Surviving the Holidays with the Family: Arguments, Conflict, and Emotional Labor

Dr. Stevie M. Munz, Ph.D
MEET YOUR COMMUNICATION COACH

Dr. Stevie M. Munz is an award winning teacher and researcher with 12+ years of experience in the communication field. She has led hundreds of discussion forums, presentations, trainings, and workshops.

As a communication expert, she is passionate about developing your communication power skills. From public speaking, to professional storytelling, to writing and editing services, and diversity, equity, inclusion workshops.

Contact her at Stevie@summit-communication.com today at to set-up your first consultation!
WHAT IS OUR GOAL TODAY?
How would you describe your family communication?
What are some communication challenges you have experienced in your family?
We are all members of a family. Some of us interact with our family daily, some of us are estranged with our family or family members, and some of us have non-blood ties with our families. Every family is *different* and the perfect family does not exist. Communication within our families *enables us to express* our feelings, needs, wants, and concerns for others. Trenholm & Jensen (2013) state that “once you *understand the processes* underlying family interaction, you should be a better judge of your family of origin (the family that produced you) as well as any family you help produce in the future” (p. 231).
So, how do we communicate?
Communication is made up of 55% body language, 38% vocalics, and 7% words.

Interestingly...
- Most people are unaware of their own body language.
- A smile and the right amount of eye contact conveys honesty, passion, and immediacy.
- Lower pitched voices convey authority and competence (compared to higher pitches).
Are you a good listener?

96% of people think they are good listeners, yet people only retain about 50% of what others say!

- **Active listening** is a person’s willingness and ability to hear and understand.
- **Hearing** is an involuntary and passive process, sounds come into your ear, you receive them, but you are not necessarily paying attention to them.

Look interested
Inquire with questions
Stay on target
Testing understanding
Evaluating the message
Neutralize your feelings
Active Listening

- Paying attention
- Holding judgement
- Reflecting
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Sharing

- Requires active nonverbal communication.
- Gives sender/receiver time, space, and comfort to respond.
- Engaging in a learner mind-set (openness to ideas and perspectives) vs. judger mind-set (minds made up before listening, disagreement rigidly with little possibility of common ground).

**Tip:** Frequently paraphrase what you are hearing. You are also conveying your own perspectives and feelings.
- It sounds to me like…
- So, you’re not happy with…
- Is it fair to say that you think…
- Let me make sure I understand…
Characteristics of Family Communication

1. Cohesion (how close/intimate the family members are to each other)
2. Adaptability (how well the family members adapt to changes with each other)
Cohesion

Levels of Cohesion

• Disengaged—extreme separateness and little family belongness
• Separated—emotional independence with some joint involvement and belonging
• Connected—strive for emotional closeness, loyalty and joint involvement and some individuality
• Enmeshed—extreme closeness, loyalty and almost no individuality
Adaptability

Characteristics of Adaptability

• The ability of a martial/family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress

• Families need stability and change to function---families experiencing extensive change maybe be chaotic.

• Unpredictability and stress from changes can harm opportunities for families to develop relationally
Family Behavior Patterns

![Family Behavior Patterns Diagram](image)

- **Balanced**: Low cohesion, disengaged
- **Mid-range**: Low cohesion, connected
- **Extreme**: Low cohesion, enmeshed

- **High Adaptability**
  - **Chaotic**: Disengaged, separated
  - **Flexible**: Structurally disengaged, separated
  - **Structured**: Rigidly disengaged, separated

- **Low Adaptability**
  - **Rigid**: Disengaged, connected
  - **Flexible**: Structurally connected, separated
  - **Chaotic**: Rigidly connected, enmeshed
So, what does this all mean for families and conflict...
Family Communication is Complicated!
All Families are Complex!

- Family conflict is normal---it is the repair that matters
- Disconnections are part of life and may include....
  - (Functional) Estrangement
  - Micro-stresses
  - Mismatches in communication or attunements
  - Space
  - Issues of physical, mental, and emotional safety

“It is acknowledging the wound that gets the thorn out.” It’s what reconnects our humanity.
Characteristics of Conflict

- Conflict is not a breakdown in communication.
  - Conflict entails communication about disagreements.
- Conflict is not inherently good or bad.
- Conflict is not automatically resolved by communication.
  - Managing conflicts productively is a skill.
- Conflict is normal.
- Conflict requires at least two entities (ideas, people, parties etc.)
- **Action**, whether overt or covert, is key to conflict. Until action or expression occurs, conflict is latent, lurking below the surface.
Understanding Conflict

Self-reflect

• How does being in conflict make you feel?
• What do you think your culture believes about conflict?
  • What about about your workplace?
• What are metaphors you have for conflict?
• Where do these ideas about conflict from?
Four Steps to Authentic Repair

1. **Acknowledge the offense.** Seek to understand the hurt you caused. It doesn’t matter if it was unintentional or what your reasons were. Seek to turn off your own defense system and focus on understanding and naming the other person’s pain or anger.
   - Begin slowly: “Did I hurt you? Help me understand how.” This can be humbling and requires that we listen with an open heart as we take in the other person’s perspective.

