

POINTERS FOR EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION

The following pointers show how to express inner feelings, desires, and limits in ways that get results for times when you need more than idle conversation or fancy repartee.

PREPARE OTHERS TO LISTEN

- Listen first! Feed back, label, and validate others' feelings. Withhold your own ideas until people become curious about where you stand.
- Ask focusing questions: "Do you want to know my concerns?" "There's something I'd like to say. Would you listen and tell me a better way to say it?"
- Keep your points brief and frequently ask for a rephrase: "What does it sound like I'm saying?" "Can you help me understand why I might feel that way?"

STATE YOUR FEELINGS

- Express yourself in one statement that starts with "I": "I feel . . . when you. . . ."
- Avoid (hidden) opinions and blaming: "I feel that you should. . . ." "You make me feel. . . ."
- Appreciate the other person for listening after your first couple of sentences.

MAKE REQUESTS

- Ask questions that begin with the word "Would": "Would you . . . , . . . , or . . . ?"
- Avoid wording that doesn't ask for a commitment: "Could you . . . ?" "I'd like you to. . . ."
- Do not threaten, order, convince, justify, or expect mind reading.
- Ask for small achievable steps: "Would you ask about my day, kiss me goodbye, or wash my feet?" Choices and absurd requests help.
- Be specific: "I'd like you to be more loving" is too general.
- When your requests are refused, give only one reason why what you want is important or simplify your request. Then, if it is declined, accept "No" graciously.
- Do not require others to want to do what they are willing to do.
- If others forget to do what they said they would, ask only one more time without making a fuss: "I'm sure you meant to. . . . Would you do it tomorrow?"

SET LIMITS

- Set limits on how much you are willing to do!
- Identify (minimal) actions you can take when others do not meet your needs.
- Avoid thinking in extremes. Do not threaten divorce or punishments for children unless you are ready to follow through.

ADDITIONAL READING

Between Parent and Child by Haim Ginott (Avon, 1969).

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus by John Gray (HarperCollins, 1992).

Bringing Up Parents by Alex J. Packer (Free Spirit Publishing, 1992).