

## Communication Skills

In addition to using the pointers described above, communication can be improved by following some basic techniques described below. These skills can be used when expressing different feelings to each other, and when there are disagreements or conflicts among family members. The rationale and steps of these communication skills are summarized below.

### Expressing positive feelings

Everyone feels good when his/her efforts are acknowledged. Expressing positive feelings about what someone has done, however small, lets him/her know that they are appreciated. Positive feedback can also let the other person know what one cares about, which can foster change. Expressing positive feelings is especially important when a person has had a psychotic episode and may feel confused or depressed about it. Positive feelings can be expressed by using the following steps:

- Look at the person.
- Tell the person what he or she did that pleased you.
- Tell the person how it made you feel.

For example:

- *“I’m proud of you that you went to your appointment even though you weren’t feeling like it.”*

### Making positive requests

All close relationships involve some degree of doing things for each other. How people communicate their wants and needs can have an important impact on how the other person responds. Making a request of another person is most effective when it is clear, specific, and stated in a positive way. The following steps can be helpful when making requests:

- Look at the person.
- Make a specific request.
- Tell the person how you would feel if the request were granted.

For example:

- *“I would appreciate it if you could go shopping for groceries today.”*
- *“I’d like you to come with me to my prescriber’s appointment this Wednesday. I would like your help in explaining my medication side effect to her. I would be relieved to know you can be there with me.”*

## Expressing negative feelings

Everyone has negative feelings at some point. Being able to express unpleasant feelings constructively is crucial to resolving conflicts and getting along with other people. The following steps can be helpful in expressing and resolving negative feelings:

- Look at the person and talk with a serious voice tone.
- Tell the person what he or she did that displeased you.
- Tell the person how it made you feel—be specific.
- Make a request for change, if possible.

For example:

- *“I was worried when you didn’t come home from work at your usual time. In the future, if you think you’re going to be late. Please call me.”*
- *“I’m angry that you stopped taking your medication. Can we talk about what your concerns are and work out a way to get them addressed?”*

## Compromise and negotiation

People don’t always agree on what they want to do together, how to achieve goals, or how to solve problems. Close relationships are based on a degree of “give and take” in which each person gives as well as takes. Being willing to compromise is an effective way of reaching resolution when there is disagreement between people, as outlined in the steps below:

- Explain your viewpoint.
- Listen to the other person’s viewpoint.
- Repeat back what you heard (to show you understand).
- Suggest a compromise.
- Be open to talking over other possible compromises.

For example:

- Jane and Sam argued a lot about whether their 16 year old daughter Emma should have a curfew.

Jane: *“I am worried Emma will get into trouble if she comes home late. I worry about problems with drinking or boys, and I can’t sleep until she is home. I don’t want her out past 11:00.”*

Sam: *“I know you worry about Emma but she has been trustworthy and often if she goes to the late movie she won’t even be out by 11:00. It is pretty early for a weekend.”*

Jane: *“So you think Emma is trustworthy and 11:00 is too early to come home if she were going to a movie. But you know I still worry. How about*

*we let her stay out til midnight only one night on the weekend, and the other night on the weekend she needs to be in by 11:00?"*

### Requesting a time-out

Sometimes when a person's feelings become very intense and heated it is difficult to communicate effectively or to resolve problems. Taking a break from intense feelings can provide time for people to calm down, collect their thoughts, and be able to deal with the situation as constructively as possible. The following steps can be used to request a time out:

1. Indicate that the situation is stressful.
2. Tell the person that it is interfering with good communication.
3. Explain that you would like to take a temporary break.
4. Say when you will be ready to talk and problem solve about the situation.

For example:

- *"I'm feeling stressed right now by this conversation. I'd like to take a break now and discuss this with you later when I'm feeling calmer."*

### Questions:

- Which of these skills are members of your family already good at? Which do you need to practice?

### The Importance of Practice

Communicating effectively is like any other skill—it takes practice to get good at it. Change is hard for everyone, and people may feel awkward or uncomfortable at first when trying to use the communication recommendations provided in this handout. With practice, the skills of good communication will feel natural over time, and the long-term rewards in terms of the quality of family relationships are well worth the effort.

Sometimes these communication changes seem hard to make and some people think "most people don't speak like this." The point here is to strengthen communication skills over and above "the average" to compensate for concentration and attentional problems that often are part of experiencing psychosis. Here, the goal is to be a better communicator than most people, to support the person in NAVIGATE's recovery.

Each of you will have the opportunity to practice at least one of the communication skills presented in the handout in the session. Which skills would you like to practice? Other family members should watch and make sure all the steps are covered.

## Home Practice Option

Between sessions, most people in our program find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here is some home practice option for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

1. Try one of these new skills each day, recording how it went on the worksheet on the next page.