2. **Express remorse.** Here, a sincere “I’m sorry” is sufficient.
   - There is no perfect formula for an apology except that it be delivered in a way that acknowledges the wound and makes amends.

3. **Consider offering a brief explanation.** If you sense that the other person is open to listening, you can provide a brief explanation of your point of view, but use caution, as this can be a slippery slope.

4. **Express your sincere intention to fix the situation and to prevent it from happening again.** With a child, especially, try to be concrete and actionable about how the same mistake can be prevented in the future. “I’m going to try really hard to…” and “Let’s check back in to see how it’s feeling…” can be a start.
I-statements = Effective (Communication + Conflict Resolution)

"I statement"

I feel: "__________________"

When: "__________________"

Because: "__________________"

Next time please: "__________________"
Boundaries & Conflict Management

Boundaries are unique to each person, and they help define where one person ends and the other begins, so they are a crucial part of maintaining identity.

Benefits of setting boundaries:
- Promotes autonomy
- Wards off burnout
- Improved emotional health
- Respect from others and self respect
- Improved self care capabilities
- Decreased stress
- Improved relationships
- Clear expectations for others

@CatalystforSelfCare
Surviving Holiday Stress?

• Prioritize---focus on quality, not quantity.
• Communicate---communicate your wishes with your family members.
• Care for Yourself—take time for yourself, ask for help, and know when to say NO.
• Validate Your Feelings---Interrogate how you feel about the holidays, dinners, loved ones etc etc etc
• Develop Your 1 Min Speech---Think of responses for questions you often get (E.g., Are you talking to XYZ? OR How are you doing with the loss of XYZ?)
What is Emotional Labor?

• The management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; [this “process”] is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value (Hochschild, 1983).
• Require face to face or voice to voice contact with the people (often in “public”).
• Requires the person to produce an emotional state in another person.

Emotional Intelligence

• *Emotional Intelligence* involves understanding emotions, managing emotions to serve goals, empathizing with others, and effectively handling relationships with others.

• *Emotional Hijacking* which is a situation in which emotions control our behaviors causing us to react without thinking.
Domains of Emotional Intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>SELF</th>
<th>OTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Awareness of own values and emotions and how they impact our performance</td>
<td>- Tuning in to others’ emotional states and concerns; having empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Keeping focused when things are tough</td>
<td>- Effectiveness in our interactions and influencing others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Regulating our emotions and ensuring own responses are under control</td>
<td>- Reinforce purpose and contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Providing a positive role model to others</td>
<td>- Motivate teams and individuals to work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve system performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emotional Intelligence Components

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Social Skills
- Empathy
- Motivation
Strategies for Effective Communication

1. **Use clear language.** When you are communicating, keep your language clear, concise, and straightforward. Avoid jargon, slang terms, euphemisms, and colloquial expressions.

2. **Understand differences in body language.** Be cautious about assuming meaning with body language. Some cultures have different comfort levels when it comes to personal space and touching. For example, in many countries, people don’t greet each other by shaking hands, and some cultures find it disrespectful to engage in direct eye contact.

3. **Practice reflective listening or paraphrasing.** When in conversation, paraphrasing or repeating the message back is a good habit to get into. This will help clarify meaning and eliminate issues that may surface because of a misunderstanding. The same is true for written communication—paraphrase to clarify any doubts you may have.
Recommendations

• Understand our own communication style/patterns/family patterns.

• Practice engaged and open-active listening.

• Try to understand how to communicate effectively.

• Be reflective of your emotional labor 💖

• We are emotional AND logical creatures—we need verbal and non-verbal communication!

🌟 And, finally try to foster spaces in conversations where everyone can be heard.
Thank you for your time and attention today. Today we covered the following topics:

- Defining Family Communication
- Understanding Family Conflicts & Strategies
- Family Communication & Emotional Labor

I hope you found this workshop engaging and useful.
Contact: Stevie@summit-communication.com

Visit: www.summit-communication.com