Communicate with Love and Understanding

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Use "LUV" when listening:

a) LISTEN with your ears, eyes and heart to understand the other person's feelings. Try to put yourself in his or her place.

b) UNDERSTAND: Repeat back the main ideas in your own words to show understanding. Ask respectful questions.

c) VALIDATE by expressing empathy, even if you disagree. Express confidence in his or her ability to find solutions.

Use "I-Messages" when speaking:

a) Begin with the word, "I" then state your feelings, needs, or thoughts in a respectful way.

b) Describe specifically what you want, or the behavior that bothers you in a non-blaming way.

c) Explain the reasons for your feelings/thinking/desires.

FAMILY GOALS:

1. Use "LUV-Listening" and assertive "I-Messages" when communicating. Avoid "You-Messages." Track progress daily.
2. When communicating, use a respectful tone of voice, banish Communication Boulders, and apologize for mistakes.
3. Hold a family meeting this week following the "Family Meeting Agenda and Rules" handout. Begin with compliments, take notes, serve treats, and have fun.

FAMILY FUN:

During your first family meeting, plan a fun activity for the weekend that everyone can enjoy.

POWER PHRASE:

"LUV-Listening, respectful I-Messages and banishing C-Boulders in our family will help us feel more love and peace.

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Three Easy Communication Skills

Tracking Sheet—Adult

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Good communication skills are essential to have a peaceful, loving family. Learn and practice these skills with your children. Then daily pick one conversation you had with a family member and rate yourself on how well you "LUV-Listened," used "I-Messages," avoided Communication Boulders and showed respect. Use a score of 1–5 (5 being the highest). Ask the other person to also rate you.

1 "LUV-Listen"

LISTEN politely with a true desire to understand other people's ideas and feelings when they talk to you.

UNDERSTAND: Show understanding by nodding your head, asking polite questions, or repeating back the main points to make sure you understand.

VALIDATE the other person's point of view, even if you disagree, by saying, "I see why you feel that way . . ."

2 Use "I-Messages"

I-MESSAGES:

1) Begin with "I," then say how you think or feel.

2) Describe what you want, or the thing that bothers you, without blaming the other person.

3) Explain the reasons for your feelings, ideas, or needs: "I feel . . . when . . . because . . ."

4) Avoid "You" messages, like: "You make me mad when . . ."

3 Show Respect

RESPECT:

1) Use a polite tone of voice.

2) Avoid Communication Boulders. "C-Boulders" are non-respectful ways of speaking each other. (See handout 2-5.)

3) Be assertive, not aggressive or passive.

4) Use the five most important words often: "I love you" and "I'm sorry."

Name:	Date:	Topic of Conversation:	Rate Yourself: *(Top space is for you, bottom for other)*				
			L ISTENED	U NDERSTOOD	V ALIDATED	I-MESSAGES	RESPECTFUL

* KIDS: *If your conversations with a family member are routinely unpleasant, ask a parent to serve as a "Conversation Coach" next time you talk with that person.*

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Three Easy Communication Skills

Tracking Sheet—Teen

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

The words and tone of voice you choose to use greatly affects family relationships. Use this winning formula to help create a happy, loving family: LUV-Listening + I-Messages - Communication Boulders = Happy Family

1 "LUV-Listen"

LISTEN politely with a true desire to understand other people's ideas and feelings when they talk to you.

UNDERSTAND: Show understanding by nodding your head, asking polite questions, or repeating back the main points to make sure you understand.

VALIDATE the other person's point of view, even if you disagree, by saying, "I see why you feel that way . . ."

2 Use "I-Messages"

I-MESSAGES:

1) Begin with "I," then say how you think or feel.

2) Describe what you want, or the thing that bothers you, without blaming the other person.

3) Explain the reasons for your feelings, ideas, or needs: "I feel… when…because…."

4) Avoid "You" messages, like: "You make me mad when…."

3 Show Respect

RESPECT:

1) Use a polite tone of voice.

2) Avoid Communication Boulders. "C-Boulders" are non-respectful ways of speaking each other. (See handout 2-5.)

3) Be assertive, not aggressive or passive.

4) Use the five most important words often: "I love you" and "I'm sorry."

Put a + in the boxes below for each day you remember to LUV-Listen and use respectful I-Messages and avoid Communication Boulders. Put a 0 for the days you forgot.

Name of Family Member	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN

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Three Easy Communication Skills

Tracking Sheet—Child

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Listening politely and talking nice to each other helps create a loving family. It is called "LUV-Listening."

