Learning to Communicate Better with Depression

by ERIC PATTERSON

Communicating With Depression

Communicating with depression is tough; depression comes into your life and robs you of your ability to communicate well with people. When you become less effective at expressing your needs and wants, depression grows, an example of depression making you more depressed.

Therapists, doctors and family members encourage you to use assertive communication, but unless you truly understand it, being assertive is a challenge. People with depression tend to shift between passive and aggressive communication. Neither is helpful. Consider the benefits of assertive communication. Assertive communication can:

- Reduce stress triggered by misunderstandings and conflicts
- Enhance self-esteem and confidence by allowing you to speak clearly
- Improve the perception others have of you
- Allow you to ask for help when needed and say “no” to others when appropriate

C.R.I.S.P. Communication

Certainly, the results are worth the time and energy needed to modify your communication. Here’s how to improve your assertive communication with C.R.I.S.P:

- **Change your mind –** Begin to move away from the idea that you have nothing to contribute or that others will walk all over you. People care about your thoughts, feeling and opinions. They want to hear what you say because your input leads to better choices. If you remain fearful or lack hope, it is possible that the people in your life are not supportive. Seek out more positive connections.

- **Respect yourself –** Depression works to diminish your self-worth and value. Realizing that you are worthwhile and your opinions deserve to be heard improves your esteem. Voicing your feelings provides self-validation and others will begin to see you differently. Acknowledging your strengths and things you do well will improve your ability to be heard.
- **"I" Messages –** The most assertive communication involves “I” messages. Saying “I feel angry when you ignore me. I would appreciate more attention” is much more effective than saying “I’m mad at you.” “I” messages allow the person you are speaking with to understand your feelings, what triggered the feelings and what they can do to help. Beware, though. Starting a sentence with “I” does not make it an “I” statement. Saying “I feel like you are a jerk” misses the mark.
- **Specific and direct –** If you want someone to learn something, be specific and direct. Making good eye contact and avoiding distractions will assist with this task. Work to be clear and concrete with your expectations. People using passive communication tend to say too little or too much. In either case, the point of your communication is not likely to be well-received. Take communication slow and simple.
- **Practice and Prepare –** How long have been using your current communication pattern? Becoming

assertive will not happen overnight but if you practice, you can make gradual improvements over time. Preparing helps you to go into a situation with information about the communication of someone else. If you know the person tends to ignore or minimize your opinions, counteract this with improved “I” messages and eye contact.

Conclusion

Assertive communication can do a lot to improve relationships and self-esteem, but even the best communication has limitations. No matter how assertive or C.R.I.S.P. your communication is, you cannot force someone to be assertive back to you. If you think your communication style has been appropriate but the other person continues to be problematic, reconsider the need for this relationship. Being assertive means knowing when to walk away from a poor situation.