Communication is important in relationships. We need to talk openly and be good listeners.

Most people can learn how to communicate more effectively.

Share positive feelings about your partner with them.

It is better to act early if you are having difficulties, rather than waiting for the situation to get worse.

Good communication is an important part of all relationships and is an essential part of any healthy partnership. All relationships have ups and downs, but a healthy communication style can make it easier to deal with conflict, and build a stronger and healthier partnership. We often hear how important communication is, but not what it is and how we can use good communication in our relationships.

What is communication?

By definition, communication is the transfer of information from one place to another. In relationships, communication allows you to explain to someone else what you are experiencing and what your needs are. The act of communicating not only helps to meet your needs, but it also helps you to be connected in your relationship.

Communicating clearly in a relationship

Talk to each other. No matter how well you know and love each other, you cannot read your partner’s mind. We need to communicate clearly to avoid misunderstandings that may cause hurt, anger, resentment or confusion.

It takes two people to have a relationship and each person has different communication needs and styles. Couples need to find a way of communicating that suits their relationship. Healthy communication styles require practice and hard work, however communication will never be perfect all the time.

Be clear when communicating with your partner, so that your message can be received and understood. Double check your understanding of what your partner is saying.

When you talk to your partner, try to:

- set aside time to talk without interruption from other people or distractions like phones, computers or television
- think about what you want to say
- be clear about what you want to communicate
- make your message clear, so that your partner hears it accurately and understands what you mean
- talk about what is happening and how it affects you
- talk about what you want, need and feel – use ‘I’ statements such as ‘I need’, ‘I want’ and ‘I feel’
- accept responsibility for your own feelings
- listen to your partner. Put aside your own thoughts for the time being and try to understand their intentions, feelings, needs and wants (this is called empathy)
- share positive feelings with your partner, such as what you appreciate and admire about them, and how important they are to you
- be aware of your tone of voice
- negotiate and remember that you don’t have to be right all the time. If the issue you are having is not that important, sometimes let the issue go, or agree to disagree.

Non-verbal communication

When we communicate, we can say a lot without speaking. Our body posture, tone of voice and the expressions on our face all convey a message. These non-verbal means of communicating can tell the other person how we feel about them.

If our feelings don’t fit with our words, it is often the non-verbal communication that gets ‘heard’ and believed. For example, saying ‘I love you’ to your partner in a flat, bored, tone of voice, gives two very different messages. Notice whether your body language reflects what you are saying.

Listening and communication

Listening is a very important part of effective communication. A good listener can encourage their partner to talk openly and honestly. Tips for good listening include:

- keep comfortable eye contact (where culturally appropriate)
- lean towards the other person and make gestures to show interest and concern
- have an open, non-defensive, fairly relaxed posture with your arms and legs uncrossed
- face the other person – don’t sit or stand sideways
- sit or stand on the same level to avoid looking up to or down on the other person
- avoid distracting gestures such as fidgeting with a pen, glancing at papers, or tapping your feet or fingers

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• be aware that physical barriers, noise or interruptions will make good communication difficult. Mute telephones or other communication devices to ensure you are really listening  
• let the other person speak without interruption  
• show genuine attention and interest  
• use assertive statements like ‘I feel … . . . about … . . .’, ‘What I need is…’  
• be aware of your tone  
• be prepared to take time out if you are feeling really angry about something. It might be better to calm down before you address the issue  
• ask for feedback from the other person on your listening.

**Improving communication in a relationship**

Open and clear communication can be learnt. Some people find it hard to talk and may need time and encouragement to express their views. These people may be good listeners, or they may be people whose actions speak louder than their words.

You can help to improve your communication by:

• building companionship – sharing experiences, interests and concerns with your partner, and showing affection and appreciation  
• sharing intimacy – intimacy is not only a sexual connection. Intimacy is created by having moments of feeling close and attached to your partner. It means being able to comfort and be comforted, and to be open and honest. An act of intimacy can be as simple as bringing your partner a cup of tea because you can tell they are tired  
• being on the same page as your partner. It’s important that you and your partner are both in agreement on key issues in your relationship, such as how finances are distributed, what key goals you have and your parenting styles.