1 "LUV-Listen"

LISTEN politely with a true desire to understand other people's ideas and feelings when they talk to you.

UNDERSTAND: Show understanding by nodding your head, asking polite questions, or repeating back the main points to make sure you understand.

VALIDATE the other person's point of view, even if you disagree, by saying, "I see why you feel that way . . ."

2 Use "I-Messages"

I-MESSAGES:

1) Begin with "I," then say how you think or feel.

2) Describe what you want, or the thing that bothers you, without blaming the other person.

3) Explain the reasons for your feelings, ideas, or needs: "I feel. . . when. . .because. . . ."

4) Avoid "You" messages, like: "You make me mad when. . . ."

3 Show Respect

RESPECT:

1) Use a polite tone of voice.

2) Avoid Communication Boulders. "C-Boulders" are non-respectful ways of speaking each other. (See handout 2-5.)

3) Be assertive, not aggressive or passive.

4) Use the five most important words often: "I love you" and "I'm sorry."

Put a + in the boxes below for each day you remember to LUV-Listen and use respectful I-Messages. Put a 0 for the days you forgot.

Name of Family Member	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN

Draw a happy face in the boxes below for each day you avoided using any "Communication Boulders."

Communication Boulders: yelling, swearing, sarcasm, a cross or angry voice, put-downs, blaming, criticising, or taking offense.

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN

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The Listening Stick*

Taking turns in truly listening

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

LISTENING STICK

I WILL:

1. Give you my full attention
2. Put myself in your place
3. Care about your ideas
4. Value your feelings
5. Comment or nod to show I'm listening
6. Not think about my rebuttal
7. Ask polite questions
8. Repeat back your main ideas
9. Validate your point of view even if I disagree
10. Banish all "C-Boulders"

FOLD ALONG THIS LINE

LISTENING STICK

BOULDERS I WILL BANISH:

1. Sarcasm
2. Put-Downs
3. Crabby Voice
4. Slash vv Burn
5. Hostile Criticism
6. Always-Never
7. Blame Game
8. Mind Reading
9. Flooding
10. Stonewalling
11. Take-A-Fence
12. Dumping

DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut along the outside dotted line around the Listening Sticks.
2. Fold along the center dotted line, with the printed sides facing out.
3. Glue or tape the long side and the top and bottom.
4. Cover the entire surface with clear packing tape so it won't wear out.

When you need to have an important conversation with someone, ask the person when a good time to talk would be. Then ask the person to hold the Listening Stick as you express yourself without blaming, using calm, polite tones and respectful "I-Messages."

The person holding the Listening Stick "LUV-Listens" and summarizes your ideas, feelings, or concerns. If the person's summary wasn't complete or correct say, "That's not quite what I meant;" or "There's more to it. . ." and offer more information or thoughts until the person listening to you correctly summarizes your views. When you feel understood, thank the person and then you hold the stick and "LUV-Listen" while the other person responds. With practice, you will be able to use LUV-Listening in all your conversations without the need for a stick.

**Idea adapted from author John Lundberg,* How to Hug a Porcupine

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Being Assertive Pays Off

Worksheet (one for each family member)

Some people think they have to act angry or aggressive to get what they want. This is not true. Being assertive, instead of aggressive or passive, in your family communication will build loving relationships, help you feel better about yourself, and get you more of what you want in life.

Use this worksheet to notice the differences in attitude, body language, tone of voice, and words in the different ways of communicating. Then fill in the blanks with ideas you can use.

ASSERTIVE

Attitude: Deep respect for self and concern for others

Body Language: Confident, erect posture, good eye contact; respects others' personal space

Voice tone: Calm, polite, firm, controlled

Words: Clear "I-Messages" that say how you feel, express your needs, or make requests without sarcasm or blaming

AGGRESSIVE

Attitude: Concerned mainly for self; willing to get own way by bullying or threatening others

Body Language: Threatening, "in-your-face," confrontational; points fingers, rolls eyes

Voice tone: Loud, angry, dramatic, accusatory, hostile

Words: Argumentative, threatening, abusive, blaming, sarcastic; interrupts a lot

PASSIVE

Attitude: Fearful, lacks self-respect, allows others to dominate. May be hiding anger.

Body Language: Slumped shoulders, no eye contact, withdrawn, shoulder shrugs

Voice tone: Weak, whiney

Words: Fails to express feelings or needs; goes along with the crowd. May say: "Whatever; I guess so; It doesn't matter anyway."

1. Circle the assertive statements. 2. Cross out the ones that are aggressive or passive by putting a large X over them.

I feel annoyed when you put your feet on my desk. Please take them off.

