

Communication Challenges and More Skills

Overview

This second communication lesson looks at challenges to good communication and adds to participants' communication skills toolkit. Participants have the opportunity to identify communication patterns experienced in their families. They are encouraged to examine these patterns and decide what to keep, leave behind, or work to change for their own lives. Participants will learn the **do's** and **don'ts** for effective complaining and raising of issues. They will practice the WWA formula (**What, Where or When, Affect**) for voicing complaints, and then through role-plays learn how to employ a gentle start for raising issues. The second section focuses on how to recognize and handle hidden issues that often lie below everyday arguments. Next, a simple problem-solving model will be taught and practiced. Youth will be reminded of the importance of taking care of relationships with daily appreciations. It is a lot easier to hear complaints and address problems with someone who you know basically appreciates you. The lesson ends with a brief review game.

Goals

- Examine the communication patterns one experienced growing up.
- Demonstrate good communication skills by using the WWA formula to raise complaints and issues.
- Analyze hidden issues that often underlie ongoing conflict.
- Practice a simple problem-solving model.

Lesson at a Glance

10.1 Communication Patterns Learned in Family (7 minutes)

Activity: *What to Take, What to Change*

10.2 Complain and Raise Issues Effectively (15–20 minutes)

Activities: *Skills Practice I; Skills Practice II; Skills Practice III*

10.3 Hidden Issues: What Pushes Your Button? (15 minutes)

Activities: Video: *Hidden Issues; My Hidden Issues*

10.4 A Problem-Solving Model (7 minutes)

Activity: *Problem-Solving in Action*

10.5 A Brief Review (5 minutes)

Activity: *Communication Skills Match*

Trusted Adult Connection



Materials Checklist

Materials:

- Lesson 10 PowerPoint slideshow is a digital download that comes with the curriculum. Easy-to-follow download directions are found at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- Video Clip: *Hidden Issues* is embedded within the PowerPoint slides.

Workbook Applications:

- *Communication Patterns—What to Take, What to Change* (pgs. 44–45)
- *Gripes and Complaints—Be Heard, Not Ignored* (pg. 46)
- *Arguments—What’s Really Going On?* (pg. 47)
- *My Hidden Issues* (pg. 48)

Resources:

- 10a. *Avoid Negative Starts: Be Gentle* (pgs. 236–237) (Duplicate, one per group.)
10b. *Problem-Solving Model* (pg. 238) (optional handout)

**Preparation**

- ✓ Preview the PowerPoint slideshow while preparing lesson.
- ✓ Preview the video clip, *Hidden Issues*, embedded within the slides.
- ✓ Duplicate Resource 10a, *Avoid Negative Starts: Be Gentle* (pgs. 236–237), one per group. Decide if you will assign one to each group or save time by having the whole group work on one collectively. Optional: duplicate *Problem-Solving Model* (Resource 10b, pg. 238).

- Workbook: *Communication Patterns—What to Take, What to Change* (pg. 44–45)

7 minutes

SECTION 10.1

Communication Patterns Learned in Family

Announce that today they are going to add a couple more skills to their toolkit. But first, they will examine the communication patterns they experienced growing up. (PP)

- ❖ *So much of what we learn about communication comes from what we experienced and observed growing up.*
- ❖ *Those patterns we experienced in our family can influence how we act today whether we are aware of it or not.*
- ❖ *Without a conscious examination of the patterns we experienced growing up, we have a tendency to **repeat** the same patterns we grew up with. Or, we tend to **react** in totally opposite ways. Both could be problematic. Here's a couple of examples:*
- ❖ **Example:** *If you had lots of fighting and screaming in your home, you might **repeat** those patterns. Or, you might **react** by stuffing your feelings inside and keeping the peace at all costs. This could put you in a bad situation if you don't speak up against disrespectful or even abusive behavior.*
- ❖ **Example:** *If you experienced a rigid, dictator-like parent growing up, you might **repeat** that and be very rigid and bossy in your relationships.*



