

BELIEFS THAT AID COMMUNICATION

The dance of communication has three steps: showing understanding; asserting your feelings, wants, and limits; and defusing abusive remarks.

- Rephrase others' thoughts, empathize with their feelings, and validate the factors that contribute to those feelings.
- State your emotions in a sentence that starts with "I," make requests that start with the word "Would," and take actions that back up your desires and limits.
- Treat cruel comments with kindness, ask questions that identify the distress that contributes to insults, and use "hypnotic" words that subtly suggest desirable behavior.

If the steps of the "communication dance" are difficult for you, it may be because you are hearing the wrong music. Thoughts such as "I have to make others understand," "My feelings aren't important," and "I must never appear weak or lose" are sure to make you trip. To discover any thoughts that are making you stumble, ask yourself:¹

- What does it mean about me when other people order, yell, complain, or blame?
- What do I think about myself when I express my feelings?
- How do cutting comments make me feel about myself?

Directions: Check off any of the thoughts in the left-hand column that you have in your worse moments. Then, check off the beliefs in the right-hand column that you would like to have when communication is difficult.

Change Thoughts That Hurt into	. . .	Beliefs That Aid Communication
1. I have trouble listening because I think: <input type="checkbox"/> I have to keep others happy, fix their problems, convince them, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> If I don't retaliate or defend myself, I'm weak, a loser, etc.		1. I can listen when I believe: <input type="checkbox"/> I can understand others without having to fix them. <input type="checkbox"/> My power comes from understanding others, not from being understood.
2. It's difficult to express myself when I think: <input type="checkbox"/> My feelings, wants, and limits aren't important. <input type="checkbox"/> If others get upset, it's my fault. I'm a troublemaker or difficult.		2. I can express myself when I believe: <input type="checkbox"/> My feelings and desires need to be known to reach long-lasting, satisfying solutions. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm responsible for my own reactions and others are responsible for theirs.
3. I have trouble defusing abuse when I think: <input type="checkbox"/> If I make mistakes, break some rules, or change my mind, I'm a failure, defective, or a terrible person. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm trapped, powerless, and helpless.		3. I can defuse abuse when I believe: <input type="checkbox"/> I have the right to make mistakes, be illogical, or have mixed emotions. <input type="checkbox"/> I can learn from mistakes. <input type="checkbox"/> I have choices. <input type="checkbox"/> I can handle this.

Identifying communication-enhancing phrases and affirming them regularly will give you the confidence you need to show understanding, express yourself effectively, and defuse verbal abuse. Surprisingly, you do not have to feel good about yourself to communicate powerfully. But the first time you take the tiniest step toward "power communication," you will feel good about yourself!

¹ See EMDR: *The Breakthrough Therapy* by Francine Shapiro (Basic Books, 1997) or *A Guide to Rational Living* by Ellis (Wilshire Book Co., 1997) for further ideas on how thoughts affect emotions.