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# The Importance of Fostering Interpersonal Relationships With Family and Peers Through Face-to-Face Communication

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The Importance of Fostering Interpersonal Relationships With  
Family and Peers Through Face-to-Face Communication

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### Abstract

It is through the relationships with peers and family that we are best able to fulfill the human need to belong and connect to others. It is human touch that can only be experienced in face-to-face communication that allows us to recognize the humanity in each other and continue to treat each other as human beings should and remain civil. Face-to-face communication fosters positive human relationships with others and family; conveying the message of importance and acceptance within our relationships. It is important to have face-to-face conversation to allow us to recognize the humanity in all of us and practice the communication skills need to work and live well together.

## **The Importance of Fostering Interpersonal Relationships with Family and Peers Through Face to Face Communication**

For much of human history, people have satisfied the need for social belonging largely in relationships, interacting face-to-face with others (Sacco & Ismail, 2014). Human beings seek out and maintain relationships that satisfy human belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

According to belongingness theory, people are motivated to satisfy a need for social belonging through social relationships. Furthermore, development and continued relationships provide the connections where people meet their need for belonging and enhance their wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995).

We are in a time in history where multiple forms of communication allow us to interact with each other regardless of time and geographic location. We have become ever reliant and dependent on technology to assist us in exchanging the information and sentiment needed to create and maintain relationships. Text-based communication mediums, such as email and texting, have been complimented and in some instances replaced by face-to-face communication mediums (e.g. Facetime, Skype). Although these technological advances represent ways to remain connected and in communication, none have been able to replicate the human experience and need to connect like face-to-face interaction. Face-to-face communications remain the gold standard for personal communication

### **What is face-to-face communication?**

Face-to-face communication is also referred to as face-to-face interactions or face-to-face discourse is a concept that describes social interactions conducted without any mediated technology (Crowley & Mitchell, 1994). Face-to-face communications are most peoples' primary means of communication and require no education or literacy (i.e. text, technology) to go forth. Face-to-face conversations are easier, requires less effort, and more pleasurable than

other mediated forms of communication because it is the most “natural” form of communication (Kock, 2002; Sacco & Ismail, 2014).

### **What does face-to-face conversation allow for?**

Face-to-face communication allows for the conveyance of content and interpretation of social cues, body language, and facial gestures. Non-verbal feedback is also more readily available when communicating face-to-face. Additionally, face-to-face communication allows the speaker and listener reciprocal and mutual influence. Hanula et al. (2011) posit similar conclusions that face-to-face communication best satisfies the human need for social belonging because the individuals conversing are in close proximity, can interact with each other quickly, and facial expressions and partner’s body language are present for interpretation. Additionally, face-to-face communication allows for the transmission of olfactory and tactile cues (Hanula et al., 2011). Face-to-face communication is central to socialization and the development of interpersonal relationships (Morreale Sherwin & Spitzberg, 2000). Face-to-face communication provides the best conditions for fostering interpersonal relationships. Face-to-face communication involves attempting to better understand the content and position of the speaker. Information is less likely to be misinterpreted and allows the opportunity for immediate clarification, correction, or having the speaker and listener come to an agreement upon the message being sent and message delivered. Communication, specifically face-to-face communication, is one of the most basic elements of human functioning and is the cornerstone of strong, healthy relationships; interpersonal relationships are initiated and maintained through communication (Erozkan, 2013). It is assumed that great communication would be associated with the development of strong and healthy relationships.

Face-to-face communication should be utilized when possible and appropriate. Face-to-face communication allows for a human touch and the treatment of speaker and listener with the utmost respect and care. By using face-to-face communication one could serve as a role-model of positive communication for peer and family members..

### **Requirements of face-to-face communication**

Close proximity and the ability to access and contact are required for face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication should be utilized in situations where conversations are needed, most appropriate, and when speaking face-to-face will likely be most effective. Face-to-face communication requires minimizing internal and external distractions; an uninterrupted time secured for focused attentiveness and communication. With these conditions met, face-to-face communication enables relationship establishment, relationship maintenance, and relationship growth.

### **Active listening and face-to-face communication**

The International Listening Association (ILA;2012) defines listening as, “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages”. Active listening is a more involved form of listening which was developed by Gordon (1975) based on previous work of Rogers’ (1951) conceptualization of empathetic reasoning. Active listening is considered as counseling or social support because it communicates that the listener understands and cares about the speaker’s thoughts and feelings (Weger et al., 2014). Active listening conveys empathy and builds trust by demonstrating an unconditional regard by confirming other’s experiences. It involves listening openly and without preconceived ideas of what will be said or how to respond. Active listening is important and useful to speaker and listener because it creates the conditions and strategies to gain the most from a conversation.