You don't know what you're talking about!

I'm feeling _____ about _____. Can we talk about it?

I guess it will have to be okay.

Get your stupid feet off my desk!

It's really not okay with me to_____. What I need you to do is_____.

No one cares what I think anyway. Or: I guess I'll just have to do it myself.

I see your point of view. Mine's a little different. Here's how I see it: _____.

Think of a family situation that bothers you. Then write what you could say by being assertive.

Situation: _____

Assertive "I-Message": *"I feel* _____ *when* _____"

Request: *"Please* _____"

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Banishing Communication Boulders

a) Delete the "Dirty Dozen" that block love and understanding

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Good communication between family members—where we feel valued, respected and understood—is one of life's great joys. But often Communication Boulders—what we say or how we say it—builds a wall between us and those we love and blocks effective communication. Remove these boulders from your conversations and you'll see an immediate increase in family happiness. Becoming aware is the first step. Make it a family game to notice and name these boulders whenever they roll off of someone's tongue. Soon they'll disappear.

1. Sarcasm

Cutting humor that insults a person's ideas, efforts, or intelligence damages a family member's sense of self and desire to bond. Make a "stop-the-sarcasm" commitment and keep it.

2. Put-Downs

Remarks that mock or put a person down are disrespectful and hinder family bonding. Choose words that build.

3. Crabby-Voice

Cross or angry voice tones cause people to withdraw emotionally, and we get less cooperation. We control our voice tones and can speak calmly and respectfully if we practice. Always use a soft voice when addressing hard issues.

4. Slash and Burn

Yelling, name-calling, insults, or swearing are aggressive and abusive. They render us emotionally unsafe and we lose the love we seek. They have no place in family conversations. Choose to be assertive instead of aggressive.

5. Hostile Criticism

Hostile, insensitive, or harsh criticism demoralizes instead of builds and rarely gets positive results. Avoid these by using the steps in the "How to Give Positive Criticism" handout from Lesson 7.

6. Always-Never

Speaking in absolutes is insulting and usually inaccurate, as there are almost always exceptions. Leave those words out.

7. Blame-Game

Blaming others creates negative feelings and sets people against each other instead of working together. The goal is to fix the problem, not place blame or fight over who is at fault.

8. Mind-Reading

Implying you know a person's thoughts ("You care more about sports than me") is judgmental. Ask questions to seek understanding and use "LUV-Listening" and "I-Messages" instead of making assertions.

9. Flooding

Extra-long comments overwhelm kids and come across as lecturing or nagging. Be brief and to the point, and then ask for feedback—or kids will tune you out.

10. Stonewalling

Stonewalling means refusing to admit or acknowledge a concern when someone brings it up. Denying there is a problem, accusing the other person of a fault to deflect attention from your mistakes, or refusing to see a need for change hinders family bonding. Listen to, acknowledge your part in the problem, and seek solutions to others' concerns.

11. Take Offense

When we feel blamed or misunderstood, we often take offense and our voice tones become defensive, which puts a fence between us and the person we are talking to. If you start to feel defensive, stop yourself. Take a deep breath. Check your tone of voice; and then ask polite questions and use "LUV-Listening" to better understand their view. Or, make assertive "I-Messages" to keep communication going. If things get hostile, take a break and jointly set a time to revisit the issue when you both feel calm.

12. Dumping

Bringing up all the old arguments and injuries is a sure-fire way to kill constructive communication. Stick to the issue at hand. If you have hurtful issues that continue to surface because they haven't been resolved, make an appointment to discuss the troubling issues with the person using the Listening Stick, Safe and Cool Scripts, and Problem Solving and Negotiation skills (Lesson 5). Then put them to rest.

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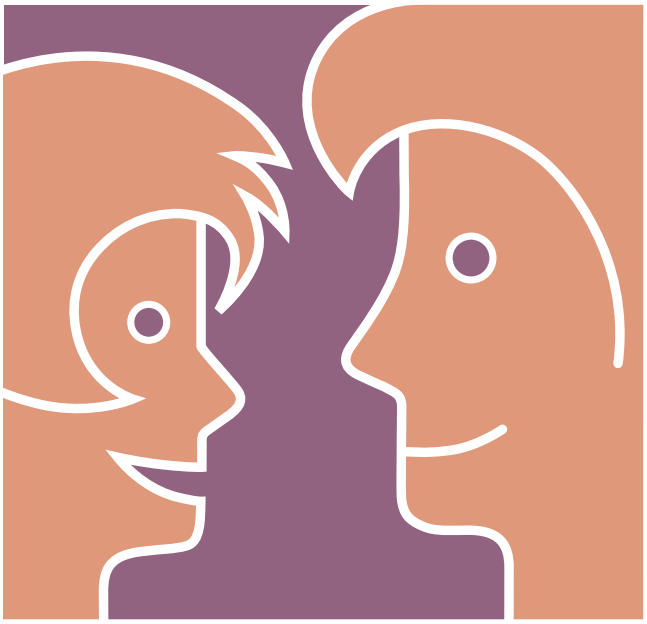
Banishing Communication Boulders