To improve the way you communicate, start by asking questions such as:

• What things cause conflict between you and your partner? Are they because you are not listening to each other?  
• What things bring you happiness and feelings of connection?  
• What things cause you disappointment and pain?  
• What things don’t you talk about and what stops you talking about them?  
• How would you like your communication with your partner to be different?

If possible, ask these questions with your partner and share your responses. Consider, and try, ways to communicate differently. See whether the results improve your communication. When you are more aware of how you communicate, you will be able to have more control over what happens between you. While it may not be easy at first, opening up new areas of communication can lead to a more fulfilling relationship.

**Some things are difficult to communicate**

Most of us find some experiences or topics difficult to talk about. It may be something that is painful or makes us feel uncomfortable. For example, some people find it difficult to express their emotions. It is often the things that cannot be talked about that hurt the most.

If you are having difficulty expressing yourself, or talking with your partner about something, you might find it helps to talk to a counsellor.

**Managing conflict with communication**

• Avoid using the silent treatment.  
• Don’t jump to conclusions. Find out all the facts rather than guessing at motives.  
• Discuss what actually happened. Don’t judge.  
• Learn to understand each other, not to defeat each other.  
• Talk using the future and present tense, not the past tense.  
• Concentrate on the major problem, and don’t get distracted by other minor problems.  
• Talk about the problems that hurt your or your partner’s feelings, then move on to problems about differences in opinions.  
• Use ‘I feel’ statements, not ‘You are’ statements.

**Seeking help for communication issues**

If you can’t seem to improve the communication in your relationship, consider talking with a relationship counsellor. Counsellors are trained to recognise the patterns in a couple’s communication that are causing problems and to help change those patterns.

You could also consider doing a course that is relevant to your relationship. It is better to act early and talk to someone about your concerns, rather than wait until things get worse.

**Where to get help**

- **Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy)** Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- **Relationships Australia** provides counselling, mediation, dispute resolution, relationship and parenting skills education, community support, employee assistance programs and professional training. Services and programs are available nationally Tel. 1300 364 277
- **1800 RESPECT** is the national sexual assault and family violence counselling service for people living in Australia Tel. 1800 737 732
- ** beyondblue** is an independent not-for-profit organisation that provides telephone and online support for depression, anxiety, and related disorders, as well as online resources and information Tel. 1300 22 4636
- **Family Relationship Advice Line**, Australian Government Tel. 1800 050 321
- **GamblingHelp** provides free, anonymous, 24/7 online support, telephone support, self-help tools and information for identifying and dealing with problem gambling Tel. 1800 858 858
- **MensLine Australia** provides national telephone and online support, information and referrals for men with family and relationship concerns Tel. 1300 78 99 78
- **OAS** provides telephone and online support to help lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities work towards better health, including mental

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References


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Relationships

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Relationships basics
- Developing relationships
- Family relationships
- Separation and divorce
- Remarriage and repartnering
- Relationship difficulties
- Violence and abuse
- Work and relationships
- Getting help

Relationships basics

- Relationships – tips for success
  - A good relationship doesn't just happen - you have to work at it...
- About child, family and relationship services (video)
  - Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services...
- Managing a relationship breakdown
  - Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you're feeling, and why. You'll also find...
- Parenting on your own
  - A person can become a single or sole parent for many different reasons. You may have chosen to start a family on your own, you may be separated or divorced, or your partner may have died. As a...
- Relationships and communication
  - Good communication is about the way we talk and listen, and about our body language...
- Relationships - dealing with conflict
  - With the physical and emotional closeness of a partnership, it is inevitable that there is sometimes conflict...
- Relationship support services
  - You may need outside help to resolve problems and ensure your relationship stays healthy and strong...

