

Communicating Our Needs

Not a day goes by that most of us do not have to let someone else know what we need or how we feel about something. Teens often have difficulty communicating their feelings and needs objectively—uninfluenced by emotion, assumptions, or prejudices. Learning to communicate feelings and needs—and to suggest ways that others could help meet those needs clearly and effectively—helps teens build relationship and social awareness skills.

Attacking other people, blaming them for a problem, or demanding that they behave differently is not positive communication and only creates hard feelings and conflict.

A What, Why, and How Message can be used to confront someone about his or her actions by focusing on the problem instead of attacking the other person:

1. **WHAT** Explain *what* behavior is bothering you.
2. **WHY** Explain *why* the behavior is bothering you.
3. **HOW** Say *how* you would like the behavior to change.

Building Your Teen's Social and Emotional Competence

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

Analyze a Poem!

Have your teen read the following poem and explain how it relates to the purpose of What, Why, and How Messages:

I was angry with my friend:

I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe:

I told it not, my wrath did grow.

—William Blake, English poet

Write It!

Ask your teen to write two versions of a short story about two friends experiencing a conflict. In the first version, the friends don't communicate. In the second version, the friends use What, Why, and How Messages to communicate their needs.

Many teens 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 teen 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>.

