

Use the L.U.V. Technique to Improve Family Communication Skills

What to Know

Family members share thoughts and feelings through communication. Connection, vulnerability, and intimacy are all enhanced when healthy communication skills exist in families.

You can probably remember times when you felt:

- heard and understood.
- misunderstood and ignored.

Generally, when family members feel heard, they are less angry, stressed, and more open to resolving problems. Feeling heard and understood also builds trust and caring between people.

In successful communication the **sender** is clear and accurately conveys the message they are trying to send. The **receiver** clearly understands the message. Miscommunication happens if the sender's message is unclear, or the receiver misunderstands the message.

Many things can get in the way of good communication, including:

- when receivers assume they know what senders are thinking.
- when the focus is on what the receiver wants to say while the sender is talking.
- bringing up other problems and issues unrelated to the topic being discussed.
- when assumptions are made about what is right or wrong – and trying to convince others of this.

Good communication may not come naturally for most people because communicating well takes practice and effort. Below are some basic techniques for good communication. If you practice them, they will become natural. You will improve all your communication with everyone – not just family members!

Use the LUV technique when listening as the receiver.

a) **L**isten with your ears, eyes, and heart to understand the other person's feelings. Imagine what they are experiencing and comment or nod to show them you are listening.

b) **U**nderstand by repeating back the main ideas in your own words to show them you understand. Ask respectful questions.

c) **V**alidate by expressing empathy for their feelings, circumstances, or point of view (even if you disagree). Express confidence in their ability to find solutions if they have a problem or challenge.

When you are the sender, use "I-messages" instead of "you messages," which can make people feel defensive. Begin with "I" and state your feelings, needs, or thoughts in a respectful way.

Clearly describe what you want, or the behavior that bothers you in a non-blaming way. Apologize for mistakes. Finally, explain the reasons for how you feel, what you are thinking, and what you desire. You might say, "I feel ___ when ___ because ___."

What to avoid when communicating with family members:

- disrespectful words
- yelling
- swearing
- sarcasm
- put-downs
- blaming
- criticizing
- taking offense

What to Do

Use the LUV listening technique and assertive "I-Messages" when communicating with family members. Track progress daily for one week in the chart below.

1. Hold a family meeting this week. Begin with compliments, take notes, serve a treat, and have fun. Explain that the LUV listening technique and use of respectful "I-messages" will help everyone feel respected, heard, understood, and loved.

2. Each day, pick one conversation you had with a family member and rate yourself on how well you used the LUV technique and "I-messages." Use a score of 1-5, where 1 = you did not use the tools at all, and 5 = you used the tools, and the conversation was positive and healthy. Ask the other person to rate you.

Date	Describe conversation	Who was involved in the conversation?	Your rating	Other person's rating

Date	Describe conversation	Who was involved in the conversation?	You	Other Person

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you and your family members improve your communication skills? Why or why not?

What was most difficult about this activity?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
