

Emotional Communication Strategies Handout

A practical family communication guide for speaking in safer, clearer, and more supportive ways when emotions are strong.

Objective: Learn and practice ways to communicate in a safe, respectful, and supportive manner.

When emotions are strong, it is easy to say things that hurt or to shut down completely. Emotionally safe communication helps every family member feel heard, respected, and understood, even when there is disagreement.

1. Ground Rules for Safe Communication

- Speak one at a time, without interruptions.
- Use respectful language: no insults, yelling, or threats.
- Share from your own perspective, not assumptions about others.
- Allow pause time if emotions become overwhelming.
- End conversations respectfully, even if not fully resolved.

2. Structured Turn-Taking

- One person speaks at a time.
- The listener repeats back the main point they heard.
- The speaker confirms whether they felt understood.
- Then the next person takes their turn.
- Use a timer with an agreed-upon timeframe when helpful.

3. Using "I" Statements

"I" statements help share feelings without blaming or attacking.

I feel ____

when ____

because ____

I need ____

Instead of: "You never listen to me."

Try: "I feel sad when I do not feel heard, because I want to feel close to you. I need us to set aside time to talk without distractions."

4. Setting Boundaries

Boundaries help create safety and respect in conversations. Healthy boundaries protect relationships; they do not hurt them. It is important to establish an agreed-upon timeframe for when the conversation can safely resume.

It is okay to say:

- "I need a break. Let's talk in 20 minutes."
- "That topic feels too overwhelming right now. Can we revisit it later?"
- "I can listen for 10 minutes, then I will need to step away."

5. Practice Activity for the Family

1. Choose one family member to share a small, low-stakes concern.
2. Use structured turn-taking.
3. The speaker uses an "I" statement.
4. The listener reflects back what they heard.
5. Rotate so each person practices being speaker and listener.

6. Reflection Questions

- How did it feel to be listened to without interruption?
- What was hard about using "I" statements?

- How did boundaries help or make things easier?
- What do we want to practice more at home this week?

Remember: Safe communication is a skill. It takes practice, patience, and compassion. The goal is not perfection, but building trust and respect in every conversation.