ēquilia

Effective ways to express yourself

Tips for letting others know how you feel and what you need when you're stressed.

Effective communication is the source of all understanding. When times get tough, it's important to know how to express yourself calmly and effectively so you can get the help you need.

Try these 5 psychological strategies to help you know what to say:

1 Know how to be heard

When experiencing strong emotions like fear, anger, or frustration, it can sometimes feel like others are just "not getting" us, which can lead us to snap, yell, or withdraw from the situation without solving the problem or getting our needs met.

Reacting this way can lead to misunderstanding, defensiveness, and cause even more unnecessary stress.

Responding to the situation calmly instead, by taking a deep breath to ease your emotions before you express how you feel, can help others hear what you say.

Try these 3 steps:

1. Notice and label how you feel, e.g. "I'm feeling frustrated right now."
2. Take a slow breath in and out of your nose before you respond.
3. Explain the problem, the situation, how you feel or what you need using calm and respectful language.

2 Describe how you feel

Even if you're visibly upset, other people won't always know how you're feeling unless you tell them. Some ways of expressing yourself are more helpful than others.

"I feel really hurt and upset about work, because I don't know if they'll be letting us all go and I'm scared I won't be able to find another job."

Helpful

- **Being honest –** letting the other person know how you're truly feeling.
- **Being specific -** naming the different emotions you're experiencing, instead of using general or vague terms.
- **Using 'I' statements** - Explaining how the situation you're in is affecting you rather than blaming or criticizing others' behaviour.

Unhelpful

- **Being aggressive** - yelling, using hurtful language, or being sarcastic.
- **Shutting down** - withdrawing or giving someone the "cold shoulder".
- **Blaming the other person** - making the conversation about them rather than about you.

3 Ask for what you need

Expressing your feelings helps others know what's going on for you so they better understand how to support you.

But if you're looking for a particular response or for them to take an action, you need to clearly express your needs.

Tip: Explaining to others what you need helps them to feel confident in supporting you through a tough time!

"I need some time to clear my mind, so I'm going for a walk. Can you please keep an eye on the kids?"

4 Know your boundaries, then communicate them

When you say yes to too many things, you use up more of your resources (energy, time, money, focus, patience, love) than you can replenish.

Communicating your boundaries is about letting others know where you stand in a calm, clear, kind yet firm way.

"Thanks for the invite, but I'm going to spend some time with my parents next weekend."

5 Be a good listener

Effective communication is not just about knowing how to express yourself but also knowing how to listen to and respond to others.

Good listening is about helping the other person feel heard and understood.

You don't always need to think of solutions or offer advice. Instead, you can practice offering reassurance and validation.

Validate - acknowledge their struggles and help them feel understood.

Reassure - help them remember their strengths and see the bigger picture.