Lesson 10
Communication Challenges & More Skills

Activity: Examine Communication Patterns in Family

- ❖ *As we mentioned, we are influenced by the patterns of communication we experienced in our families.*
- ❖ *It is important to look at your family's patterns of communications and decide which were positive, which were negative, and which patterns you want to take into your future relationships.*
- ❖ *How do your family members talk to each other? How do they talk when there are disagreements?*
- ❖ *How are feelings expressed in your family? Or how are decisions made?*
- ❖ *Asking these kinds of questions—doing this kind of examination—gives you power to decide and work toward the patterns you want for your future.*
- ❖ *You can't change things if you aren't aware of what you want to change.*

(PP) Instruct teens to open their workbook to pg. 44 and read the directions aloud. Note that the options may not perfectly describe what they experienced, but they should check the ones that come the closest. If they lived with different families, focus on the patterns experienced the most. Check the boxes. Be sure to tell them to fill in the shaded box on pg. 45.

Examine the Patterns You Experienced Growing Up

What do you want to be the **same**?
What do you want to be **different**?

Conclude:

- ❖ *As you get romantically involved with someone, it's important to learn about each other's family communication patterns. Later in life, if you decide to marry and start a family, it is really important.*
- ❖ *By becoming aware, you can decide the patterns you want to work on and establish for your life, and later your family life.*

SECTION 10.2

Complain and Raise Issues Effectively

- Resource 10a: *Avoid Negative Starts: Be Gentle* (pgs. 236–237)
- Workbook: *Gripes and Complaints—Be Heard, Not Ignored* (pg. 46)
- Video: *Hidden Issues*

15–20 minutes

State that all people in relationships of any type can have issues or complaints with those they are close to. In this section we'll learn how to raise issues or complaints in ways people can hear you. **(PP)**

Ask participants to jot down a gripe, irritation, or complaint they have had recently with someone. Then ask:

*What do you typically want when you are complaining to someone? We usually want someone to **stop** doing something, **start** doing something, to **listen** to us, or to **change** something.*

Have you noticed they usually don't stop or start or listen or change?

The reason for this is that most of us have never learned how to complain effectively.

One of the best things you can do for a relationship is to learn how to complain more effectively. This is a very simple skill with amazing results!

Learn How to Complain Be Heard, Not Ignored.



Ineffective Ways to Complain

(PP) Go over the most common, but ineffective, ways to complain.

Mindreading—assumes that you know what the other person is thinking, what he or she intended, or why he or she did something.

- “You don't care about my feelings.” Or “You made me wait because you are mad about what I said to you yesterday.”

Bad Ways to Complain

- Mind reading
- Name-calling
- You always, you never
- Blaming
- Kitchen-sinking
- Cross-complaining



- *It is important to say what you think and feel, not what you think the other person thinks and feels. Instead of “You don’t care about my feelings,” say, “I feel ignored and like I’m unimportant to you.”*

Name-calling—happens when you attack someone’s character, instead of focusing on a specific behavior that bugs you.

- *“You’re so irresponsible.”*
- *When name-calling, you are making a comment about a person’s character, not a specific behavior. Say instead, “I’m really upset you didn’t pick up your sister from school today.”*

You Always, You Never—an overgeneralization

- *“You never do anything I ask.” Or, “You always take her side.”*
- *It is common for all of us to start our complaints this way; but, no one always does anything or never does something. And this is why the other person will almost always say, “No I don’t!”*

Blaming—is usually done with an angry intent to hurt another person.

- *“It’s all your fault that this happened.”*
- *The problem with blaming is that the other person is nearly guaranteed to react defensively, which doesn’t solve the problem.*

Kitchen Sinking—is when you start with one complaint and then throw in another, and another, and another, ultimately overwhelming the person.

Cross-Complaining—is when one person starts complaining and then the other person says, “Yeah, but what about when you did such and such....”