b) A family agreement to sign and post

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Communication Boulders create contention, harm the happy atmosphere, and damage relationships. Here's what to do:



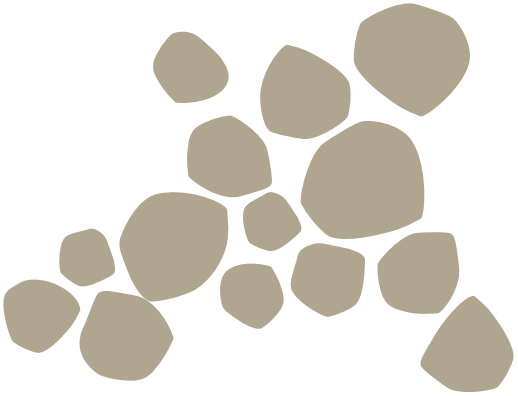
THIS HOME IS BOULDER-FREE

Instead of throwing Communication Boulders when we speak, we will:

- "LUV-Listen"
- Use "I-Messages"
- Show Respect
- Welcome Reminders

WE AGREE TO BANISH:

- ❑ Sarcasm
- ❑ Put-Downs
- ❑ Crabby-Voice
- ❑ Slash and Burn
- ❑ Hostile Criticism
- ❑ Always-Never
- ❑ Blame-Game
- ❑ Mind-Reading
- ❑ Stonewalling
- ❑ Flooding
- ❑ Take Offense
- ❑ Dumping



Signed: _____

_____

_____

_____

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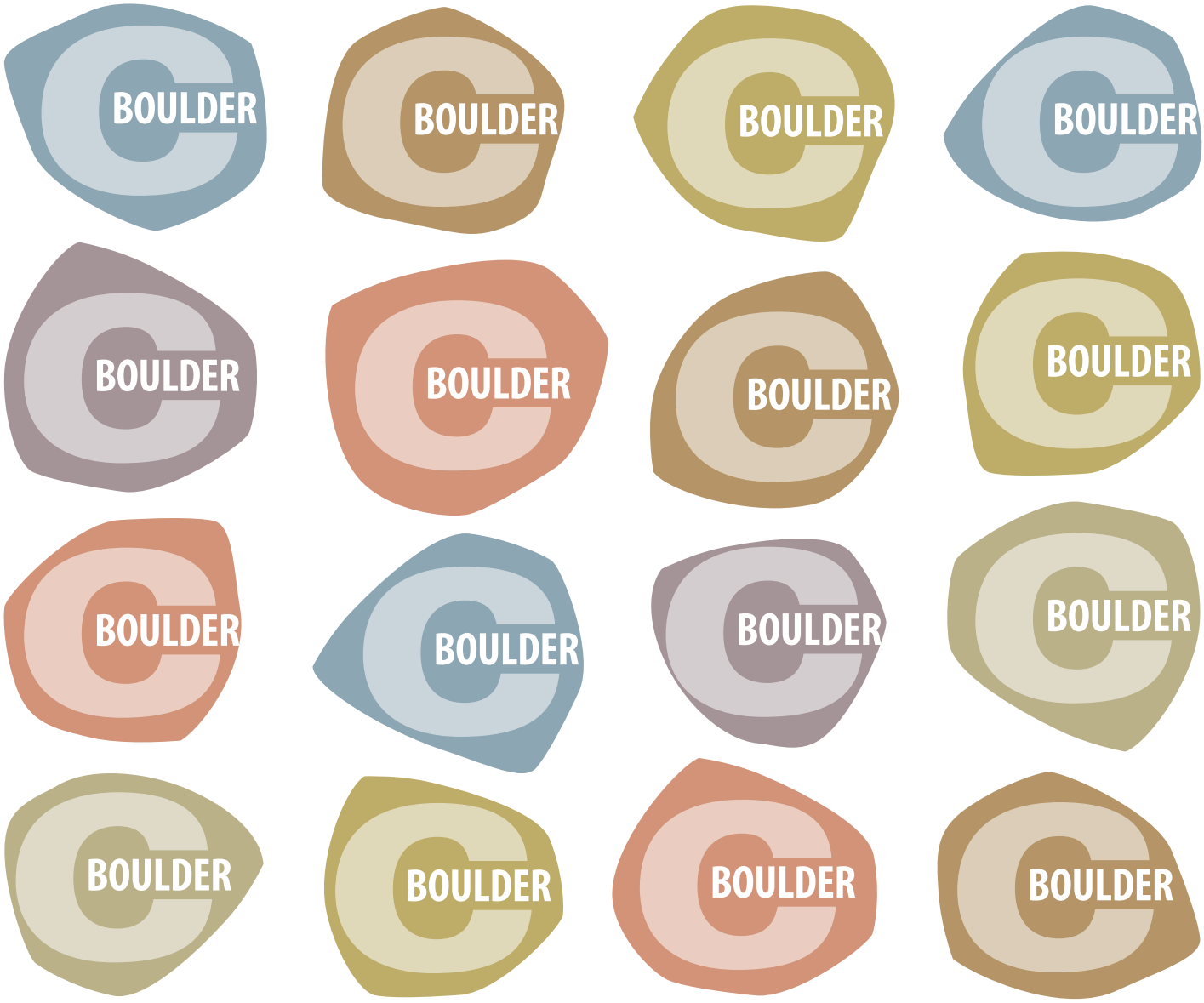
Banishing Communication Boulders Game

