

16 - COMMUNICATION

Reflections:

“Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously. Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this discipline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word....”ⁱ Universal House of Justice

“When your dialogue feels safe, loving, and satisfying, your relationship feels like a good one. If talking together becomes dominating, tense, rude, or bruising, the relationship feels both less secure and less appealing. Moreover, since verbal interaction occurs during so much of the time you spend together, and is essential to the business of living together, how you talk to each other becomes the single best indicator of the health of your relationship.”ⁱⁱ Susan Heitler, PhD

~*~

The quality of your communications has a direct effect on you as individuals and on your ability to be trusted companions with each other. The interactions your children see affect their security, feelings of safety, and well-being. Your communications and actions are important ways of conveying love and appreciation. Often you will speak to one another, but you also connect with words and graphics by various electronic means, such as text messages, social media, or email. You also share photographs and quotations that send a message.

Your facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language all convey information to each other and to your children. It’s wise to be very conscious about what you are intending to communicate and the best way to share that message. It’s difficult to maintain couple and family well-being if you are constantly dealing with misunderstandings, hurt feelings, assumptions, reactions, and more.

While it’s important for both of you to be responsible for what you communicate and how, no one can achieve complete clarity and be fully understood every time. As you send and receive communications, part of what you use your words for is to check for understanding as needed. When it’s important for your relationship, it’s wise to clarify what the speaker meant. Go back and forth, summarizing what you heard and asking gentle questions, until you understand each other.

When you have something difficult to communicate with each other, pay attention to whether it’s a good time and place. Do you need alone time first? Do you both need to eat or sleep first? Sometimes it can be useful to engage in some positive action before and after sharing. This might include sharing an appreciation for something the other did, offering a prayer, or giving a hug. You will learn over time what is best for each of you.

A Couple’s Experience:

“We have both lived in homes where communication was painful, frustrating, and angry. We never knew whether our partners were being truthful. We were determined to not be together if that was going to be the culture of our relationship. With many experiences over time, we learned that we both prefer to approach our interactions with timeliness, truthfulness, and love. The combination has us fully share what’s on our minds and hearts. We soften the edges with kindness, and often humor as well.

“We stay very conscious about limiting communications between us when either of us is hungry, overly tired, angry, distracted with major projects, or not feeling well. It helps us communicate well when we recognize that we highly value our relationship, and so we want to protect it from harm.”

Well-Being Discussion:

- What are our favorite types of communication? What can we do to prevent hurtful communications?
- What can we do to ensure we are paying attention to each other and not distracted when communications need to happen?
- Are we generally able to control the volume of our voices and apply tact and kindness for successful communications? Where can we improve?

Learning Activities to Try:

- Study a book or articles on couple communication together; watch videos on the topic; begin practicing one or two new ways of interacting.
- Set a time to give each other focused attention and discuss issues of importance (one at a time) to each of using tactfulness, truthfulness, and wisdom.
- Practice two new ways of communicating love and appreciation with each other for a week. Include the children as appropriate.

Conscious Focus:

“We use communication to convey important thoughts and feelings in ways that we both enjoy.”

ⁱ Universal House of Justice, “Individual Rights and Freedoms”, p. 16

ⁱⁱ Susan Heitler, PhD, *Power of Two*, p. 7