According to Block (2008), active listening is important because “listening is the action step that replaces defending at a level than is being expressed” (p. 132).

Additionally, Rusch and Horsford (2008) posit active listening is an important strategy that involves reciprocity, allowing both speaker and listener opportunities to contribute and engage in the process. The three most common elements in active listening are:

- 1 Expressing an interest in the speaker’s message by displaying moderate to high nonverbal involvement
- 2 Refraining from judgement and utilizing paraphrasing
- 3 Asking question that encourage the speaker to elaborate on his or her experiences

Active listening is associated with conditions needed for positive relationship development, maintenance, and growth. Active listening may reduce uncertainty, generate more positive impressions, and lead to participants feeling more trustworthy.

In a study of active listening, Weget et al. (2014) found that listeners’ verbal paraphrasing, when used as part of active listening was associated with attentiveness and responsiveness, and that listeners’ questions were associated with positive conversation management, the listener being perceived as socially attractive (i.e. pleasant company) and responsive. Active listening may accomplish a sense of understanding and care about the speaker better than providing unsolicited advice or offering simple verbal and nonverbal acknowledgments. Additionally, in a study of couples, Reznik, Roloff, & Miller (2012) found that “active listening was positively related to problem solving, relationship stability, perceptions that problems could be solved and was negatively related to intrusive thoughts during arguments” (p.15). Furthermore, Bodie et al. (2008) identified understanding, experiencing positive affect, and relationship building as outcomes of the listening process.

Feeling understood by the listener is relevant to both speaker and listener in relationships because it enables the establishment and maintenance of rewarding relationships. Active listening is related to the development of positive affect and of positive feelings associated with sustained engagement in relationships. Rewarding conversations are a likely outcome of active listening. These conversations are best achieved face-to-face, in close proximity through personal communication. Active listening contributes to rewarding conversations, and is a contributor to and an outcome of positive relationships.

### **Relationships and active listening**

Active listening in face-to-face communication fosters rich relationship experiences associated with the development of care, closeness, trust and unconditional regard. Furthermore, in these relationships participants are learning the content, emotional context, and emotional state needed to be appropriate, responsive and supportive. Relationship participants feel that they are cared for when their stories are heard, ideas are acknowledged, and their experiences are validated. These outcomes are achieved primarily via active listening; listening to verbal as well as attending to non-verbal communication (Bettez, 2011). Active listening aids communicators in relationship development. When active listening is used to enhance face-to-face communication both participants are active contributors and active participant in relationship building. Conversation and relationship building are interconnected, with better communication likely associated with better and hopefully long lasting relationships.

Face-to-face communication is of the utmost importance in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers and even more in establishing lifelong relationships with family. Peers are like actors who you'll share a scene of life with. Most peers will come into life using relationships as vehicles of exchange and mutual benefit. Family relationships usually represents

a longer time commitment and take priority over other relationships. Face-to-face communication may be beneficial in establishing and maintaining lifelong relationship within families. Speaking face-to-face allows opportunities to attend to each other, demonstrate care, and form genuine bonds and connections.

Active listening as part of face-to-face communication requires an investment that at times may not be balanced or reciprocal, however the effort should be made in using active listening to establish and maintain high quality positive relationships. It is beneficial to utilize active listening in face-to-face conversations early and often in peer and family relationships. To maintain relationships, participants could teach and model active listening in face-to-face conversations. Better quality conversations are likely related to increases in relationship understanding, connectedness, and empathy. The goal of active listening is to be mindful and present when engaging in face-to-face conversation with those who you would like to and need to maintain positive and lasting relationships with. Active listening facilitated via face-to-face communication enables one to be open to allowing others to tell you about their stories and having them share their experiences. The responsibility for relationship building starts with the listener being prepared to model, participate, and grow deeper. Important relationships are fostered by spending time speaking, listening, and demonstrating mutual care and connection among participants.

In a time where technology facilitates convenient and quick communication, it is important to make times for face-to-face communication and conversations for those we spend the most time with and those whom we would like to maintain healthy and strong relationships. It is through the relationships with peers and family that we are best able to fulfill the human need to belong and connect to others. It is human touch that can only be experienced in face-to-face communication that allows us to recognize the humanity in each other and continue to treat

each other as human beings should and remain civil. Face-to-face communication fosters positive human relationships with others and family; conveying the message of importance and acceptance within our relationships. It is important to have face-to-face conversation to allow us to recognize the humanity in all of us and practice the communication skills need to work and live well together.

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