

Make Friends and Get Rid of Enemies (and Difficult Teachers, too!)

A tutorial for school children ages 8 through 13

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About this How-To Lesson

This How-To Lesson will teach you how to make friends better, how to get rid of enemies and bullies, and how to make teachers respect you. It will also help you to get your parents to listen better to you.

Believe it or not, you can accomplish all these things simply by learning how to talk in a different way. Also, you can use this new way of talking to improve any situation you are in, even if other people do not talk this way.

You might wonder, "Why do I have to learn a new way to talk? It's the other kids who are making trouble. And the teacher is being difficult. And my parents just don't listen. Why don't they change?" These thoughts might be true, but they won't change the situation and make things better for you. If you knew a different way of talking that would help change these things, wouldn't it be worth it?

This Lesson has three parts. First, it explains a little about communication. Second, it teaches you a new way of talking called the Better Communication Method. Last, it gives you several examples of how to use the Method when talking with other people.

As you will see, the Better Communication Method is simple. You can learn it, but it will take some practice. Just remember, the more you try using the Method, the faster you will learn it and the sooner others will get along better with you and listen to you.

How Communication Works

When we talk, we say different types of things. Sometimes we ask questions, such as, "Did you call me?" Sometimes we ask for things: "Can I have the last slice of pizza?"

We respond to questions by giving an answer. For example, you might say, "Yes, I called you, but I didn't leave a message." Another example would be responding to a question that asks for something. "Ok, you can have the last slice of pizza."

The rest of communication involves telling people something you know or believe.

Therefore, everything you say is either asking, answering, or telling.

While it can be important to decide what you want to tell other people and what you don't want to tell others, telling is not the part of communication that determines how well you will get along with others and how well they treat you. The parts that determine how well you will get along with others are asking and answering. Therefore, the Better Communication Method only teaches you how to ask and answer in a better way. You can decide for yourself what you want to tell others.

Let's begin with asking.

Asking

When asking a question, start with the words, "I want." Adding the word "please" is also helpful. For example, if you want your teacher to explain a homework assignment, say, "I want you to explain this assignment to me, please." Another way of saying it would be, "Would you please explain this homework assignment to me?" The exact words you use are not all that important. What is important is that you have told the other person exactly what you want.

If a bully is bothering you, ask the bully to stop. "I want you to stop bullying me." You might be surprised to learn that bullies stop sometimes simply if you ask. If the bully does not stop, then you should get help from another student, a teacher, or your parent. Calling the bully names or trying to embarrass the bully in front of others usually just makes things worse.

Answering

How you answer people is very important. It is usually the part of communication where things either get better or worse. People may not always ask for things in a nice way, but how you respond to their requests almost always makes the difference between making friends and making enemies.

Keep in mind that when you are answering, the person asking you the question wants to know two things: that you listened to the question, and what you think about it. People want to know these things in that order, too. It's most important that they know you are listening to them. Then, they want to know what you will agree to.

Thus, the first thing you must do when answering someone is to summarize what you heard and repeat it back to the other person. Don't repeat their exact words, use your own words instead. For example, if someone asks, "Will you trade my peanut butter sandwich for your cookies?", you might summarize by saying, "So, you want my cookies for your sandwich, right?" By telling the other person what you heard, you are letting the other person know that you are truly listening.

After you have summarized the other person's request, you must tell the other person what you think about it. First, tell the other person what you are willing to do or agree to. For example, you might say, "Ok, I'm willing to make a trade." Then, say what you are not willing to do. "But I won't trade for your sandwich."

It's very important that you answer in this order. If you say what you are not willing to agree to first, then the other person may stop listening to you and won't hear what you are willing to agree to.

Answering can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Summarize what the other person wants, (**Summarize**)
- 2) Tell the other person what you are willing to agree to (**Willing**), and then
- 3) Say what you are unwilling to agree to (**Unwilling**).

In brief, it's **Summarize (S), Willing (W), Unwilling (U)**, or **S-W-U**.

After you answer, the other person will then respond. Perhaps the other person says, "Why don't you want my sandwich? It's really good." You then answer back, using the Method again. You might say, "I realize you want me to trade for your sandwich. [**Summarize**] And like I said, I'm willing to trade. [**Willing**] But I just don't want your sandwich. [**Unwilling**]. You might then make your own request: "How about you trade your apple for my cookies?"