A Better Way to Complain: WWA

(PP) Present the WWA formula, a better way to complain:

W: *What happened? Focus on the specific behavior that bothers you.*

❖ *By focusing on what happened, you can avoid name-calling or attacking the person’s character.*

Effective Complaining A Better Way—WWA

- **W:** **WHAT HAPPENED?** Focus on the specific behavior that bothers you.
- **W:** **WHERE OR WHEN?** Focus on last time it happened. Avoid “you always...; you never...”
- **A:** Explain how it **AFFECTED** you, made you feel, or why it bugs, upsets you, or makes you mad.

W: *When* or *Where* it happened? Focus on the last time it occurred.

❖ Use a specific time or place to avoid the “you always/you never.”

A: How it **Affected** you — State how it affected you, why it bothers you, or how you felt about it. (For example, “I am mad because when you ignored my comments, it made me feel stupid and little...”)

❖ Speak for yourself and give information about how the behavior affects you.

The objective is to think about the **What** (specific behavior), the **When** or **Where** (it happened last), and to state **How it Affected You**.

Emphasize to participants that a complaint is an opportunity for one person to let another person know how and why something affects or bothers you.

Skills Practice I: Identify the W, W, and A

(PP) Ask the group to identify the parts (**W**, **W**, and **A**) in the examples in the slides.

❖ **Example A:** “When you didn’t show up yesterday at school like you promised you would, I felt betrayed because I trusted you. I’ve gone the extra mile to keep you from getting suspended.”

Key: **What**—didn’t show up; **When or Where**—yesterday at school; and **How it Affected You**—I felt betrayed because I trusted you.

❖ Ask them to compare that complaint with the example of an ineffective way of complaining: “There you go again, always late or never showing up. I should have known. You’re so irresponsible.”

❖ **(PP) Example B:** “When you brushed off my suggestion we go out and do something fun and different last weekend, I felt uncared for. I really miss doing the fun things we used to do.”

Identify the W, W, & A

Example A:

“When you didn’t show up yesterday at school like you promised you would, I felt betrayed because I trusted you. I’ve gone the extra mile to keep you from getting suspended.”

Key:

What? _____

When or Where? _____

Affected me/Feelings/Impact _____

Compare with ineffective way:

There you go again, always late or never showing up. I should have known. You’re so irresponsible.

Key: **What**—*brushed off my suggestion*, **When**—*last weekend*, and **How it Affected You**—*I felt uncared for and I miss doing things with you.*

- ❖ Again, ask the group to compare that complaint with this example of an ineffective way of complaining: *“You never want to do anything. You don’t care about me.”*

Skills Practice II: Good or Bad Complaint?

(PP) Ask students to identify if the statements are basically good complaints or not good as you advance the slide for each statement.

Also encourage them to say why it is good or what type of ineffective complaint it is. Ask them how they would react if someone said this to them.

Answers to the complaint examples:

1. Good—have them identify the WWA
2. Bad—name-calling
3. Good—have them identify the WWA
4. Good—have them identify the WWA
5. Bad—mindreading

(PP) Answers to the complaint examples:

6. Bad—mindreading
7. Bad—you always/you never & mindreading
8. Good and Bad—what is good and what is bad (the “you always” statement)
9. Bad—you always & mindreading & name-calling
10. Bad—cross-complaining

Complaints: Is it good or bad?

1. When you don’t ask about my opinion, but just lecture me, I feel like my thoughts don’t matter.
2. You’re so lazy!
3. I’m upset you didn’t take the garbage out again this week.
4. Last night I felt awful when you said I wasn’t smart enough to win that game.
5. You don’t care at all about me.

Complaints: Is it good or bad?

6. You don’t really want to keep your job, do you?
7. You’re always covering up your feelings. I hate it that you never talk.
8. When you called last night and said you weren’t coming over, I felt rejected because you always do that on Friday nights.
9. You always over-react. I can’t stand it.
10. Yeah but ... how do you think I feel when I always pay for dinner?

Skills Practice III: Avoiding Negative Starts—Be Gentle

(PP) Point out that how you start when raising an issue really matters. If a person starts out negative and harsh, the other person tends to turn off or turn defensive.

Research has shown that arguments typically end on the same tone in which they begin. If you start negatively and harsh, it will probably end that way.