c) A fun way to eliminate "C-Boulders" and raise social awareness

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

To help family members notice how their words and voice tones affect others, play this "Banishing the C-Boulder" game. Here's how the C-Boulder game works:

1. Have everyone in the family sign the "Banish the Boulder" handout. Each person should agree that he or she will welcome reminders when he or she forgets and uses a C-Boulder.
2. Cut out the C-Boulder pieces and put them in a bowl where everyone can find them. (You can cover the pieces with clear packing tape so they won't wear out as quickly.)
3. Whenever someone uses a C-Boulder in a conversation, the person listening gives him or her a C-Boulder piece. If the offending person apologizes and says it again nicely, he or she can put the C-Boulder piece back in the bowl. Otherwise, he or she has to keep it until the family meeting. The person with the least C-Boulders wins.



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Family Meeting Agenda and Rules

Planning for health and happiness

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Use this as a guide and worksheet. Pick a set day and time when all family members can attend, like a Sunday evening. Parents can conduct or assign a child to conduct the meeting. Hold the meeting even if only two can attend. Others may join later when they see that it is a positive experience and that things discussed and decided there affect them. Make sure the meeting is positive and meets the needs of family members.

OUR FAMILY MEETING AGENDA			*Date:*
Chairperson:	*Calls on family members to speak, sees that each person's opinion is heard. Ensures the agenda is followed in a timely fashion.*		
Note Taker:	*Writes down main discussion points and decisions either on note paper or on this agenda. Saves notes in binder or notebook.*		
1. Compliments *Take turns mentioning one good thing noticed about each family member that week.*			
2. Coordinating Calendars *Coordinate where each person needs to go, do, or have ready for coming week. It is helpful to have a calendar to write on that all can view.*			
3. Past Business *Note Taker reads and reviews decisions made at the last meeting. Follow up on any new developments.*			
4. New Business *Review chore charts, chore completion, allowances, rules, family activities that are being planned for the week, month, or year.*			
5. Value Message *Teach values such as honesty, kindness, perseverance, etc.*			
6. Next Meeting *When:*	*Chairperson:*	*Note-taker:*	*Message:*
7. Family Fun *Have a treat and/or fun family game to end with good feelings.*			

FAMILY MEETING RULES

1. **USE AN AGENDA,** take notes, and save past agendas for future reference.
2. **ONE PERSON TALKS AT A TIME** using short, respectful "I-messages." No interrupting.
3. **EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE TO TALK,** but no one has to talk.
4. **NO ONE PUTS ANYONE DOWN** or says his or her ideas are dumb.
5. **KEEP IT SHORT AND SWEET:** About twenty minutes and positive. Serve a treat or play a game after.

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Apologies

Learning to apologize and ask for an apology helps heals relationships

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

All of us make mistakes sometimes and say or do things that hurt or offend others. When that happens, we need to take responsibility, admit we did wrong, and say "I'm sorry." A sincere apology removes the "hostile barb" you inflicted, allowing their emotional wounds to heal.

