

FamilyTALK: Farm and Ranch Families

Ways to FamilyTALK for Satisfying Relationships

- Share everyday happenings.
- Show fondness and admiration.
- Bring up tough issues “softly.”
- Avoid using the word “you” to blame.
- Use “I” statements to talk about problems.
- Make messages short during disagreements.
- Be respectful even during conflict.
- Agree on rules for difficult discussions.
- Suggest a “time out” to cool down.
- Calm your body in times of conflict.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Honor each other’s hopes and dreams.

Family communication is important. It determines relationships with each other and sets the tone for family living and the family farm business. Family communication is not simple. Communication is more than what you say and do. Your messages depend on how you think the other person will react, so you may communicate differently with each member of the family. Each person has several different family communication patterns that develop over time, depending on who is being communicated with, the setting, the timing, and other factors. Recognizing those patterns, especially during tough times, builds awareness on how you can change your own pattern to make things better.

How You Communicate

You have something you want to share when you communicate with another family member. Using words is the most common way to express thoughts and feelings, but you also send nonverbal messages with your eyes, facial expressions, and body movements. Have you ever known anyone in your family to stomp out of the room without saying a word? That is a nonverbal message.

Another important part of communication is listening. A good listener sends a nonverbal message of care and concern even if he or she does not agree with the message being sent.

Thoughtful listening builds relationships. Conflicts happen when family members do not agree with each other which might be often in a farm family business. That is normal because no two people are likely to get along all the time. It takes time and effective communication skills to work through these differences. Treating each other with respect even when you are mad at each other is very important. That means no name calling, put downs, or insults. How you treat each other in conflict shows how much you value your relationship.

Building Your Family Communication Skills

Think about typical interactions among your family members that are involved in your farming operation. Review the times when things are going well – think about the problem times. It is easy to think that the other family member should change during conflict. Look seriously at yourself first to see what type of communication patterns you are using — you have the most control over yourself in changing family interactions.

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• You can get carried away by thinking bad things about others when there is a great deal of conflict. Stop yourself when negative feelings and thoughts about other family members overwhelm positive thoughts. Talk to yourself about the good qualities of other family members. Think about the good times you have had together. Self-talk is powerful for influencing your feelings and actions.

• Communication with family members involves talking, but listening is also important. Effective listening is one of the best ways to show you care for the other person. Effective listening builds trust, but takes patience and hard work. This type of listening is more than hearing just the spoken word. It allows you to understand what is actually said.

• A family member can tell when you are listening by noticing your eyes, facial expressions, and body movements. Part of listening may be as simple as saying, "Yes," or "I see," or nodding your head. Remember that family members sometimes want a listening ear without advice or judgment. Think about body language. What message are you sending? Are you fidgeting? Rolling your eyes? Smiling sarcastically? Interrupting? Think about your body position. Are you facing the speaker without being too close or too far away? Are you sending a message that you are truly listening?

• Effective listening does not mean you agree. You may not like what the other person says. You are just trying to understand and identify with the other person's message. You may need to ask questions to get the correct meaning of the intended message.

• One way to show you understand is to use your own words to repeat the main points the other person has communicated, but without sarcasm. It is helpful to try to identify the speaker's feelings during this process. If you are not correct in understanding the speaker's emotions and message, you need to repeat the process until the other person is satisfied that you understand. Effective communication during a disagreement happens when each person gets a chance to be listened to without interruption and each person works hard at voicing feelings and the impact of the given situation without blaming.

• Communication built on trust helps family members survive all kinds of tough times. You know you can depend on each other. Having trust also means that the communication patterns you use all the time show care and respect for each other.

You may not always agree, but each of you has confidence that everyone will talk with respect, even when angry. Family members stop themselves from using insults and name calling to hurt each other.

• Big problems can seem overwhelming at times. They are easier to deal with when you break them down into the following parts.

1) Get your emotions under control. Effective communication is hard when a person is angry.

2) Stop and clearly define one part of the problem with other family members that are involved in the situation. This is often the hardest part of problem solving. If you are angry at a family member, define one specific behavior without exaggerating your feelings or bringing up the past.

3) After you have clearly defined one part of the problem, brainstorm creative solutions. Try hard to welcome all suggestions. If you begin to say, "No, that won't work," other family members may stop thinking creatively.

4) Think about the pros and cons for each solution.

5) Decide on a course of action that is agreeable to all involved.

6) Do what the family has decided.

7) Determine after a period of time if it is working. If it is not, start the problem-solving process again.

• Families that enjoy each other build strong family relationships. Often a family will find it hard to have fun and enjoy each other when they are having serious conflicts all the time. Enjoyable time together provides a relaxed way for family members to bond with each other. This helps reduce arguments. When family members are having fun, they are calmer and behave more naturally. You often think you cannot stop and make time for fun with your busy lives, but enjoyment can come in simple and everyday ways. Daily conversation provides an easy way to increase positive family interactions. Try giving compliments, showing appreciation, and talking over pleasant things that happened during the day. Playful silliness can be nourishing, too. A family may have to establish some ground rules when they are planning an event. This will help avoid arguments that can ruin a family's attempt to enjoy each other.