Pass out *Avoid Negative Starts: Be Gentle* (Resource 10a, pgs. 236–237). Divide into six groups and assign each group one of the situations.

- Read the situation and then the harsh start. Work together to come up with a gentler way to raise the issue or state the complaint. Try to incorporate some WWA.

Ask for volunteers to read their gentler start/gentler complaint. Invite the group to improve in any way.

Note: Alternately, to save time, pick one for the entire group to work on (read aloud) and collectively come up with a gentler start.

Avoiding Negative Starts



- Practicing *Gentle Starts* – group activity
- How you raise an issue says a lot about how things will go.

Workbook Application

(PP) Ask students to turn to workbook pg. 46, *Gripes and Complaints—Be Heard, Not Ignored*.

Assign as homework. They are to take a couple of complaints and improve them using the WWA.

Also, have them note that they are asked to take an appreciation and phrase it with a WWA. We often forget to verbalize or show our appreciation to those we care about. We all like to feel appreciated. And, it's a lot easier to hear complaints from someone if we know they fundamentally appreciate us. Being more descriptive about what we appreciate is far more meaningful to the other person.

Gripes and Complaints



Example: *When you left your practice early to see your little sister's play, that meant so much to her. You are really thoughtful.*

A Review & Transition to Hidden Issues

Announce you are going to play a short clip of a couple having an argument (*Hidden Issues*). Their argument will be used to review everything in Lessons 9 and 10 thus far. It also serves as an example of Hidden Issues, which will be the topic of the next section. Before you play the video clip, ask the group to keep a tally (chit marks) of all the negative interactions they hear as they watch the argument.

Remind them of what to watch for by writing on the board the following, or use the PowerPoint slide: **(PP)**

- **The Four Danger Signs:** escalation, put-downs, avoidance/withdrawal, and negative interpretations.
- **Bad Ways of Complaining:** mind reading, blaming, "you always/you never," name-calling, kitchen-sinking, and cross-complaining.

(PP) Show the video clip embedded in the PowerPoint slide now. When finished, ask how many negative interactions they saw and for the examples.

Note: This argument will be referred to in the next section, *Hidden Issues: What Pushes Your Button?*

Video clip: Review

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Danger Signs:
(Find Examples) - Escalation - Put downs/invalidation - Negative Beliefs or Interpretations - Avoidance/Withdrawal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad ways of complaining:
(Find Examples) - Mind reading - Name-calling - "You always...; you never..." - Blaming - Kitchen-sinking - Cross-Complaining |
|--|--|

SECTION 10.3

Hidden Issues: What Pushes Your Button?

- Workbook: *Arguments—What’s Really Going On?* (pg. 47)
- Workbook: *My Hidden Issues* (pg. 48)

15 Minutes

(PP) Argument Starters

Many of our arguments start over something small—something happens or someone says or does something and it pushes our button and sets us off.

Even though the argument starts over something small, under the surface there’s stuff that’s been bugging us, but which we haven’t been talking about.

In the clip you just watched, think about what set off that argument that got pretty heated and nasty.

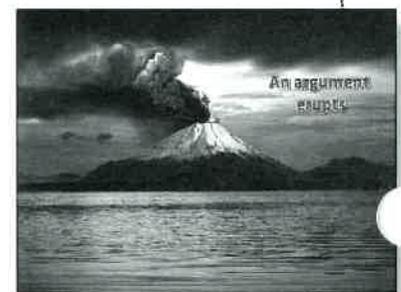
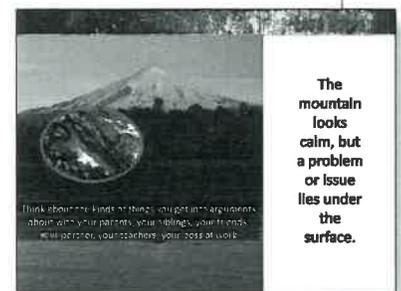
Do you think Elizabeth and Jimmy had bigger issues beside the fact that the baby-sitter was sick and couldn’t come? Pause and listen.