HOW TO APOLOGIZE

1. Admit wrongdoing.
2. Acknowledge that what you did or said was hurtful (even if it wasn't intentional).
3. Express sincere remorse.
4. Commit that you won't do or say it again.*
5. Express willingness to make amends.

Example: "I'm sorry I yelled at you for spilling your juice during breakfast. I'm sure that offended or hurt you. I feel badly about it. What can I do to make it up to you?"

*One way to help you not offend again is to try Positive Practice. Examine what you did or said that caused the hurt and choose a positive opposite of the negative behavior to practice instead. This will help you wire the new, more appropriate behavior into your brain.

WHAT NOT TO DO

if someone expresses hurt at your behavior

1. **Don't deny** there was a problem.
2. **Don't minimize** the person's hurt feelings.
3. **Don't justify** your hurtful behavior.
4. **Don't become offended** at their words.
5. **Don't be too prideful to** apologize.

HOW TO ASK FOR AN APOLOGY

1. Clarify in your mind how and why you feel hurt and how it affected you. Write it down.
2. Examine your own attitudes, words, or behaviors to see if you contributed in any way to the harmful situation, problem, or hurt you experienced. If so, acknowledge it. (This is very unlikely if you experienced a random act of violence.)
3. If you feel the situation is safe to do so, calmly talk to the person privately, or write them a letter, to express how you feel using respectful "I-Messages."

Example: "I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but when you _____, I felt _____. A sincere apology would make it a lot easier for me to feel better towards you."

Example: "I felt really sad and hurt when you _____. It would help me to know that you are sorry and that it won't happen again."

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Forgiveness

Forgiving is an essential skill to find peace, happiness, health and healing

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is giving up the desire for vengeance and retribution, so you can heal. It allows you to free yourself from the emotional pain and resentment you carry as a result of someone's offensive or harmful behavior, so you can feel a sense of freedom and peace, connect with the innate goodness within you, and become your highest and best self. Forgiving does NOT mean you condone, minimize, or excuse the offense. Nor does it mean you have to continue close relations with the person who harmed you or trust them again. It's a gift to yourself and not the offender. Forgiveness frees you from your negative past so you can make a happier future.

"Forgiveness is the powerful assertion that bad things will not ruin your 'today' even though they may have spoiled your past."
—Dr. Fred Luskin , Director of Stanford University's "Forgiveness Project" and author of the book, *Forgive for Good*.

Forgiveness IS...

1. A willingness to give up the anger and pain caused by the offense, so you can feel peace.
2. A gift of freedom for yourself, not something you do for your offender.
3. Taking back power over your own life.
4. Taking responsibility for how you feel.
5. About your healing, not about the person who hurt you.
6. A trainable skill—any one can learn to forgive.
7. A way to gain control over your feelings.
8. A tool to improve your mental and physical health.
9. The key that allows you to become the hero instead of the victim.
10. A choice that everyone can make.

Forgiveness IS NOT...

1. Saying the unkindness or hurt was okay.
2. Excusing people's bad behavior.
3. Denying or minimizing your hurt, or thinking you have to give up having feelings.
4. Releasing the person from making amends.
5. Forgetting that the painful thing happened.
6. A gift for your offender; it is a gift to yourself.

From Forgive for Good*, by Dr. Fred Luskin*

Why Should I Forgive?

Holding on to resentment raises your level of cortisol (a stress hormone in your brain and body), which can damage your health. Resentment also dampens your sense of joy, and inhibits you from accomplishing your highest goals.

How Do I Forgive? *(Adapted from Dr. Fred Luskin)*

You forgive when you choose to free yourself from the hurt or anger caused by another's poor behavior. Put aside the painful memory, hard feelings, and desire for revenge, and focus on the positive present—not the painful past. You forgive when you don't allow the offense to keep harming you.

Steps to Forgiveness

1. Accept that life is often painful and unfair, and we don't always get what we hope for. But we don't have to continue to suffer emotional pain from past hardships or losses.
2. Recognize that thoughts create feelings. If you frequently think on your hurts or losses, you will continue to feel sad. However, you can control, and are responsible for, your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors since the negative experience(s) occurred.
3. Realize that holding onto resentment damages your health.
4. Decide to give up your desire to punish or get even. Hurting people in return rarely causes them to feel remorse or regret, or encourages them to change their behavior. Accept that only forgiveness, not revenge, will give you what you really want: peace, happiness, and healing.
5. Decide that you will no longer spend time thinking or feeling upset about your bad experience. Make a choice to focus your thoughts on feeling grateful and looking for the beautiful and good in life.
6. If you feel safe it is safe to do so, clearly explain to the person (verbally or in a letter) the harm that you felt he or she did to you.
7. Re-write your mental script of what happened so you become the hero in your story by overcoming difficulties and turning the trial into something good, instead of remaining the victim.
8. If the memory surfaces, use Mindfulness Breathing to shift your attention and help you remember your goals. (See Intro lesson.)
9. If the offense was illegal, report it to the authorities and let them deal with the person.

