

HARRIS CREEK

Communication Guide

This document identifies communication patterns and provides practical, biblical advice on improving our communication. This content was adapted from ***A Lasting Promise*** by Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain, and Milt Bryan



Negative Communication Patterns

The presence of certain negative communication patterns can be corrosive to or destroy a relationship. Overcoming these patterns can have a dramatic, positive effect on a relationship.

NEGATIVE COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

W	WITHDRAWAL AND AVOIDANCE	An unwillingness to get into or stay with important conversations
E	ESCALATION	Negative back and forth responses that result in increasingly hostility
N	NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION	Assuming motives are always negative leading to hopelessness
I	INVALIDATION	Putting down the thoughts, feelings, character of the other

Don't be a W.E.N.I. (Withdrawal, Escalation, Negative Interpretation, Invalidation)

WITHDRAWAL AND AVOIDANCE

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

You get quiet, look away, agree quickly, or simply leave to end the conversation.

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Recognize the situation will likely get worse if you continue to pull away. Avoidance typically leads to anger, which damages relationships. Read Ephesians 4:25-27.

ESCALATION

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

You respond by upping the ante, so the conversation gets more and more hostile. You say hurtful things or pile other issues on top of the conversation. This can be subtle and doesn't necessary involve raised voices.

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Back off, "power down", soften your tone, put down your shield, acknowledge the other point of view. Read James 1:26 and Proverbs 15:1.

NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

You believe that the motives of the other person are more negative than they really are. You feel attacked, hopeless, discouraged, or demoralized.

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Reconsider what you think is true about the other's motives. Look for evidence that is contrary to your negative interpretation. Ask the other person about their motives.

INVALIDATION

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

You put down, de-emphasize, downplay, or de-value the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other person, either subtly or overtly.

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Show respect for the other person, accept their feelings, and acknowledge their viewpoint.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which negative communication patterns do you struggle with?
2. How have you seen relationships impacted by these negative communication patterns?
3. Which patterns are affecting your Life Group? As a group, what can you do to identify them and combat them *when* they happen again?

Filters

Filters prevent clear communication, which can sometimes cause what is said to be very different from what is heard.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”
James 1:19*

F I L T E R S

INATTENTION	You're unable to give your full attention, because you're distracted by internal or external factors
EMOTIONAL STATES	Your mood is affecting the way you're receiving communication
EXPECTATIONS	You see and hear only what you expect

Some of our biggest arguments come from what we think we heard in the past. To protect our relationships from fruitless arguments from the past:

- Stay humble and accept the fact your memory isn't perfect.
- Use the opportunity to achieve clarity on what was intended in the past discussion, rather than continuing to argue about what was actually said.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which filters do you struggle with?
2. How have you seen relationships impacted by these filters?
3. Which filters are affecting your Life Group? As a group, what can you do to identify them and combat them *when* they happen again?

Speaker Listener

The Speaker-Listener Technique adds structure to your communication. This will combat the Negative Communication Patterns, help it feel safe to communicate, and ensure that each person is fully heard and understood.

RULES FOR BOTH OF YOU

- The Speaker has the floor – Use some object to demonstrate who has the floor. Pass it to the Listener when you are ready to give them the floor.
- Share the floor – Switch roles back and forth as many times as it takes to achieve full communication.
- No problem solving – Focus on having good discussion. Stay on the topic. Don't try to solve problems prematurely.

RULES FOR THE SPEAKER

- Speak for yourself – Don't mind read. Talk about *your* thoughts or feelings. Use "I" statements.
- Speak in small chunks – Be brief, especially when learning the technique.
- Pause frequently – Stop and let the Listener paraphrase. Your goal is to help the Listener hear and understand your point of view.

RULES FOR THE LISTENER

- Paraphrase what you hear to make sure you understood what was said.
- Don't rebut. Focus on the speaker's message. Don't offer your opinion or thoughts. You can express any disagreement once you have the floor.
- Be sincere in your effort to show you are listening carefully and respectfully.

The key is making it safe and showing respect for the other's thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Even though it can feel 'artificial' or 'mechanical', it is an effective communication tool.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which rules are the hardest for you to follow?
2. Try this technique out in either a current or past argument. How does it help the communication?

Issues and Events

Most people tend to argue about **events**, which are everyday happenings such as dirty dishes and bounced checks. Larger topics like selfishness, pride, money, sex, and in-laws are called **issues**. Underneath the larger issues are **hidden issues**, which are the deeper, fundamental issues that lie beneath events/issues.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Romans 15:7

HIDDEN ISSUES

CONTROL AND POWER	Power struggle when making decisions; trying to take control
NEEDING AND CARING	Emotional needs not being met well
RECOGNITION	Activities and accomplishments not valued or appreciated
COMMITMENT	Lack of long-term security and safety
ACCEPTANCE	Fear of rejection

SIGNS OF HIDDEN ISSUES

The following are some communication patterns that might indicate that hidden issues are involved:

- Wheel Spinning – Talking about a problem over and over but getting nowhere
- Trivial triggers – Tendency for minor things blow up out of proportion
- Avoidance – Avoiding certain topics or levels of intimacy
- Score Keeping – Keeping track of who did what without talking about the real issues

The most important thing you can do is simply to talk about these hidden issues.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What recent events can you identify that were really a symptom of larger issues or hidden issues?
2. Which of these hidden issues can you currently identify in yourself?
3. Do you think hidden issues will ever go away? How might growing in your relationship with God will help overcome hidden issues?

Expectations

Most of our frustrations in life are caused by unmet expectations. Expectations build up over a lifetime of experiences. Most expectations are based in the past but still operate in the present.

*“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”
Proverbs 13:12*

SOURCES OF EXPECTATIONS

FAMILY OF ORIGIN	The tendencies, traditions, and patterns of the family you grew up with
PAST RELATIONSHIPS	Behaviors you learned or learned to expect others in past relationships
CULTURE	Influences from social media, television, movies, books, etc.

HANDLING EXPECTATIONS

Four keys to handling expectations well are:

- Be aware of what you expect
- Be reasonable in what you expect
- Be clear about what you expect
- Be willing to listen to the Lord

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you believe most of your expectations come from?
2. What are some expectations that you have about your Life Group? Are these expectations reasonable?
3. How can you grow in handling your own expectations?