Developing relationships

- 10 tips for being assertive
  - Practise speaking in an assertive voice... 10 tips for being assertive...
- 10 tips for making new friends
  - Forget about gossip and build strong relationships... 10 tips for making new friends...
- Assertiveness
  - It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity...
- How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)
  - Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process...
- Making friends
  - Friendships are an important part of life, but many of us find it difficult to find, make or keep friends...
Peer pressure
Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life.

Relationships and communication
Good communication is about the way we talk and listen, and about our body language.

Relationships - creating intimacy
Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences that we have as human beings.

Relationships – tips for success
A good relationship doesn't just happen - you have to work at it.

Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)
Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

Family relationships

Happy families
It might be valuable to occasionally evaluate the dynamics of your family to ensure that everyone is as happy as they could be.

10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves...

Children and sibling rivalry
Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age.

Family conflict
It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life.

Managing a relationship breakdown
Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you're feeling, and why. You'll also find...

Parenthood and your relationship
The birth of your first child can significantly change your relationship with your partner and may impact on other relationships.

Parenting on your own
A person can become a single or sole parent for many different reasons. You may have chosen to start a family on your own, you may be separated or divorced, or your partner may have died. As a...

Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services
Provides an overview of family support programs and health services available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Victoria.

Separation and divorce

Family breakdowns - supporting children
Separating parents can help children by giving them honest explanations and emotional support.

Family break ups - tips for children
A family breakup may be even harder for children if they have to move house as a result.

Managing a relationship breakdown
Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you're feeling, and why. You'll also find...

Stepfamilies
Becoming part of a stepfamily involves adjusting to a number of changes.

Remarriage and repartnering

10 tips for happier step-parenting
Give your undivided attention when your child asks for it...

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Managing a relationship breakdown

Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognize how you’re feeling, and why. You’ll also find...

Relationships – remarriage

A step-family will be different from your previous experience of family...

Relationship difficulties

- Making friends
  
  Friendships are an important part of life, but many of us find it difficult to find, make or keep friends...

- Assertiveness
  
  It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity...

- Peer pressure
  
  Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life...

- Is my body normal? (Boys)
  
  Boys’ bodies come in all shapes and sizes. As you get older, and go through puberty, you become more aware of your body and how it compares with others. Boys’ bodies come in all shapes and sizes...

- Is my body normal? (Girls)
  
  Puberty is a time when your body goes through lots of changes. It’s wonderful and exciting, and can sometimes feel overwhelming. This is the time your body changes from being a girl into being a woman...

- Mental health problems - early care helps
  
  If emotional or behavioural problems are disrupting your life, it’s important to seek professional help early...

- Relationships – tips for success
  
  A good relationship doesn’t just happen - you have to work at it...

- About child, family and relationship services (video)
  
  Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services...

- Relationships and communication
  
  Good communication is about the way we talk and listen, and about our body language...

- It's okay to feel sad
  
  Sadness is a feeling that everyone experiences. It is part of life. We can respond to our sadness in ways that help us feel better...

- Pregnancy and your mental health
  
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby...

- Exercise and mood
  
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise...

- Body image - women
  
  The urge to diet or use other dangerous weight loss methods is almost always prompted by feeling unhappy with body shape or size...

- Body image - men
  
  Homosexual men and athletes are particularly vulnerable to poor body image or feeling insecure about their bodies...

- Body image and young people - staying positive (video)
  
  The pressure on young girls and boys to be physically perfect is creating an epidemic of children and teenagers with low self-esteem and negative body image. Reporter Flip Shelton introduces us to the...

- Cognitive behaviour therapy
  
  Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can help you change unhelpful or unhealthy habits of thinking, feeling and behaving...

- Relationship support services

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You may need outside help to resolve problems and ensure your relationship stays healthy and strong.

- Fighting your fears
  Fear is a natural human emotion, and it is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime. What matters most is how you fight your fears, and whether you let them affect your life.

- Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

- Talking through problems
  Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won't take their feelings seriously.

**Violence and abuse**

- Family violence explained
  Perpetrators often make excuses for their violence, for example, blaming alcohol or stress.