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Tips for Talking with Teens

Creating positive conversations with teens

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Having daily, pleasant conversations with your teens is an important part of bonding that helps keep them safe from alcohol and drugs. But it isn't easy. Teens claim parents only talk about uncompleted homework or chores. Parents say teens are uncommunicative and uninterested. So they both avoid talking. But teens need parental support and guidance during these difficult years. So daily take time to begin friendly conversations on topics that interest them—without any prying or reprimands. That will make it easier to discuss more difficult topics when you need to, like not using alcohol or drugs, or engaging in casual sex.

Use these tips and scripts to enjoy meaningful conversation with your teen.

1. **Look for opportunities to talk** that arise in everyday life, to start conversations. Also look for quiet moments—and ask if it's a good time to talk.

2. **Begin by expressing appreciation** for the good things you notice or admire about them.

3. **Use a caring tone of voice** and positive body language: a smile, nod, friendly face, etc. Be empathetic, positive and encouraging throughout the conversation.

4. **Give your undivided attention,** even if they prefer to sit next to you to avoid eye contact.

5. **Use "LUV-Listening" skills** of listening without interrupting; repeating back main ideas to show understanding; and validating their feelings by saying things like, "That must have made you feel…That's too bad."

6. **Use "I-Messages."** Use respectful "I-Messages" to express your own feelings and thoughts. Begin with "I" and then respectfully state how you feel and why you feel that way. Be specific in what you want and don't assign blame. Avoid "You" Messages.

7. **Ask open-ended questions,** often and casually, about things they are interested in: music, sports, celebrities, friends, TV shows, or movies; who they sat with at lunch; what they like to do for fun; what they think about current events, etc.

8. **Respect their right to have a different point of view,** even if you disagree. Don't make every conversation a debate.

9. **Encourage teens to tell you about problems** they may be having, and assure them that you'll try to understand and won't judge or reprimand. Use the Problem Pass.

10. **Don't offer solutions unless** they ask for advice. Instead, listen, and ask what options they are considering; express confidence in their ability to find solutions. Say, "If you would like to explore any of my thoughts on the subject, let me know."

11. **Ask about school.** Find out which classes are hardest and offer to assist or get them help if needed. Help them finish homework before play, TV, or social media.

12. **Ask about friends.** Find out which friends help kids be their best selves. Encourage and support good friendships.

Conversation Extenders

- *"What do you think?"*
- *"How so?"*
- *"I didn't know that."*
- *"That's helpful. Tell me more."*
- *"That's interesting. Keep going."*
- *"That's a good question."*
- *"Would you like to share more about that?"*
- *"Can you be more specific?"*
- *"Good point."*
- *"In what way?"*
- *"That seems important to you."*
- *"Do you want to talk about it?"* If they say "No": *"I'm here if you change your mind."*
- *"I'm so sorry that happened to you… What can you do now?"*
- *What options are you considering?*
- *Do you need any advice? Would you like to brainstorm solutions?*

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Safe and Cool Conversations

How to talk respectfully when emotions run high

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Creating emotional safety: Open, honest, and respectful communication increases family bonding and fosters loving relationships. For this to occur, people need to feel emotionally safe with one another. This is especially true in discussing a sensitive topic or talking with teens—who often feel misjudged and emotionally stressed. Fortunately, creating an emotionally safe place only needs three things: a right attitude, improved social skills, and new "scripts" or phrases that can cool a conversation and restore emotional safety. Focus on adjusting your attitudes, memorize the "scripts," and practice the skills until they come naturally. You'll see a huge increase in personal satisfaction and bonding.

(See also VitalSmarts.com or read Crucial Conversations by Patterson, Grenny, McMillian, and Switzer.)

