

COMMUNICATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

“The way we communicate with others and ourselves ultimately determines our quality of life.” Anthony Robbins.

Yes, there is power in the spoken word. But, most of us aren't AWARE of what we say, how we say it, and how it affects every aspect of our lives. Too often we get into bad habits and say whatever pops into our heads without thinking. Good communicators are aware of what they say, how they say it, and how well they listen.

Talking is possibly the smallest piece of the communication puzzle. It's important to choose words carefully and wisely, to *listen* to yourself, to be clear and concise, to be aware of what you say, and to show respect for the listener.

Nonverbal messages are more powerful than the actual words we speak. We've all heard, “It's not so much what is said, but how you say it.” Ask yourself if your body language matches the message you want to share. Pay attention to facial expression, hand gestures, and eye contact.

Perhaps the most important aspect of healthy communication is listening. The Greek philosopher Epictetus says, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.” A good listener maintains eye contact, gives full attention to the speaker, is able to paraphrase what is heard, asks open ended questions, and shows encouraging body language. A common mistake is to begin formulating your answers before the speaker finishes talking. Being a good listener shows respect.

To ensure you don't fall into the rut of ineffective communication, pay attention to your words, body language and listening skills. Learn about Assertive communication, the benchmark for healthy relationships. Assertiveness means expressing your feelings, beliefs, and ideas without infringing on the rights of others. When we are assertive, we are honest, direct, and respectful. We talk about our feelings and state the facts instead of aggressively blaming others or acting as doormats for their aggressive behavior.

If you'd like to learn more about healthy communication, check out a book on Assertiveness, attend an Assertiveness training class, or call Ellen Harris for a consultation 239-404-0862.