

# Ethical Communication

*Ethical Communication is a practice that aligns our values – of collaboration, curiosity, inclusion, innovation and reflection – with our everyday interactions with partners and each other. This practice helps build strong collaboration and keeps the team focused on shared goals. It can be used in any interaction where clear and direct communication is the goal. It can be especially useful in giving and receiving feedback and in resolving conflict.*

*What makes communication ‘ethical’?*

Before sharing information, ask:

1. Is it true?
2. Is it necessary?
3. Is it fair?
4. Is it mine to share?

Focus on behaviorally-specific feedback

1. What the person said/did
2. The impact
3. What you appreciate and/or the desired outcomes of all involved
  - a. Seek shared, mutually-beneficial outcome

How Ethical Communication is aligned with Human Rights Principles (from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

1. Universal – applies to all
2. Indivisible – keeps a group united
3. Interdependent – requires mutual support

Core Communications Skills\* that support an Ethical Communication Practice

1. Sensory awareness: give objective and specific feedback
2. Behavioral flexibility: see various points of view **and** use your words. Ask and provide clear questions and answers. Don't mind read.
3. Outcome thinking: commit to a shared outcome (resolution) and explore ways to get there

\*See Lisa for more information on skills training.

## The Steps

1. Consider the specific behavior/impact that you want to address.
2. Reflection:
  - a. What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation? *What do I know objectively? What assumptions am I making?*
  - b. What more do I need to learn, understand about the other people in the story? *What additional information do I need? What questions, clarifications might help?*
  - c. What more do I need to learn and understand about myself? *What's underneath my response? What am I really feeling? What part did I play?*
3. If you are not clear about your part in the dynamic, seek out a "facilitator" - someone who will be honest with you and help hold you accountable for your part. This will help with a reality check and minimize confirmation bias. Just choose this person (sometimes referred to as a "facilitator") carefully - someone who doesn't have a direct stake in the situation and won't take sides but can help you clarify the crux of the issue.
  - a. Facilitators are then responsible for holding you accountable for the follow-up. Now that they have knowledge of the situation, they are also responsible for a successful outcome.
  - b. Set a time by which you intend to complete the steps of the process.
    - i. Let the facilitator know when things have been complete.
    - ii. If you do not complete the steps, the facilitator - also responsible for the outcome - will also be responsible for the follow up.
4. Make a commitment to yourself, the other person and the group in which you operate that you will deliver specific feedback and/or reach resolution. This may not need to be an explicit, spoken commitment – this step simply builds your investment:
  - a. in yourself, so that you don't carry unresolved issues that can get compounded by other unresolved issues;
  - b. in the other person, so that they have the benefit of receiving clear feedback from you and also the opportunity to respond; and
  - c. in the group, since your individual unresolved issues impact the health of the group whether they're directly aware of these issues or not.
5. Go directly to the source of your concerns. This eliminates gossip and involving others in a situation that may have nothing to do with them.
6. Speak from your own experience (using "I" statements) and share behaviorally-specific examples (using "you" statements).
  - a. An **Appreciation**: "When you (specific behavior), the impact on me is/was (specific outcome). Thank you."
    - i. This can be said many ways, but the structure should remain the same starting with their specific behavior how it specifically affects you and ending with a thanks.
    - ii. Telling people they are doing a "great job" is nice, but will have a very limited positive effect. It is not behaviorally specific.
    - iii. Giving specific positive feedback is useful no matter how long it has been, but timely feedback will help reinforce the positive behavior.
  - b. A **Request**: "When you (specific behavior), the impact on me is/was (specific outcome), I would prefer (specific behavior or specific outcome)"

- i. Can also be said in many different ways, but should keep core structure.
  - ii. The rest of the conversation can vary greatly depending on how they respond to your request; if they give you an unexpected answer do not be afraid to tell them you some time to think about it/come up with a compromise. You can also offer them time to think about it if they are caught off guard and follow up with them later that day or week.
  - iii. Start small with your requests and the sooner they know how their behavior affects you the less likely it is to become a larger more troublesome problem in the future.
- c. **Requesting Feedback:** “When I (specific behavior), what was the impact on you?”
- i. This is useful if you notice any body language or passive comments in response to something you’ve done or said

**Exercise:** Everyone will share one appreciation about someone else exactly or loosely in this format. It can be about something as small as asking how you are in the morning. Preferably about someone at Trailhead.

7. In conflict: share your desired outcome – what would resolution look/sound/feel like for you? Ask the other person the same.
  - a. Be prepared to take the time to work through it. If resolution is not attained in the first meeting, then make a commitment to ongoing, goal-oriented discussion. If you reach a point during which you need help, agree together on someone who can help facilitate the discussion.
  - b. You can “agree to disagree” as long as this outcome feels like resolution to you.
8. Reflect on your key learnings from this experience and use them to inform future interactions. Practice!

## The Agreements

*For Ethical Communication to be successful, each team member makes the following **agreements**:*

1. We are open to receiving and offering constructive, behaviorally-specific, solution-focused feedback.
2. We value the processes of self-reflection and self-regulation. We assess our part in the communication and take responsibility for our own reactions, assumptions and stories.
3. We are each accountable for communicating what we need in order to fully participate in the group to meet our shared goals.
4. We stay accountable for the impact of our words and actions, even if that impact has little/nothing to do with our intentions. At the same time, we strive to assume positive intent when possible.
5. We examine our own perceptions and assumptions, and commit to resolving any misperceptions in a timely manner.
6. We ask questions and seek clarification and understanding over trying to prove our point or be right.
7. When conflict arises, we agree that resolution is the goal and we address concerns in a timely, non-reactive manner.
8. While we may have different ways of expressing ourselves and communicating our perspective, we speak **directly** with the person when we have concerns or conflicts with that person, respectfully sharing behaviorally-specific, solution-focused feedback.
9. We value regular time with our Guide and consistently use this resource to gain support in the practice of ethical communication.
10. In order to develop honesty and trust – which may take time – we strive to act congruently; our words and actions are consistent and aligned.
11. We strive to be aware of the various levels of formal and informal privilege that we may hold, and actively work to dismantle inequities.
12. We commit to transparency to the best of our ability and as context warrants.
13. We agree that no one is isolated or denied a process to be heard.
14. We give each other our attention without interrupting or side conversations.
15. We hold ourselves and each other accountable for the agreements we make.