Right Attitudes

- Value others as yourself
- Desire to understand how others feel and see things
- Desire to express yourself respectfully as a peacemaker
- Develop pure intentions
- Cease to judge or be critical
- Be generous instead of selfish
- View others with compassion
- Abandon ill-will; be willing to love
- Respect others' boundaries and right to choose differently
- Desire to speak only truth
- Believe you could be wrong; freely admit errors
- Be willing to make amends if you offend
- Have courage to bring up hard issues in a sensitive and kind way.
- Feel sorry when you offend

Proven Social Skills

- Use "LUV-Listening"
- Talk in "I-Messages"
- Use positive and kind words
- Use respectful voice tones and body language
- Look for and compliment the good
- Notice others' body language
- Notice if the discussion gets tense
- Notice your own stress and quickly self-calm if needed (see Lesson 1 and Lesson 6)
- Defuse confrontations with calming statements and questions
- Avoid throwing any C-Boulders
- Say hard things in kind ways
- If misunderstood, patiently clarify your motives and restate what you mean
- Be tentative with your opinions
- Avoid getting defensive
- Apologize quickly for offenses
- Ask openly for what you want or need
- Use Mindfulness techniques to calm your brain, help you be non-judgemental, and question your thoughts and "stories."

Safe and Cool Scripts

- "Is this a good time to talk?"
- "I want to be here for you. Let me know if you just want a listening ear, or if you need help or advice."
- "What I appreciate about you is…"
- "So what I think you're saying is…"
- "Help me understand what you mean by that."
- "How would you like things to be?"
- "Thanks for sharing your opinion."
- "You must feel…"
- "I sense you're feeling_____. Tell me more."
- "I'm sorry you're upset."
- "I appreciate your concerns."
- "Would you like my thoughts?"
- "I'm sorry, that's not what I meant to imply. What I meant was_____."
- "I'm sorry, what do you need me to do to make it up to you?" (If you offended.)
- "Let me think on that and get back to you."
- "Let's get more facts on this and then revisit it."
- "I recognize I'm also part of the problem."
- "Let's take a break to cool-down."
- "Let's take turns getting our own way."
- "Let's agree to disagree for now."
- "Let's get outside help with this."
- "I need your help. Would you please…"

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The Problem Pass

Give your kids "a pass" from fear of sharing a problem or concern

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

Kids are often afraid to talk to their parents about sensitive issues or problems for fear of negative reactions. To encourage honest disclosure, create an emotionally safe environment by giving these "Problem Passes" to your children to pre-establish your commitment to calm reactions when they share distressing problems.

HELP ME FEEL SAFE TO TALK

PROBLEM PASS

I have a problem that, if you knew about, you might get angry or upset. So even though I'm still responsible for my actions, by accepting this PASS you agree to "LUV-Listen" and help me problem–solve without saying "I told you so," "I can't believe you did that," or getting angry.

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Pro-Social Skills for a Successful Life

How to communicate with love and understanding

Strengthening Families Program by Dr. Karol Kumpfer

HOW TO USE I-MESSAGES

1. Have a respectful tone of voice.
2. Begin with "I," then state your feelings, needs or thoughts in a respectful way.
3. Describe what you want, or the thing that bothers you, in a specific, non-blaming way.
4. Explain the reasons for your feeling/thinking/desires: "I feel . . . when . . . because . . ."
5. Avoid "you" messages, like: "You make me mad when . . ."

HOW TO BE ASSERTIVE

1. ATTITUDE: Have a deep respect for yourself and a respectful concern for others. Pause to think how they might view the concerning issue.
2. BODY LANGUAGE: Act confident, stand up straight, have good eye contact, and respect others' personal space.
3. TONE OF VOICE: Speak in a calm, polite, firm, controlled voice. Avoid all Communication Boulders.
4. WORDS: Use a clear "I-Message" to say how you feel, to express your needs, or make requests without sarcasm or blaming.

HOW TO LUV-LISTEN

1. LISTEN with a genuine desire to understand. Try to put yourself in the other person's place. Show by a comment or a nod that you are listening, not thinking of your response.
2. UNDERSTAND: Repeat back the main points to make sure you understand. Ask questions to get more understanding.
3. VALIDATE the other person's feelings by expressing empathy for their feelings or point of view, even if you disagree.
4. Say something like, "I see why you feel that way." Express confidence in his or her ability to find a solution if he or she has a problem.

HOW TO RESPECT OTHERS

1. View all persons as equal to your own self. If you start to feel judgmental about one of their negative points, say to yourself, "Just like me."
2. Use a respectful tone of voice when you talk.
3. Never thrown Communication Boulders: yelling, swearing, sarcasm, cross or angry tone of voice, put-downs, blaming, criticizing, or taking offense. (See the complete list on handout 2-7.)
4. Be assertive, not aggressive or passive.
5. Use life's five most important words often: "I love you" and "I'm sorry."
6. If you say you are sorry, then you should really mean it. Ask what you can do to make it up to the person you hurt.

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