

Dialogue Tip Sheet

10 Ways to Have Meaningful Dialogues

by Susan M. Andrus, author of
Beyond Mars & Venus - Lessons of Dialogue and Peace, a Buddhist's perspective

1. Plan ahead. Make a few notes of key points that you want to communicate. But a scripted communication will come across as a script, so just use keywords and keep it natural.
2. Make it face-to-face. You need all those nonverbal cues to support the words that come out. Text messaging just doesn't work that well for a serious dialogue.
3. Use "I" statements. This takes practice. Use a friend or a mirror or a pet and bounce ideas off of them first. For example, dialogue around the topic of money is loaded with emotion. So start off the dialogue by saying, "I feel threatened when we have less than \$50 in our savings account." Here are some other examples:
 - a. "I feel nervous bringing up this topic because it usually results in a big argument."
 - b. "I feel tongue-tied whenever I want to talk to you about money."
 - c. "I feel angry and isolated when people make an agreement with me but then go and do their own thing anyhow."
4. Listen to the other person. Remember what they are saying. Keep mental notes, or if it's hard to remember and you're distracted by your own thoughts and ideas, use paper and pencil to jot down the key points that you hear.
5. Before you respond with your side of the conversation, make sure you heard the other person correctly. Summarize what the other person said and wait to hear whether your summary is correct.
6. Paraphrase and use your own words. It's irritating when someone repeats word-for-word what was just said.
7. Use props. I like a tennis ball because it reminds me that I have to listen when the ball is in my court. As long as the person is speaking I hold the ball and listen. When the other person has acknowledged that my summary of their statements is correct, I give him or her the ball and I give my opinion on the topic being discussed.
8. Keep on the topic. Be careful not to stray to other unrelated issues like their mother, the fact that someone didn't exercise the dog last night, or the last time the bank balance was overdrawn.
9. Practice, practice, practice. It takes 1500 repetitions for a newly learned task to become learned at the automatic level.
10. Sign up for our free, monthly dialogue workbooks on a variety of topics. These will help you practice and become a more proficient dialoguer. You can sign up at www.WordminderPress.com.