- 10 tips for being assertive
  Practise speaking in an assertive voice.

- 10 tips for happier step-parenting
  Give your undivided attention when your child asks for it.

- 10 tips for making new friends
  Forget about gossip and build strong relationships.

- 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves.

- 1800RESPECT
  1800RESPECT is a national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service.

- About child, family and relationship services (video)
  Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services.

- Anger - how it affects people
  Well-managed anger can be a useful emotion that motivates you to make positive changes.

- Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

- Assertiveness
  It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity.

- Breastfeeding and work
  You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family.

- Children and sibling rivalry
  Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age.

- Christmas can be stressful
  The expense of gifts and food, the pressure of shopping, and the expectations of the season can make Christmas an extremely stressful time.

- Family breakups - supporting children
  Separating parents can help children by giving them honest explanations and emotional support.

- Family breakups - tips for children
  A family breakup may be even harder for children if they have to move house as a result.

- Family conflict
  It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life.

- Family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of family violence compared to other women.

- **Family violence and children**
  Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems.

- **Family violence and culturally diverse women**
  All forms of family violence (also called domestic violence) are illegal and unacceptable in Australia. But for women from culturally diverse backgrounds, the situation is complex.

- **Family violence and the LGBTIQ communities**
  Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence. Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as...

**Work and relationships**

- **Breastfeeding and work**
  You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family.

- **Workplace conflict**
  A clash of personalities at work is bad for business, because it can affect productivity and increase absenteeism.

- **Work-related stress**
  Work-related stress causes an increase in sick days and absenteeism, a higher turnover of staff and a drop in productivity.

**Getting help**

- **Family violence services for women**
  Family violence can have an enormous impact on the health of women and their children.

- **Parenting support to help prevent abuse**
  There is a range of non-government agencies available to help families under stress in caring for their children.

- **Relationships Australia**
  Relationships Australia is a nationwide community-based organisation that provides relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

- **What is family violence?**
  Family violence can be physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual or legal abuse. All family violence is illegal and unacceptable.

- **Getting help for someone with a mental illness**
  The sooner a person with a mental illness receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be.

- **Personal and relationship services**
  There are personal and relationship services available to you that offer counselling and relationship advice.

- **About child, family and relationship services (video)**
  Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services.

- **Relationships, family and mental health**
  When you, your partner or someone in your family has a mental illness, it can cause stress and worry for everyone.

- **St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre**
  The St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre offers support, information and referrals to people who are in difficult situations.

- **Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault Forum**
  The 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs) that are spread throughout Victoria support women, men and young people who have been sexually assaulted.

- **Social worker**
  Social workers are trained to help people experiencing a range of issues including family problems, anxiety, depression, crisis and trauma.

- **Victoria Legal Aid**
  Victoria Legal Aid provides free advice to people with legal problems, focusing on criminal law, family law and some civil law matters.
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing or recovering from family violence or sexual assault.

safe steps Family Violence Response Centre
safe steps is a service for women and children experiencing family violence.

Victims of Crime

Victims of crime in Victoria are entitled to free help and may also obtain victims of crime compensation and receive victim support services.

Anger - tips to resolve arguments

There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

Relationship Support Services

You may need outside help to resolve problems and ensure your relationship stays healthy and strong.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

DVRCV provides support, information and referrals to people experiencing family violence.

Men’s Referral Service

The Men’s Referral Service is a free, confidential telephone helpline that offers counselling, advice and support to men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues.

Sexual Assault Crisis Line

SACL is a telephone crisis counselling service for people who have experienced sexual assault.

Related Information

- Relationships – tips for success
  A good relationship doesn't just happen - you have to work at it...
- Relationships - creating intimacy
  Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences that we have as human beings...
- Relationships – remarriage
  A step-family will be different from your previous experience of family...
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Related information on other websites

- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors (AARC) Inc.
- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)
- Relationships Australia.

Content Partner

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: Relationships Australia Victoria

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