

What, When, Why, and How Messages

Children often find it difficult to communicate their needs and the emotional impact of another person's bothersome behavior in positive ways without blame or defensiveness. Yet, being able to effectively communicate how they feel—whether positive or strong emotions—and ask for what they need can open up conversation and strengthen relationship and social awareness skills. Using What, When, Why, and How Messages can help young people communicate how they are feeling and ask for what they need.

Here are some ways to use What, When, Why, and How Messages:

1. **WHAT** Name the feeling. *I feel _____.*
2. **WHEN** Explain what behavior is bothering you or what you appreciate. *When you _____.*
3. **WHY** Describe why you are feeling this way. *Because I _____.*
4. **HOW** (Use as an option for a bothering behavior.) State how you would like the other person to behave in order to better meet your needs. *I wish/I want/It would help if _____.*

People often avoid expressing their feelings and asking for what they need because they are afraid of how the other person will react.

Building Your Child's Social and Emotional Competence

Relationship skills and social awareness are social and emotional competencies that help children establish and maintain healthy, rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. These activities help children build communication, empathy, and seeking help skills.

Practice It!

Invite your child to practice using What, When, Why, and How Messages. Have your child think of a situation where they avoided sharing what they were feeling and asking for what they needed and practice how they could have used What, When, Why, and How Messages.

Remember It!

Encourage your child to come up with a simple rhyme or another mnemonic device to remember the parts of a What, When, Why, and How Message.

Many children are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to the onset of COVID-19. They need a chance to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions. Make sure you are accurately informed and ready to educate your child knowing the information is evolving all the time. Get information from: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