The discussion continues until you both reach agreement. Hopefully, the other person will say, "Ok, I'll trade my apple for your cookies" and you both get what you want. Sometimes though, you don't agree on what you both want, so you must simply agree that you cannot reach an agreement and end the discussion. For example, if the other person says, "No, I don't want to trade my apple," then you might simply say, "Ok, well I guess we're just not going to make a trade."

When responding to someone, it's important not to change the subject. For instance, when the other person said, "Why don't you want my sandwich? It's really good," you might have become upset and said, "Don't try to talk me into it. I saw you trying to talk Bobbie into a bad trade yesterday on the playground." This would be changing the subject, and it gets in the way of the discussion you're having now. Changing the topic is often what starts fights and then turns friends into enemies. Try to stick to the conversation you are having now, and just let the other person know what you want and what you don't want. You don't need to give reasons unless you really want to.

Using the Better Communication Method On a Regular Basis

It may seem odd at first to use this approach. People don't usually answer others by summarizing first. Some people are afraid to ask others directly for what they want, or fear

they may hurt others' feelings by saying what they don't agree to. Thus, it can take some time getting used to the Method.

In order to get used to it, I recommend that you start by using the Method exactly as I have explained it. Over time, you will find that you are a better listener and communicate better with others. As a result, you won't always have to summarize what others have said, it will be clear to other people that you are listening to them. And when people act as though you aren't listening, you can start summarizing again in that conversation. Also, by practicing saying what you are willing to agree to and not willing to agree to, you will find these things easier to say over time.

Also, when someone asks you a question because they just want information, such as in the example, "Did you call me?", you don't have to summarize. You just need to give the person the requested information that you are willing to share. You don't have to share everything you know, and you can also tell the other person, "I don't want to tell you that."

By using the Method every time you talk, it will become a natural part of how you speak. When you ask for things, you will naturally begin by stating what exactly you want. And when answering, you will make it clear that you are listening, and then state what you are willing to agree to and what you are not willing to agree to. As you do these things, you will notice that people will respect you more and treat you nicer.

Quick Reference Chart

Asking: "I want..."

Answering: SWU

Summarize (S) – *Summarize* what the other person wants,

Willing (W) – say what you are *Willing* to do or agree to, then

Unwilling (U) – say what you are *Unwilling* to do or agree to.

Following are examples of the Better Communication Method.

Examples

The following examples explain how to use the Better Communication Method. In each example, the conversation is written first using bad communication, then it is rewritten using the Method. I also make notes to show how the parts of the Method are used in conversation, sometimes very naturally. Please keep in mind that the examples demonstrate only one possible way to use the Method, they are not intended to be memorized or repeated in

conversation. You will have to use the Method as it best works for you.

Example 1. Stopping a Bully

Bullies hurt others in many ways. Some common ways include pushing you into your locker or throwing your books on the floor. In this example, a boy named David is bullying another boy named Alfred. David often tries to knock Alfred's books out of his arms.

[David pokes at books that Alfred is holding.]

Alfred: Stop!

[David grins and keeps poking. After a few more pokes, he hits the books and they fall to the ground.]

Alfred: Quit it, you jerk!

[Alfred begins to pick up his books while David laughs and walks away.]

Sadly, David got what he wanted. He wanted to see Alfred upset and having to pick up his books. David wanted to feel powerful, and that was the only way he knew how.

Let's suppose that Alfred has learned the Better Communication Method and understands what to do about bullies:

[David pokes at books that Alfred is holding.]

Alfred: I want you to stop poking at my books. [*Asking*]

[David grins and keeps poking.]

Alfred: Hey Carlos, come here. [Alfred looks at his friend, Carlos, as he asks him to come over. Carlos starts walking towards Alfred.]

Carlos: Hey, Alfred. What's up?

Alfred: I want your help, Carlos.

[David pokes again at Alfred's books.]

Alfred: I want you to stop, now. [*Asking*]

Carlos: [looking at David] Hey man, what are you doing?

David: Nothing.

[Carlos looks at Alfred and then back to David.]

Carlos: Leave my friend alone.