*What starts the argument is an **event**—those day-to-day happenings—like the babysitter not showing up. Its sets off a big argument because under the surface they have **issues or problems** they haven’t been dealing with.*

(PP) *It’s like this image. The mountain on the surface looks normal and calm. But under that calm looking surface there’s the pressure of heat and lava building up. Think about the kinds of things you get into arguments about with your parents, friends, partner, siblings, your teachers, or boss at work. What pushes your buttons?*

*Here’s the deal: when you have **issues or problems** you haven’t been dealing with and talking about directly, frustration and pressure build up. Maybe you have issues and conflicts, like jealousy, about other friends, alcohol, drugs, or sex.*

(PP) *It won’t take much for some event (a day-to-day happening or something someone says) to trigger an eruption—a big argument.*



So the problem or issue is dealt with more as a pocket of frustration and anger. And they never make any progress on really solving their problems.

Remember, angry brains aren't smart brains! You're operating in your reactive, lower brain and the argument goes nowhere except spewing hot words.

(PP) *Many people have problems or issues with those they are close to and which they haven't really discussed or resolved. They seem to only talk about it when some event pushes their button. It erupts and they argue unproductively, like Jimmy and Elizabeth.*

Hidden Issues

(PP) *Sometimes the issue or problem is much deeper. When two people keep arguing about the same thing, or when some small event sets off a whopper argument, it's typically a sign that what is at stake is something much deeper than they really need to talk about. We call these **hidden issues**.*

Hidden issues are really about needs and sensitive stuff. It's sort of like skin. The argument is like the pimple on the surface. It may go away. But if you scratch at a pimple over and over you could eventually get a scar. Hidden issues are like a scar or wound. It might seem like a little fight on the surface, but it cuts deeper and is more serious.

*We **all** have our **hidden issues**.... Sometimes they are hidden from the people we interact with and sometimes they are hidden even from ourselves. Listen to this list of issues and see if you recognize some of your hidden issues.*

(PP) **Some of the most common hidden issues:**

1. **Power and Control:** Whose needs and concerns are important, and who is in charge? Is your opinion valued? Are decisions made without you? Do you feel controlled or treated with equality?
2. **Caring and Love:** This is about feeling cared for and loved. Do you feel used or taken for granted? Do you wonder if someone cares or loves you?



3. **Recognized/Appreciated:** This is about feeling appreciated and recognized for what you do. Do you feel people you care about, notice, and value your accomplishments?
4. **Integrity:** This hidden issue is triggered when you feel challenged about how you see yourself. Have you ever noticed how upset you get when someone questions your intent or motives? When someone falsely accuses you?
5. **Respect:** Do you feel you are respected? Respect is shown in how others treat you, talk to you, and value your opinion, contribution, and efforts. Do you feel disrespected or discriminated against?
6. **Trust:** This is about a feeling that you can count on someone; you can rely on someone to come through. It's important to feel that those we care about have our best interest in mind and will not betray us.
7. **Commitment:** This issue is about long-term security. Is this person going to be there next week, next month, or for a lifetime? Is he or she in your corner? Or is the commitment one-sided?
8. **Acceptance:** We all have a deep need to find acceptance and avoid rejection. In addition, what we yearn for is the acceptance of our authentic, genuine selves — being accepted for who we really are. We want to feel totally comfortable in being ourselves around those we are in relationships with.

Then point out:

- ❖ *If you get in the same fight over and over and it never seems to get resolved, think about what the hidden issue may be for you. People tend to argue over and over about events on the surface when there are really deeper issues underneath that need to be talked about.*

Ask participants to open their workbooks to pg. 47.

- ❖ *Let's look at this example.*

- ❖ *This girl is angry that she saw her boyfriend talking to another girl. "I saw you talking to Sabrina.... I bet you're cheating on me!" That is the **event**.*
- ❖ *But they have issues under the surface. This couple has jealousy issues. They haven't really defined the relationship nor talked about their expectations for the relationship.*
- ❖ *What might be the **hidden issue** here?*

Ask participants to identify some possible **hidden issue** and indicate why they think that (**trust, love, caring, commitment...** all are good answers).

