

Communication and holiday stress

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

The pace and changed routines of the holiday season can mean a lot of stress for many families. They can also result in poor communication between family members.

Family members don't always have time to talk as they rush off to their activities. Or, when they do talk, they don't really listen to each other. They're often troubled with thoughts of things they must do for the holidays.



This holiday season, try to practice the skills of listening and expressing.

Effective listening

Effective listening requires concentration, tolerance, rephrasing and sensitivity.

- **Concentration** means focusing on what the speaker is saying. Try your best not to think about holiday matters when a family member is talking to you.
- **Tolerance** involves openness and respect for what the other person is sharing. You're not truly listening if you're being judgmental or defensive. Have an open mind and hear the other person out.
- **Rephrasing** is a way to check your understanding of messages received. Use things like, "Do you mean . . ." before restating the speaker's message in your own words. Or add phrases like "Is that correct?" at the end.
- Finally, **sensitivity** means paying attention to the feelings being expressed, as well as the words being spoken. This includes being sensitive to the nonverbal parts of talking. It's important to be sensitive to the way family members feel about holiday plans.

Effective expressing

Good communication involves expressing as well as listening. Expressing your thoughts and feelings may mean that you need to listen to yourself first. Ask yourself:

- "What am I really feeling right now?"
- "What do I really think about this issue?"
- "Do I really want to spend the 25th with the in-laws?"

Then you can state your message as clearly and honestly as possible.

Consider using I-statements instead of you-statements. You might say, "I'd like to spend the 25th at home with you and the kids instead of going away this year." This message is better than a you-statement, which says, "You always want to spend the holidays with your family."

The you-statement can seem like an attack on your spouse who may become defensive. I-statements are more likely to keep communication open.

A final thing you can do is find more time to talk. Even during the hectic holiday season, you can make an effort to talk while driving, doing chores or wrapping gifts.

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