



## **Course Name: Communication - Communicating in Difficult Situations**

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### **Course description:**

Challenges, difficulties, and conflict are part of life. During these times, communication can be strained. When anger flairs, words are often used that damage relationships. Why is it so hard to communicate in ways that express our feelings and, at the same time, share those feelings in a calm, understandable manner? What can we do to improve the avenue of communication when situations are difficult? This course explores our approach to communication during difficult situations and how we can improve our ability to communicate effectively.

### **Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have:**

- A. Listed out two reasons communicating during difficult situations is challenging.
- B. Considered two types of difficult situations.
- C. Identified a minimum of four ways we can improve our ability to communicate during difficult situations.

### **Outline of the class:**

- A. Numerous resources provide information on communicating during the most difficult situations and times in life. Within the church, we also know of situations that present challenges to how we communicate during those difficult times.
- B. Make sure the class remains in groups of three or four. Ask each group to make a list of 4-5 situations that increase the difficulty of communicating effectively. Give about 10 minutes to complete the task.
- C. Afterwards, ask the groups to share their lists and write the responses on the whiteboard. If the following responses are not given, add them to the discussion.
  - 1. Asking for a raise on the job
  - 2. Talking to a teenager about drugs, alcohol, tobacco, etc.
  - 3. Delivering bad news: tragedy, loss of life, loss of job, terminal illness, etc.
  - 4. Discussing change of just about any type
  - 5. Introducing a different or alternative way of thinking about something
  - 6. Addressing someone who has deceived or lied to you
  - 7. Inquiring situations where something is damaged, broken, or stolen
  - 8. Sharing struggles we deal with on a personal level

- D. Take a few moments and list out two reasons why it is difficult to communicate during these times? Afterwards, ask each group to share their answers and make a list on the white board. A few answers to share, if not mentioned.
1. Emotions usually run high during these times.
  2. Difficult communication usually involves introducing change, which is often difficult for people to accept.
  3. Perception or the interpretation of the situation varies from one person to another. Thus, we struggle to know how people will respond.
- E. There are two types of difficult conversations, according to the Skills You Need resource: [skillsyouneed.com](http://skillsyouneed.com)
1. Planned: These are thought out as to the content of the discussion, place, time, etc.
  2. Unplanned: These are unexpected, spur of the moment conversations, which are often built on a situation that sparks anger.
- F. As we think about both the planned and unplanned nature of conversations, consider the following questions.
1. Which of the two generally experiences a positive outcome?
  2. How can the planned difficult conversation benefit relationships?
  3. What might we do to prevent the unplanned difficult conversations from becoming divisive to relationships?
  4. What type of warning signs have we experienced that relate to the unplanned difficult conversations?
  5. Who might be a good accountability partner to help us when we reflect on the outcome of these unplanned difficult conversations?
- G. Ask each group to list 3-4 ways we can improve our ability to deal with communicating in difficult situations. Give about 5-10 minutes and ask everyone to share from their list. A few suggestions to add if not mentioned are below and from the [skillsyouneed.com](http://skillsyouneed.com) website.
1. Gather information: Make sure you have all the facts straight before you begin. Know what you are going to say and why you plan to say it.
  2. Be assertive: Once you are sure something needs to be communicated, then do so in an assertive way. Do not back down or change your mind midstream.
  3. Be empathetic: Put yourself in the other person's shoes and think about how they feel and what they are thinking about what will be said. Give others time to ask questions or make comments.

4. Be prepared to negotiate: When negotiating, always shoot for a win-win outcome, some way for all parties to benefit.
5. Use appropriate verbal and nonverbal language: Speak clearly avoiding any jargon that other parties may not understand, give eye contact and try to sit or stand in a relaxed way. Do not use confrontational language or body language.
6. Listen: When stressed we tend to not listen well. Try to relax and listen carefully to the views, opinions and feelings of the other person/people. Use clarification and reflection techniques to offer feedback and demonstrate that you were listening.
7. Stay calm and focused: Communication becomes easier when we are calm, take some deep breaths and try to maintain an air of calmness. Others are more likely to remain calm if you do. Keep focused on what you want to say, don't deviate or get distracted from the reason that you are communicating.

**Conclusion:**

- A. In our lesson today, we have discussed several areas related to concepts that related to communication during difficult situations.
- B. When we gain a better understanding of communication, we can eliminate numerous areas of conflict in the home, world, and church. The time we dedicate to improving our communication skills is worth the effort.
- C. Future lessons are designed to help in areas of leadership most needed to strengthen current leaders and prepare others to lead in the future.