David: I'm not doing nothing to him.

[Alfred and Carlos look directly at David. David stops smiling and walks away.]

Alfred: Thanks for being there for me, Carlos.

Carlos: Anytime, my friend.

Alfred communicated as best he could with David. Notice that he never yelled or cursed at David, he simply told David that he wanted him to stop. When David refused to stop, Alfred got help by telling Carlos that he wanted him to help. If David still did not stop, Alfred could have gotten the help of a teacher. If no teacher helped, he could later get help from his parents. He just needed to learn how to ask in a better way.

Example 2. Teasing

Mike is teasing Jake. Mike tells several people that Jake likes Kristy, when in fact Jake likes Sarah. Jake confronts Mike one day after school.

Jake: Hey Mike, what the hell is wrong with you? You know I like Sarah. Stop telling people I like Kristy or I'm going to punch you.

Mike: [laughing] Yeah? Well, I can tell the whole school and they will believe me.

Jake: Well, I know where you live.

Mike: Really, what are you going to do?

Jake: You'll find out soon, won't you?

Mike: Oh, I'm really scared of a wimp like you.

Jake: Ok, you'll find out.

This discussion didn't solve anything. Both boys are even madder at each other now. Let's suppose that Jake has learned the Better Communication Method:

Jake: Mike, I heard that you are telling people that I like Kristy. Is that true? [Asking for information]

Mike: [laughs] Yeah.

Jake: You know I like Sarah. I want you to please stop telling people I like Kristy. [Asking for Mike to cooperate.]

Mike: Yeah? Well, I can tell the whole school and they will believe me.

Jake: Well, I can't stop you from telling the whole school and they may believe you.

[*Summarize*] But I don't want you to do that. [*Unwilling-- to agree to it*] I want you to

stop. [*Asking, again*]

Mike: Why should I stop? This is getting good.

Jake: I know you think it's fun. [*Summarize*] But it makes me upset. [*Unwilling-- to agree that it is fun*] Please stop.

Mike: I'll do what I please.

Jake: I'm sure you will. [*Willing-- to agree that Mike will do what he wants*] But I want you to stop. [*Asking again*]

Mike: I don't have to do what you say.

Jake: I agree, it's your choice. [*Willing-- to agree that he cannot control Mike*]
 [Mike walks away from Jake silently.]

Mike never apologizes or even tells Jake that he will stop, but Mike does stop spreading this rumor around school. Mike and Jake are not friends at this point, but at least they have stopped being enemies. Jake got what he wanted because he listened to Mike and said what he wanted and what he didn't want, which is the whole point of the Better Communication Method.

Example 3. Misbehaving in Class

John and Lisa are sitting in Ms. McGhee's history class. John starts asking Lisa about a new movie.

John: Lisa, have you seen that new movie, "Ultimate Explosions in Outer Space?"

Lisa: Be quiet, the teacher will catch us.

John: Don't worry about it. Have you seen it?

Ms. McGhee: John and Lisa, quit your yapping. You both get to do an extra assignment tonight because you like class so much.

Lisa: But Ms. McGhee, I wasn't talking.

Ms. McGhee: Quit lying, Lisa. I heard you talking.

Lisa: John was talking to me.

Ms McGhee: I don't care. You were talking.

Lisa: But I was just telling him to be quiet.

Ms. McGhee: But nothing. Do you want a triple homework assignment?

Lisa: No.

Suppose now that Lisa has learned the Better Communication Method. Here is how the

conversation might go:

John: Lisa, have you seen that new movie, "Ultimate Explosions in Outer Space?"

Lisa: Be quiet, the teacher will catch us.

John: Don't worry about it. Have you seen it?

Ms. McGhee: John and Lisa, quit your yapping. You both get to do an extra assignment tonight because you like class so much.

Lisa: Yes, Ms. McGhee, I was talking. I'm sorry. [*Summarize and Willing-- to agree*] I don't think I should be punished because I was only telling John to stop talking to me.

[*Unwilling-- to agree to punishment*]

Ms. McGhee: It's not your job to tell John to be quiet.

Lisa: It's not my job, you're right. [*Summarize*] I won't do it again. [*Willing-- to agree to stop*] But I don't think I should be punished. [*Unwilling-- to agree to punishment, again*]

Ms McGhee: You shouldn't have been talking.