(PP) Go over the tips on the slide for ways to handle events that trigger arguments.

Tips to Handle Arguments

1. Express your frustration about the event, but quickly take a **time out** rather than have an escalating, unproductive argument while you're angry.
2. Set a time to talk about it after you calm down. Use the **Speaker Listener Technique**.
3. Ask yourself if there are any **hidden issues**.

Workbook Application

(PP) Ask students to turn to pg. 48, *My Hidden Issues*, in the workbook.

*This exercise in your workbook will help you identify which **hidden issues** tend to come up most for you.*

Spending some time thinking about these hidden issues and what they means to you can help you talk about them later with the other person.

Allow a few minutes for them to fill in or assign as homework.

Conclude with this message:

- ❖ *Using the **Speaker Listener Technique** to talk about sensitive issues, hidden issues, creates safety to really talk and share.*

Hidden Issues — workbook p. 48



7 minutes

SECTION 10.4**A Problem-Solving Model**

Participants learn a simple problem-solving model and gain practice using it.

Presentation of the Model

(PP) One last communication skill we want participants to learn is problem-solving with another person: the **Problem-Solving Model**.

All people have problems – big ones and small ones – with those they love, live with, or work with. Best friends have problems, happy couples have problems. Good news! There is a simple tool you can use when trying to deal with these problems.

As you see in this model, you first need to understand each other's concern or perspective. When two people really understand what and why something is a problem, they can better work together to solve it. This is a time to take turns using the Speaker Listener Technique. Once you understand each other's view, then you move into the following steps.

(PP) *Let's solve a real problem using this model. Here's the problem. Your first anniversary is approaching and you want to do something nice to celebrate, but your partner hasn't mentioned anything. You wonder if your partner really cares about you. What your partner hasn't told you is that his mom has lost her job and he's giving anything extra he makes to help the family.*

Problem-Solving Model

First, discuss concerns—try to understand each other's perspective. Use S/L Technique.

1. Brainstorm possible solutions. Write them down!
2. Process of elimination and compromise to find a solution.
3. Follow-up—is it working?

**Solve the Problem!****Here's the Problem:**

You and your partner are approaching your one year anniversary and you want to do something nice to celebrate but your partner hasn't mentioned anything. You wonder if your partner really cares about you. What your partner hasn't told you is his mom lost her job and he's giving anything extra he makes to help his family.



Activity: Problem-Solving in Action

Spend five minutes as a group going through the steps.

First have a discussion: Ask for two volunteers to role-play a discussion between our two partners.

- ❖ *You each must honestly and sensitively say what is bothering each of you, what you are wondering about, and what you'd like. The goal is for each to understand the other.*
- ❖ *You will use the Speaker Listener Technique and role play for the class.*
- ❖ *Get to a place where you both understand.*

Give an applause after they role-play the discussion.

State they are ready now to move into the brainstorming part. The whole class will partake in throwing out ideas.

1. **Brainstorm** on all possible solutions... one of the facilitators writes them on the flip chart. Remind students that there are no bad ideas.
 - ❖ *In real life problem-solving, it is important to get a piece of paper and write down all the solutions each of you can think of. Do this value-free. No judgements. Get as many ideas on the table as possible. And remember, neither of them has much money! So you have to get creative.*
2. **Begin process of elimination:** Eliminate ideas that won't work until you get a few good ones and then **compromise** if need be and **agree** on the solution.
 - ❖ *Divide into two sides, representing each of the partners, and work through the list, eliminating ones each of them may not like and then combining some until you agree on something you both like.*

3. **Follow up** at some point in time and make sure the solution is working. In real life, we sometimes have to try out our solutions and see how they work. They may need adjusting.

5 minutes

SECTION 10.5

A Brief Review

(PP) *Why do you think we've spent the last two lessons talking about communication?*

It is the foundation of any healthy, productive, successful, and mutually satisfying relationship. The skills you have learned can be used effectively even if you are the only one in the relationship who knows how to use them!

Why? Because we tend to treat people like how they treat us, so any positive change in how you talk and interact with someone is likely to spark a change in how they talk and interact with you.

