

Communicating and Relating

Communicating with the people in my life is often very intimidating. How do I build effective communication skills?

Many people agree that communicating with others is scary. In fact, enough books on communication and relationships have been published to fill Butler Library. When it comes to relating with fellow humans, there are a number of important factors to keep in mind:

Communication involves risk

When we communicate, we put ourselves – our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs – out there. By sharing an opinion, we become vulnerable to criticism. However, taking risks about communicating can help ensure that our relationships are meaningful and help us become more assertive.

Barriers to effective communication are numerous

Given the unique nature of individuals, differences in communication styles are natural. Challenges to good communication might include: making assumptions about what is being said, lacking listening skills, and distractions and interruptions. It can be helpful to consider the types of barriers most frequently experienced when communicating and exploring ways to address them.

Communication is not just verbal

Non-verbal communication is as, if not more, important than verbal. We are able to communicate all kinds of messages through posture, facial expressions, and other aspects of body language. For example, non-verbal language cues can be indicative of a person's preferences and boundaries when it comes to touch and space that vary depending on the context (e.g., interacting with strangers, acquaintances, friends, and loved ones). Also consider the way one's affect – flat? animated? – impacts communication.

Navigating through conflict doesn't have to be scary

All relationships experience some degree of conflict. While it can be nerve-racking to find yourself in conflict with another person, confronting one another about an issue can improve the relationship. Open dialogue is the best way to manage conflict and involves an exchange of opinions, ideas, and facts.

If you are interested in building communication skills, seek out workshops or trainings to help you:

- Identify and practice effective communication strategies
- Develop techniques to clearly and confidently express your opinions, values, and emotions
- Identify and practice how to handle difficult or stressful communication situations

Online & Off-Campus Resources	On-Campus Resources
Columbia Health – www.health.columbia.edu Go Ask Alice! – www.goaskalice.columbia.edu Sexual Violence Response – http://health.columbia.edu/services/svprp	After Hours Clinician On Call – 212-854-9797 Counseling & Psychological Services – 212-854-2878 Public Safety – 212-854-5555 (or x99 from a campus phone)

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