



Communication Patterns: What to Take, What to Change

What communication patterns have you experienced while growing up with your family? People often repeat those patterns as adults, so it's useful to examine them and choose which patterns you want to take into your adult life and which you want to work to change. How you communicate and handle conflict over time is strongly associated with relationship success and happiness or failure.

For each item below check the statement that comes *closest* to describing what you have experienced while growing up. If your parents are separated and you have lived with each one at different times, or if you have lived in a foster home, choose the family situation that you feel influenced you the most, or in which you have spent the most time.

1. How well do members listen to each other, especially when difficult topics come up?

- Not well at all. Family members usually just shout and argue.
- Sometimes not well, other times pretty well.
- Usually we take time to listen to each other and understand each other's perspective.

2. Decisions are made:

- By one person without regard to how others feel.
- By the kids mostly without much parental guidance.
- By parents but with input from kids.

3. Can family members disagree freely with one another? Do members value each other's opinions?

- Not really. Whoever has the loudest voice or most power gets his or her way.
- Yes, most of the time we can voice our disagreements or opinions freely.
- We do not like to disagree. Members just keep their opinions to themselves.

4. How prevalent are put-downs in your family?

- Very prevalent. Members regularly trample upon each other's feelings and character.
- It happens, but we are called on it and usually get the message that it's not right. We know we should avoid it.

5. Showing and expressing feelings:

- It is not okay.
- We are encouraged to express our feelings and usually feel accepted.

6. When there's a problem:

- Family members get mad and explode, but never really solve it.
- Family members avoid dealing with it.
- We actually sit down, talk about it, and try to solve it.

7. Disagreements or conflicts between parents or adults:

- Are never heard in my home.
- Come up regularly, but my parents usually deal with them pretty well, even when one gets angry.
- This is the constant backdrop of my life. Parents or adults in my home just scream and never solve anything.

8. On apologizing and admitting wrongdoing:

- No one in my family takes responsibility or apologizes. Others are always blamed.
- We have been encouraged to admit when we are wrong and apologize.

9. In my family:

- Members tend to jump to conclusions and judge each other in the most negative light.
- Members tend to give each other the benefit of the doubt.

Now go back through the list of questions and *circle* the three you feel are most helpful for families and *check* the three you feel are most destructive for families. On the lines below write about the kind of communication you want for your future family and why it's important to you.
