



Communication Blocks

Sample blocks to two-way conversations/dialogue.

Commanding, Ordering, Directing

Examples: "What you should do is ____." "Stop complaining."
"You had better ____." "You have to ____."
"You must ____." "Just (do) ____."
"You will ____"

Intention: To control the situation and provide quick solutions.

Why it blocks communication: It says to the other, "You don't have the right to decide how to handle your own problems." It implies you are superior and creates a power struggle. It disrespects the other person's right and responsibility to make choices. It usually produces anger and resistance (invites, "Make me!").

Alternatives: Offer choices, ask for cooperation.

"I would appreciate ____."
"It's your choice, you can either ____ or ____."
"Would you rather ____ or ____."

Warning, Threatening, Admonishing

Examples: "If you do that, you'll be sorry." Nonverbal threats of physical violence.
"If you don't ____ then ____." "You'd better not do that if you know what's good for you."

Intention: To control the other person's behavior through negative consequences.

Why it blocks communication: It says to the other, "I have power over you, do what I say." While an ultimatum may at times be appropriate, it does not invite communication. Threats invite testing and a fight. This usually builds hostility.

Alternatives: Consequences and action methods. Simply state what actions you plan to take and then do them without reminders. Act - don't talk.

"If you continue to ____ I will need to ____."

Exhorting, Preaching, Moralizing

Examples: "The right thing to do would be to ____." "It is your duty to ____."
"You should ____." "It is your responsibility to ____."

Intention: To control the other person's behavior through guilt.

Why it blocks communication: Usually, the listener only hears the control part and resists, without considering the reasons or consequences.

Alternatives: Listen first to the whole issue/situation. Then help the person problem-solve.

"What do you think might happen if...?" "How are you planning to handle this?" "How will you feel if you ____?"

Judging, Blaming, Criticizing, Ridiculing, Name-calling, Sarcasm, Shaming, Put-downs

Examples: "How stupid." "That's an immature point of view." "You're just lazy."
"You're a spoiled brat." "I'm ashamed of you." "Well, it's your fault."
"OK, since your so smart ____" "Well, I guess that's just about the end of the world." (sarcasm)

Intention: To show the person how wrong he/she is by making them feel ashamed.

To make the person feel inferior, inadequate, or foolish.

To shift blame/criticism from oneself by focusing on the flaws of another.

Why it blocks communication: Making negative evaluations about people provokes them to defend themselves in order to protect their self-esteem. The common response is to defend, attack back, or to shut down feelings and/or communication.

Alternatives: If there is a need for criticism, try to separate the behavior from the person's character. Use "I messages."

"I'm sure you don't usually think/do ____, but." "Perhaps you didn't mean to, but ____"
"I feel ____, when you __ (describe their negative behavior)__"

Lecturing, Giving logical arguments, Teaching, Know it all

Examples: "The solution is really very simple. ____." "Do you realize ____."
"Yes, but ____." "Here is why you are wrong. ____."

Intention: To prove your point with the facts, logic, information, arguments.

Why it blocks communication: People usually know the facts and resent being told them again.

Alternatives: Help the person explore the goals, alternatives, and consequences. This is a more influential way to guide someone.

Advising, Giving Solutions or Suggestions

Examples:

“What you should do is ____.” “If I were you I would ____.” “Why don’t you ____.” “I suggest ____.”

Intention: To influence the person or change outcomes with arguments or opinions. To take responsibility from the other person onto the advice giver. To make the other person dependent.

Why it blocks communication: Again, advice is often resisted. It implies that the person can’t come up with his/her own solutions. If the results of the advice are negative it is the fault of the advice giver instead of the person making the choice.

Alternatives: Listen first to the whole issue/situation. Then help the person problem-solve.

“What do you think might happen if...?” “What do you plan to do?” “How will you feel if you ____.”

“What are your options?” “How would you like me to help you?”

Playing psychologist, Analyzing and Diagnosing

Examples:

“You’re just jealous / insecure.”

“The problem with you is ____.”

“Do you know why you said that?”

What you need is ____.”

“You don’t really mean that.”

Intention: To fix the other person by analyzing and explaining their motives.

Why it blocks communication: It implies that the speaker knows more about the other person than they do and that the speaker is therefore superior. This can cause a person to feel embarrassed, frustrated, or threatened. A common defense is to shut down communication, so the speaker doesn’t have access to analyze. If the interpretation is wrong, the person will feel angry or misunderstood.

Alternatives: Ask the person what he/she thinks/feels.

Placating, Consoling, Flattering, Agreeing

Examples:

“It’s really not that bad..”

“Everything will be OK.”

“Don’t worry. It will all work out.”

“You’ll feel better tomorrow.”

“You’re such a great person ____.”

Intention: To keep uninvolved by treating the other person’s feelings lightly. To take away the person’s pain and make them feel better.

Why it blocks communication: It implies the person doesn’t have a right to his/her feelings. It demonstrates that the speaker can’t handle discomfort, deep emotions, or conflict. Talking people out of feelings usually causes them to justify their emotions or responses more emphatically, often exaggerating to make the point. This can then cause the speaker to attempt to persuade the person further, to minimize more emphatically, to argue, or to dismiss the person’s feeling altogether since they seem excessive.

Alternatives: Listen and help the other person explore alternative solutions. Empathize without an attempt to solve anything.

Withdrawing, Distracting, Humoring, Diverting

Examples:

Distracting the person with another subject or a task at hand.

Joking the person out of the problem.

Pushing the problem aside for something else or another priority.

Withdrawing from the problem yourself.

Intention: To draw the person away from the problem. To protect the person from pain by changing the subject.

Why it blocks communication: It implies the person can’t stand the discomfort long enough to find a real solution. It minimizes the importance of the subject at hand. The typical response is to shut down communication because the problems and the person’s feelings about them have been minimized. He or she feels foolish to pursue the issue.

Alternatives: Listen and help the person explore alternative solutions. Validate the importance of the issue and then schedule a better time to handle it. Express your discomfort with the subject and handle it anyway or help the person seek more skilled help.

Probing, Interrogating, Questioning

Examples:

“Who ____? What ____? When ____? Where ____? Why ____? How ____?”

“Why did you ____?”

“What did you do to him/her?”

Intention: To try to find reason, motives, causes. To search for more information to solve the problem.

To keep the discussion fact-oriented to avoid uncomfortable feelings.

To determine blame.

Why it blocks communication: It implies that the person did something wrong or isn’t telling the truth. The person is placed on the defensive and is likely to shut down communication, become passive or resistant. The speaker then is the one with the responsibility to find the information and the solutions.

Alternatives: Allow the person to express the problem in his/her own way. Listen first with belief and empathy. Ask questions in non-accusing ways.

“What happened before ____?” instead of “What did you do to him?”