Quickly review the skills and ask the group if they can imagine using these skills in their relationships.

(PP) Communication Skills Match

We have learned several skills for communicating effectively in relationships. Can you identify which skill you use for which scenario?

Have them shout out their answers.

- A. When your feelings are hurt by someone's actions or behaviors.
Answer 2: Use the WWA formula

Skills to Reduce, Stop and Exit Negative Interactions

- Be aware of 4 Danger Signs
- Use Time-Out Skill
- Use Speaker-Listener Technique when talking is difficult
- Use WWA to Complain Effectively & Raise Issues Gently
- Learn to recognize Hidden Issues under arguments.
- Use the Problem-Solving Model



Communication Skills Match

A. Your feelings were hurt by their actions or behaviors.	1. Use Time Outs
B. You keep having the same argument over and over.	2. Use WWA
C. You both have difficulty communicating about facts or feelings.	3. Look for Hidden Issues
D. You both agree you need to work on an issue.	4. Use Speaker Listener Technique
E. You feel yourself getting really upset.	5. Use Problem-Solving Model

- B. When you keep having the same argument over and over.
Answer 3: Look for the Hidden Issues behind the argument.
- C. When you are both having a difficult time communicating about facts or feelings.
Answer 4: Use the **Speaker/Listener Technique**.
- D. When you both agree that you need to work on an issue.
Answer 5: Use the **Problem-Solving** model.
- E. When you feel yourself getting really upset and angry.
Answer 1: Use Time-Outs.

Trusted Adult Connection

- ❖ **(PP)** Trusted Adult Connection
- ❖ *After completing the workbook activity, Communication Patterns: What to Take, What to Change, on pgs. 44–45, talk to your person about one negative pattern you want to leave behind.*
- ❖ *Talk to your TA about a hidden issue you may have and how you might deal with it.*

Trusted Adult Connection

- After completing the workbook activity, *Communication Patterns: What to Take, What to Leave* on pages 44–45, talk to your TA about one negative pattern you want to leave behind.
- Also, ask your TA to use the Speaker Listener Technique with you to share your thoughts on one or more of the *My Expectations* from the workbook, pages 6–9.

Avoid Negative Starts: Be Gentle

Read the complaints below and come up with a better and gentler way to voice this complaint or raise this issue.

1. Your sister invites her friends over tonight to watch movies. You hate it when they leave the room you share without bothering to clean up their mess. You don't mind them being in your room, but you want them to clean up.

Harsh Start: I hate your friends. They're pigs! I don't want them coming over!

Gentler Start:

2. You feel you and your partner are getting into a rut. You want to do more fun things together on the weekends.

Harsh Start: You're no fun anymore! All you do is think about yourself.

Gentler Start:

3. When your baby's grandma comes over tonight, you plan to tell her how much it hurts you when she criticizes your parenting. You want your man, who is very defensive when it comes to his mama, to back you up.

Harsh Start: Your mama runs all over you—you baby!

Gentler Start:

4. Your best friend is ignoring you ever since she started going with Jorgio. You want her to make some time for you.

Harsh Start: Ever since you started going with Jorgio, you just ignore everyone. He's gonna dump you and you'll be sorry. We'll all be gone.

Gentler Start:

5. Your best friend seems to make everything about her.

Harsh Start: Why is everything always about you? You aren't even my friend when you do things like that!

Gentler Start:

6. Someone you work with who has been there less time than you is always telling you how to do your job. True, he sometimes has good suggestions, but it's bugging the crap out of you that he's giving you unneeded advice every day as though you don't know anything.

Harsh Start: Shut the _____ up! I know how to do my work.

Gentler Start:

Problem-Solving Model

FIRST,
discuss concerns—
try to understand each
other's perspective.
Use the Speaker Listener
Technique.

1. Brainstorm all possible solutions

Write them down on paper.
No value judgments.



2. Process of elimination and compromise

Eliminate some, combine others
creatively until you find a solution you
can both agree to try.



3. Follow-up—is it working?

Try it out and see how well it works.
Tweak if needed.

