10 Tips for effective communication *Liz Kingsnorth*

1. **Keep an intention for connection.** Nurture your intention: that you want to create and sustain, a respectful and compassionate quality of connection – whatever happens! Trust that this intention for connection is more important and more nourishing than 'winning' or 'being right', or even just 'having your say'. Connecting heartfully with others is one of the deepest of human needs.

   Having a quality of connection means that you bring yourself FULLY PRESENT and try to keep your heart open to what is going on for the other person - however they might express themselves! - plus you keep an awareness of what is alive within yourself in each moment. In this way you can be in touch with what is mattering to the other and to yourself.

   To achieve this, learning to PAUSE OFTEN, is invaluable!!

   When the connection is sustained, then there is a strong possibility that both of you will be able to express yourselves, plus be heard and understood.

2. **Listen twice as much as you speak!** We have two ears and one mouth – an effective reminder! Listening, truly listening, is one key to a healthy relationship. Often, we are only half listening, just waiting for our chance to speak, wanting to make our point, disagree, or tell our story. When our attention is with our own thoughts, we are not listening. Listening means to sense into the world of the other person, *to intend to understand their perspective and needs, even if we disagree with what they are saying*.

3. **Understand the other person first.** "*Seek first to understand before you are understood*", said Stephen Covey in his book 'The 7 habits of highly effective people". When the other person feels you are understanding them, they are far more likely to be open to understanding you. Being willing to understand the other person first, involves acceptance, generosity, respect, self-control, patience, and being **curious instead of furious** about how they are different from you!

When someone receives respect and empathy - then a wish to cooperate and contribute to someone else is free to emerge. In this approach we believe that generosity and a desire to cooperate and contribute, are natural human states. Not habitual, but natural. When people don't receive attention and empathy, they may continue struggling to be heard and understood, becoming increasingly insistent or aggressive. Alternatively, they may shut down, feeling resentful and unwilling to interact further. Remember: Empathy is not agreement – we can empathise with someone with whom we profoundly disagree... if we are willing!

4. **Develop awareness of underlying needs and values.** One way of understanding human behaviour is to be aware that everything that people say and do, are expressions of underlying needs, longings or values. We can learn to tune in, to identify and 'hear' these needs, even when they are not directly expressed. Because all human beings share these needs, they are our magic key to unlocking mutual understanding. For example: If someone says, "You are so selfish, you never do anything to help at home!", they are indirectly expressing a longing for consideration and support, but it is coming out as blame and judgment. If we can empathise rather than reacting, we might say, "Are you upset and angry because you really need consideration and support?" This type of response will connect and the person will start to feel understood.

5. **Become aware of responses likely to disconnect you.** Refrain from:

   Immediately telling your own similar story…. Interrogating with lots of data-type questions…. Interpreting the other's experience…. Giving advice…. One-upping (eg "if you think that's bad wait till you hear about what happened to me"!)…. Dismissing the person's feelings, eg "Oh don't be angry" …. Compensating and minimising the person's experience eg "At least…. "; Or telling the person that this experience is actually good for them!

   Generally people appreciate receiving empathy before anything else. The above responses may have their place later on in a conversation – it is often a matter of being sensitive to WHEN!

6. **Link your feelings to your needs or values and take responsibility for them.** What someone else says or does is not the cause for how we feel, it is the trigger. Our feelings are linked to underlying needs or values that are stimulated by what's happening. For example, we might get angry that someone does not do what they say they are going to do, and we tell them: "You make me so angry, you are so unreliable!" This inflammatory accusation could be re-phrased by owning that our anger comes from our own unfulfilled wish or value, eg "I feel really frustrated because it's important to me that we keep to agreements that we've made."

7. **Make requests that are do-able, specific and positive, linked to your need.** Having expressed what is important to us (our need or value) we can make a request that would go *one step* towards fulfilling that need. Making specific requests helps us move out of just complaining, and is a gateway to something changing. Often, we ask things of others that are simply too vague or too big, or are expressed as a request to *stop* doing something rather than a request about what we would *positively* like to happen. Eg "Stop making so much noise", or "Please be more considerate", are not clear and could be interpreted in various ways, whereas: "When you are playing video games, please would you use headphones?" is specific and do-able.

8. **Describe what's happened in Observation language.** When we are upset, angry, scared or worried, we often lapse into descriptions of what is triggering us, in language full of judgments, blame or interpretation. Examples: "You are always attacking me", "He doesn't care at all about us", "You're too lazy" …

   If we can describe what we are seeing or hearing in a neutral, factual way, free of judgments – what a video camera could record! – then there's a good chance the other person can agree with this initial description. Then the interaction can move into aspects that will make the difference, i.e., a sharing of our feelings, needs and requests. Eg: "That's a really stupid idea!", might be changed to, "When you suggest that we all go to the movie which is finishing at midnight (Observation language), I'm worried (Feeling) because it's

important that the kids get a full night's sleep (Need). How about we go to the 2pm show instead? (specific Request)

9. **Be willing to hear "NO"!** Even keeping to these guidelines is not a magic wand and our carefully expressed requests might still elicit a "No" from the other person. If this upsets us, it is useful to reflect if our request was actually a demand – that the person *should* fulfil! **We have a choice about how we hear that "No".** We could hear it simply as an expression that something else is important to the other person, ie they have a different need or value alive in this moment. If we take time to find this out, we may realize that their "No" is actually a request for something else to happen. And then we are into the dance of negotiation! "No" may not be as threatening as we might imagine!

10. **Remember how much we are communicating without words.** What is in our heart and mind, our inner condition and attitude, the energies being expressed through our body, our facial expressions, the tone of our voice…. all these elements are communicating in ways that are intuitively picked up and understood by others. Are our words in alignment with these subtler elements? We are manifesting our consciousness at every moment. If we want connection, understanding and harmony in our relationships, we can work on nourishing those aspects deeply within ourselves.

    Then our communication may become truly **communion.**