

# Using “What, Why, and How” Messages to Improve Family Communication

One way of communicating clearly and directly is to use What, Why, and How messages. This form of communication allows us to tell others in a positive and helpful way how their behavior affects us and suggest another behavior that will improve the situation. Here are the guidelines for What, Why, and How messages, as they are taught to students in Skills for Growing.

## 1. Name WHAT behavior is bothering you.

- Describe the behavior, not the person doing it.
- Avoid using a tone of voice that sounds blaming or attacking.

## 2. Say WHY it's bothering you.

- Tell the person how the behavior makes you feel.
- Let the person know how the behavior has affected you.

## 3. Say HOW you would like the other person to behave instead.

- Suggest what the person could do the next time they find themselves in a similar situation.

### EXAMPLE:

*WHAT:* I asked you to tell me where you were going, and you left without letting me know.

*WHY:* I need to know where you are.

*HOW:* Please make sure you leave me a note before going out.