

*One of the most destructive forces that occurs in families is **emotional reactivity**.*

*At **Mainstream** we are very aware of this and we work to help families change this.*

Jim Piekarski, MFT, has written a book devoted to this topic.

Here is an excerpt from his book:

Mastering Your Emotions: 7 Steps to Transforming Emotional Reactivity

With Your Spouse and Others

We think you will find this helpful!

Below is a list of the most common faulty communications. Review the list and ask yourself if you communicate in any of these ways. Don't be disappointed if you identify with many of them because everyone uses them at some time in their lives. These methods of communicating are destructive and encourage hurt, defensiveness and resentment. By identifying and eliminating them, we can open the way to healthy communication and reduce emotional reactivity.

1. **Discounting:** We undermine another's feelings, point of view, or what they find important. "How could you feel that?", or "I can't believe you like country music," discounts their feelings. Rolling your eyes in response is also hurtful.
2. **Put downs, name calling, and labeling:** We make a personal attack on someone's character rather than focus on the other's behavior. "You're just lazy." "You can't do anything right." Calling names is not appropriate unless the name is both affectionate and welcomed by the person.
3. **Sarcasm:** This is a put-down using voice tone, exaggeration, etc.

4. **Silence as punishment:** We manipulate others by not talking to them and by withdrawing.
5. **Leaving the scene:** We abandon communication with others, without excusing ourselves or without making an appointment time in the future to talk about the problem.
6. **Bringing up past history:** We rub the other person's nose in their past deeds. We trigger the other person to feel bad about themselves. Very few people are strong enough to hear more than one negative at a time. The only time it is appropriate to bring up another person's past history is when we have permission from them and there is a spirit of learning from these past events.
7. **Needing to be right and not being able to say we're sorry:** We do not take responsibility for our actions. Past conflicts become difficult to resolve.
8. **Denial of feelings:** We tell others we are not angry, upset, or hurt, when we obviously are.
9. **Making assumptions:** We assume what another's intentions, feelings or thoughts are. We communicate these assumptions as if they were facts without checking them out.
10. **Defensiveness:** Instead of listening and responding to criticism, we deny or counterattack.
11. **Martyrdom:** We blame our misery on somebody else or suffer in silence. We play the victim.

12. **Not listening:** We don't focus on what the other is saying. We interrupt, finish their sentences, think about our own counter-arguments, or we just ignore them by spacing out.
13. **Cross complaining:** We respond to a complaint by bringing up another complaint in retaliation.
14. **Fixing the other:** We rush into giving the other person solutions rather than listening to them.
15. **Arguing over the facts:** We do not focus on the underlying feelings and concerns that are the basis for the disagreement.
16. **Holding back:** We don't share how we are feeling or what we really want. This creates distance in our relationships.
17. **Staying in the negative:** We express our resentment and criticism, but do not express our love, appreciation, or give compliments.
18. **Using "always" or "never":** When describing other people's behavior, there are usually many exceptions.
19. **Justifying:** We justify our abusive behavior or hurtful communication. We make excuses rather than take responsibility. There is no justification for hurtful actions and poor communication.
20. **Badgering:** We repeat and bring up the same things over and over again, or we do not let another person excuse themselves from an argument. Neither person has the opportunity to calm down and collect themselves.
21. **Intimidation:** We use anger and a loud tone of voice to get our way with others.

22. **“You” language:** We focus our discussion on the other person, rather than talk about our own feelings and concerns.
23. **Not telling the whole truth about our feelings:** We express our anger, but not the other more vulnerable emotions that accompany the anger, such as hurt, fear, and shame. Or we just display our positive feelings, never confronting more painful issues with the other person.
24. **Not being specific:** We do not give others feedback about specific behaviors that are difficult for us. The other person remains confused about what change is needed, what they are doing that upsets us, or about what we want or need.
25. **Mind reading:** We expect the other to know what we want, feel, think, or need without our telling them. We feel angry and resentful when they do not read our minds.

This list describes the most common ways we communicate poorly with others. It is not only helpful in our efforts to stop these behaviors in ourselves, but it also alerts us to faulty communications in others, making it possible to provide feedback so that they may understand and change their behavior, if so inclined.

If individuals in a relationship hold each other accountable for faulty communication and embrace eliminating poor communication together, they can make great strides to “clean up” their communication and reduce emotional reactivity. Even if one person in a relationship stops using this damaging style of speaking, it will diminish emotional reactivity and help the relationship. By referring to this list after an argument, we can discover exactly what triggered the emotional reactivity, and decide to do something to remedy this in our next conversation.