

COMMUNICATION ROADBLOCKS

Blocks are behaviors that hinder, rather than facilitate, communication. We should be alert to them in ourselves and in others. Generally, a block discounts the validity of the feelings, opinions, and rights of another person. Blocks may sabotage open communication and get in the way of building self-esteem. Using a block draws focus away from the issue at hand, which often creates a power struggle.

Common Blocks to Communication

1. Directing, Ordering, Commanding

These messages produce fright, resistance, defensiveness, and resentment, and arouse retaliation, revenge, and/or rebellion. Such responses teach authoritarianism and discount the other person's feelings.

Examples: "You must ___." "You have to ___." "You will." "Stop crying." "Try harder."

2. Threatening, Warning, Punishing

These messages invite testing and sabotage. They cause anger, resentment, and resistance. They also teach authoritarianism.

Examples: "If you don't stop crying, then I'll give you something to cry about." "You had better ____, or I'll tell your mom."

3. Moralizing, Preaching, Obliging

These messages induce guilt, reduce self-esteem, and build generalized resistance to authority.

Examples: "You should ___." "You ought to ___." "It is your duty to go to school and do your best."

4. Persuading With Logic, Arguing, Instructing, Lecturing

These invite counterarguments, imply you're right and the listener is wrong, increase defensiveness, and reduce openness.

Examples: "Do you realize ___." "Here is why you are wrong ___." "That is not right ___." "The fact is ___." "You must not get involved with drugs because they are harmful." "You have to get a good job and support yourself."

5. Advising, Recommending, Providing Answers or Solutions

Statements of this nature imply superiority. They deprive the receiver of the esteem-building experience of solving problems on his own and may encourage dependency.

Examples: "What I would do is ___." "Why don't you talk to your mom about it?" "Let me suggest ___." "It would be best for you if you do your homework before you watch TV."

6. Criticizing, Name-Calling, Blaming, Evaluating, Judging Negatively, Disapproving

These messages lower confidence and self-esteem, induce guilty feelings, and reduce openness. They may create resentment and provoke retaliation.

Examples: "You are lazy." "You are bad." "You aren't thinking straight." "You really messed up." "You dummy."

7. Kidding, Teasing, Making Light Of, Joking, Using Sarcasm

While we do encourage being able to joke and laugh with your Little, these messages, when used too often or inappropriately, may create feelings of rejection, resentment, and hostility.

Examples: "You think you know it all." "When did you last read a newspaper?" "Get up on the wrong side of the bed?"

8. Diagnosing, Psychoanalyzing, Interpreting, Reading-In

These messages may be seen as threatening to privacy. They can be a rejection of the other person's self-perception, arousing anger and defensiveness and possibly causing serious insecurity.

Examples: "What you need is___." "What's wrong with you is___." "You're just trying to get attention." "You don't really mean that."

9. Withdrawing, Diverting, Avoiding, Digressing, Shifting

By displaying these behaviors you may communicate your own anxiety and lack of respect for the listener. The "silent treatment" also has a punishing effect.

Examples: "Let's not talk about it now." "Forget it." "That reminds me..." "We can discuss it later."

10. Cross-Examining, Interrogating, Questioning, Prying

These messages may show interest in what the other person is saying, but in fact they ignore the other person's feelings. One may feel as though she is being subjected to the "third degree" or that she cannot be trusted.

Examples: "Why did you do that?" "Where were you?" "When are you going to ___?"

11. Overuse of Praising, Judging Positively, Approving

These messages are usually well-intended when they are not manipulative. However, when they are misused they imply that the speaker is in a position to judge the other person's performance. They imply that the next performance may elicit disapproval by the speaker's failure to express approval for the next deed or act.

Examples: "You've done a good job on that model." "You were a good boy today." "That is a very good drawing."

12. Dismissive Use of Reassuring, Consoling, Excusing, Sympathizing

Though usually intended to reduce the other's pain, these types of messages don't always express understanding and empathy. If reassurance is overly optimistic, young children may start to lose a sense of trust in the adult. Consequently, the child may learn not to acknowledge pain.

Examples: "It'll feel better tomorrow." "Don't worry." "It's not so bad." "You will be fine."