Lisa: Yes, you're right. I won't do it again. [*Willing-- to agree to stop, again*]

Ms. McGhee: Ok. John, you still have an extra assignment to do.

Notice that even though she is still angry, Ms. McGhee listens to Lisa and changes her mind about punishing her. Ms. McGhee listened because Lisa listened to her and responded in a very direct but respectful way. People almost always appreciate it when you say what's on your mind directly but respectfully.

Example 4. Arguing with Your Parents

Julie intends to go to the movies with her friends. Instead of asking for permission from her mom, however, she simply announces to her mom that she is going.

Julie: I'm going to the movies with my friends. See you later.

Mom: You can't go to the movies. The family is coming over tonight.

Julie: I don't care. I'm going to the movies.

Mom: The hell you are. Now just stop it.

Julie: Why do I have to stay home for the family? I hate this stupid family anyway.

Mom: Go to your room, now!

Julie got off to a bad start with her mom, and then made it worse. If she learned the Better

Communication Method, she could get her mom to listen better and respond better:

Julie: I would like to the movies with my friends now. Alright? [**Asking**]

Mom: You can't go to the movies. The family is coming over tonight.

Julie: The family is coming over? [**Summarize**]. I forgot. May I still go? [**Asking**]

Mom: No, I just said the family is coming over.

Julie: Oh, so you're saying I can't go at all, even later? [**Summarize**]

Mom: Right. We're all going to be together, and by the time they leave it will be too late for you to go to the movies.

Julie: Ok, I understand. [**Willing-- to agree that she will not go**]

Mom: Maybe you can go with your friends tomorrow.

Julie: Maybe another time [**Willing-- to agree**], but not tomorrow. [**Unwilling-- to agree**]

Mom: Well, ok. Maybe next time you can ask me earlier so that we can make plans?

Julie: Ok, I will. [**Willing-- to agree**]

Even though Julie did not get to go to the movies that night, the conversation went much better. Her mom even offered to help her plan to go another time. Communicating better will improve your relationships with others, even though you won't always get what you want.

Example 5. Arguing with a Friend

Monique and Emma are friends. They agreed to meet at a video store at noon on Saturday to hang out. Monique waited at the store, but after an hour Emma had still not shown up, so Monique left. They run into each other at school on the following Monday:

Emma: Hey, Monique. How's it going?

Monique: I don't want to talk to you.

Emma: Why?

Monique: You know perfectly why.

Emma: Are you talking about the video store? I didn't think it was big deal.

Monique: A big deal? I waited there for over an hour and we had some plans.

Emma: But I was busy shopping with my mom.

Monique: Then how come you didn't call me?

Emma: Because I forgot.

Monique: Well, you can't forget about being friends with me.

Emma: Whatever.

[They walk away from each other.]

Now suppose that Emma has learned the Better Communication Method. Here is how the conversation might go:

Emma: Hey, Monique. How's it going?

Monique: I don't want to talk to you.

Emma: Why?

Monique: You know perfectly why.

Emma: I know why? [*Summarize*] I'm not really sure. [*Unwilling-- to agree*]. Are you mad that I was late to the video store? [*Asking*]

Monique: Yeah! I waited there for over an hour and we had some plans.

Emma: You're right, we did have plans. [*Summarize*] I did go, [*Willing-- she tried to meet her*] but I was really late. [*Unwilling-- explaining she was unable to meet on time*] I'm sorry.

Monique: How come you didn't call me?

Emma: I didn't call you because I forgot. [*Summarizing and Willing-- to answer the question honestly*] I'm really sorry.

Monique: You forgot?

Emma: Yeah, I did. [*Willing-- to answer*] Like I said, I'm sorry.

Monique: Ok. Next time call, alright?

Emma: Alright. [*Willing-- to agree*]

Talking in this way helps the other person calm down. Because she was more calm, Monique could listen to Emma and forgive her for not showing up on time. It also helped that Emma apologized for breaking their date and for not calling.

Conclusion

The conversations above demonstrate how you can get others to listen better to you. When you talk this way, everyone is friendlier to you and you will find it easier to get along with others, including difficult people. Don't believe me? Try it and see for yourself!