Communicating with honesty and openness

Are you getting what you need from your relationships? If not, perhaps it’s time to change the way you communicate. Practicing open and honest communication is a vital part of maintaining healthy relationships with other people, and essential to building compatibility in romantic partnerships. Most of us want our relationships to have honesty and openness, but for some it goes beyond this. Some of us have a fundamental need for it, as it provides a sense of security and helps us to feel emotionally bonded.

It is essential to understand what is required when trying to maintain healthy relationships with others. Those with a need for honesty and openness want accurate information from their friends and/or partners about things like thoughts; feelings; habits; likes; dislikes; daily activities; and plans for the future. Aside from the practical considerations of honesty and openness, those that take part in honest and open communication feel happy and fulfilled when people they care about reveal their most private thoughts. Conversely, they may feel frustrated when these private thoughts are hidden. This can apply to friendships, working relationships, and/or romantic partnerships.

In romantic partnerships, making decisions that work well for more than one person simultaneously requires compatibility. Compatibility is achieved through an understanding that is reached when people talk openly and honestly. In our romantic partnerships, this open and honest communication strengthens our love, fosters our trust, and increases our understanding of our partner(s).

In order to have effective, open, and honest communication, it is important to ask not just questions, but good questions. Question asking is one of the main ways that we try to understand whatever is going on, and how we get our loved ones to reveal their most private thoughts. In life, as we wrestle with each new challenge, we ask ourselves, and others, a continuous stream of questions. However, we are usually not very conscious of the quality of questions we ask. By learning to ask better questions, we can encourage honesty and openness. Some ways to achieve this are mentioned below.

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**ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS**

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Asking questions that require more than one word answers allow for a wide range of responses. For example, asking *How did you like that movie?* will evoke a more detailed response than *Did you like it?* One question leaves the door open for a more comprehensive answer, while as the other provokes a “yes” or “no”.

- **Get creative.** When we ask questions, we are using a powerful language tool to focus conversational attention and guide our interaction with others. In general it is more fruitful to ask “how” questions about the future, rather than “why” questions about the past—however, there are many more creative possibilities.
Respect the person that you are speaking with. Listen with your heart, work toward understanding, and allow the discussion to be a true dialogue. Try not to force immediate responses to your questions.

Of course, it is not easy for everyone to speak openly and honestly. Although effortless for some, there are those that are unable to speak about their thoughts and feelings freely. This can be for a variety of reasons—they may fear rejection, may be overly concerned with what other people will think of them, may suffer from some degree of anxiety, or may never have learned the communication skills essential for openness and honesty. Regardless, the ability to have open and honest communication in any type of relationship requires effort. Gaining this ability takes practice and above all, it takes trust.

If you find it difficult to express yourself openly and honestly to your partner, friend or co-worker—take a step back. Take a deep breath, and evaluate the situation. Determine how important open and honest communication is to them, and whether or not it is an important emotional need of theirs. If this is the case, below are a few important things to consider if you are just beginning to understand, develop, or practice open and honest communication in your relationship(s).

**DEVELOPING AND UNDERSTANDING OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION**

- **Find an appropriate time to talk.** Sharing feelings and emotions while preoccupied with the business of the day doesn’t always work. If you are distracted, hurried, or otherwise affected mentally, you may want to find a quieter, less hectic time to talk, where a discussion can be respected and uninterrupted.

- **If being honest and open is new for you, then go slowly.** Approach the conversations gently—there is no need to bring everything out at one time. The point is not to drastically alter the relationship, but to begin opening the lines of communication.

- **Don’t be afraid.** Communicating openly and honestly requires that you dispense with the fear of being ridiculed or criticized for your thoughts. Take the time to think about what you want to say, and convey it in a way that you are comfortable with. In most cases, confidence is also required to communicate honestly and openly.

- **It is ok to be vulnerable and to disclose feelings of uneasiness.** Often, mentioning your feelings of fear or of being uncomfortable brings understanding and compassion.

- **Go with the flow.** Open communication means that conversation could go in a variety of directions and cover a number of topics. Simply follow the conversation along and offer what you can.

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