; the “opponent” is the issue itself.

There are a variety of reasons why people do not communicate in a healthy manner. Often the reasons are rooted in unresolved hurts from the past. A person may have been treated in the past as if his or her needs are insignificant. A person who believes this may become either a passive or an aggressive communicator. Passive communicators are typically afraid to speak up and advocate for their needs and may try to “keep the peace” at any cost. On the other hand, aggressive communicators may tell others what they *should* think or feel, violate the needs of others in attempt to meet their own needs, blame others, and do whatever is necessary to “win” no matter who they hurt in the process.

Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes lies an assertive communicator. A person who communicates assertively is able to clearly state how he or she feels while respecting both the needs of one’s self as well as others. An assertive communicator is straightforward, but not critical, and is able to negotiate for reasonable change. In this manner, an assertive communicator advocates for his or her own needs while simultaneously being respectful of the needs of others.

One of the most important keys to healthy communication is the use of “I statements” and the elimination of “you statements.” For example, instead of saying, “You always interrupt me when I am talking!” try saying, “I feel disrespected when I am interrupted.” By phrasing it the second way, you are avoiding putting the person to whom you are speaking on the defense. Instead of attacking someone else, you are taking responsibility for the part you can own in the interaction: your feelings about the issue.

Healthy relationships are not defined by a lack of conflict, but rather how the conflict is managed. When conflict is managed poorly, the relationship is damaged. When conflict is managed constructively with healthy communication, the relationship can actually be strengthened.



J. Kristin McIntyre is a Licensed Professional Counselor and the owner of All Things New Counseling Services, LLC in Nixa. She will be providing a **free** informational meeting on Healthy Communication at Generation Christian Center at 1864 N. Commerce Drive at the intersection of Highways 160 and CC behind the Pizza Hut and Commerce Bank on the north edge of Nixa on Monday, April 13th at 6:30 pm. This is open to anyone in the community. Please call 848-5574 or send an email kmcintyre@allthingsnewcounseling.com to register, or you can register at the door.