

According to the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, communication problems often develop because people in conflict do not communicate with each other as frequently, as openly, and as accurately as they do when relationships are not strained. These miscommunications can be seen between parents and children, significant others, or even friends. Although I agree with this definition, I believe that poor communication is what starts problems in relationships. Many times, when upset or frustrated, we may assume others know why we are upset. Often, they do not know, which is one reason problems arise. It is very difficult to define “good” communication, yet so easy to define “bad” communication. A version of bad communication we see in plenty of situations is when we limit the information given to others, leaving them to figure out the problem by themselves, sometimes resulting in severe consequences. In fact, in a recent study conducted at the University of Michigan, eighty percent of people showed signs of using poor communication skills even though they thought they were good communicators.

When I was little, I loved helping my mom around the house and tried really hard to help with my two little brothers. Sometimes, my help ended with my parents yelling at me. But, the problem was, most of the time, I didn’t realize why I was being scolded. My mind would jump to conclusions, which were usually false, and resulted in me learning the wrong lesson. From this I realized, when parents try to yell or “talk sternly” to their children, they really should specify what it is they are mad about. If they do not, their child will not only miss the intended lesson, but learn something different. For example, when I was little, I learned that I was an awful cook, when in reality, I was supposed to learn to clean up my own messes.

I am the oldest in my family, so when I was about eight my mom was running all over the place, trying to deal with my two brothers, juggling bottles and toys. I enjoyed helping out

around the house because it made me feel older and more important. One day around dinner time I noticed that nothing was on the stove or in the oven. I am sure everyone has been in this situation before. Old, or young, it is that scary moment where a ton of questions start to arise: Where's the food? What if I go hungry? What if I collapse from lack of food? Then I realized, my mother was busy and distracted, therefore, she had not made dinner. That is when my great idea manifested. I would make dinner for her and she would be so happy!

But, there was a problem: I didn't execute the plan very well. I got out all of the stuff to make the best peanut butter and jelly sandwich ever made by an eight year old. I climbed up on a chair, grabbed the bread and just barely knocked the peanut butter out of the kitchen cabinet. First the bread, then the peanut butter, and last but not least, the jelly! I globbed the ingredients on the bread left and right like it was no big deal. And presto, there it was: the king of all peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. As soon as I finished my masterpiece, my mom looked into the kitchen and her jaw dropped. She muttered words under her breath and then yelled, "Kaitlynn, what did you do?" She ran into the kitchen, threw out my sandwich, and frantically began to clean up.

Being young and naïve, I thought that she was appalled by the looks of my sandwich, because even I knew that it wasn't the best looking PB&J out there. I had hacked the bread with a butter knife and the peanut butter and jelly was not just inside the sandwich, but all over the outside. I had attempted to cut off the crust, and when that did not work out, I simply ripped off the edge of the bread. As a child, I thought she was judging the sandwich I had made rather than the pile of peanut butter I had left her in the kitchen. Jelly was splattered on the floor and bread crumbs covered the chairs like a layer of newly fallen snow. My mother was not horrified of the sandwich I made, but the mess I had left her in the kitchen. But, being only eight years old, I

was not aware of this. I went years before trying to cook again, but once I began, I found out I really was not that bad. Looking back, I now know why my mom was yelling and frantically running to put things away in the kitchen, but at that time I hadn't seen the real problem. This proves that when you are upset with people, you should tell them what you are angry about. My mother had every right to be mad with the mountain of peanut butter I left for her on the kitchen counter, but since she did not tell me what was wrong, I was unable to change my behavior.

But some messes in our lives are not just peanut butter and jelly related. Some may come in between us and our significant other. Such a conflict may begin due to one's embarrassment or stubbornness about a situation. Some classic examples of this are in television and in movies, for example my guilty pleasure, *Degrassi*, a teen soap opera involving all different kinds of tensions in teen relationships. Lying and deceiving other people are regular subjects in this series. One instance that really showed how lack of communication can strain a relationship was between my favorite couple on the show, Eli and Clare. Clare had been sexually assaulted by the man running her co-op, but she felt that Eli would be upset with her for letting it happen. Because of this, she acted oddly and would not tell Eli what was wrong. Consequently, Eli believed that he did something wrong and got frustrated and confused. The communication here was extremely poor on Clare's part. She felt guilty about something awful that had happened to her, and thought not telling Eli what had happened would make things better. But, things did not go according to plan for Clare. Not only did the man get away with sexually assaulting her, but Eli also became frustrated with her and their relationship was strained to the point that they almost broke up. If Clare had told Eli what happened to her, the two of them would not have been in such a big fight and the man who assaulted her would not have gotten away. The consequence of Clare not communicating her problem right away led not only to problems in her

relationship, but problems for other young girls in the future who may also be attacked by this man. This goes to show that communication can be vital and good communication can help people that are not even part of the situation at the moment.

Similarly, friendships can be torn due to conflicts in communication such as giving somebody the cold shoulder or avoiding confrontation all together. In the popular '90s TV series, *Friends*, there were a few examples of this. In one episode, Joey went on a date with Phoebe's twin sister, Ursula, on the twin's birthday. Thinking nothing of it, Joey said happy birthday to Ursula and went out with her, completely ignoring Phoebe and forgetting about her birthday party. The next day, Phoebe kept hinting at the fact that she was mad at him, but he didn't know why. Instead of just telling him that he forgot her birthday, she continued making comments about how, "Good friends actually care about each other." This left Joey extremely confused and unaware of his mistake. It wasn't until someone else told him what he had done wrong that he was actually able to apologize. Since it took a while for someone to tell Joey what the problem was, he and Phoebe went a long time without even talking to each other. Even after Joey did apologize, it had been such a long time since they talked to one another that it made their relationship awkward. If Phoebe had been more blunt and told Joey exactly what he did wrong, they could have avoided such a big conflict and it could have just been resolved by Joey saying he was sorry.

Similar to the above situations, a recent study conducted at the University of Michigan showed that eighty percent of people believe themselves to be very good about communicating, while at the same time, seventy percent of people said that in a frustrating situation, they would either avoid confrontation or not tell the person why they are upset. This was a very interesting find, because it was discovered that some people who claim to be open about their feelings,

really are not when they are put in certain situations. I asked these questions, hoping to find a general trend in the way people communicate with each other, and found that how they actually communicate is much different from the way they think they communicate. A follow up survey might give more specific situations rather than asking about general circumstances. These circumstances might include topics that range from gossip to betrayal to determine what kind of situations trigger certain behaviors. If a person were to show poor communication during small situations such as gossip, it might show that they are just bad at communicating. On the other hand, if for the small stuff the person shows good communication, but during big situations such as betrayal, they show poor communication, it may show that as the tension grows higher, the more likely one is to communicate poorly.

Rather than just focusing on bad communication itself, another follow up survey may focus on the consequences any bad communication has caused. Since my examples focus on the consequences poor communication made, it would make sense that my survey data should show the same. A question like this may state a specific situation and ask the person to respond what consequences have happened to them, resulting from a situation similar to the one given. An example of this may be: "When my friend forgot to attend a ceremony at which I was being honored, I would not talk to her for a week, resulting in _____. Please assume a situation similar to the one stated." The choices could range from the loss of the friendship, to no consequences at all. It would be very interesting to include a last option of not applicable. I think a lot of people would either choose that or no consequences at all because they like to think that they are so good at communicating and would likely pretend like they have never encountered these common conflicts. Then again, they may be more honest with a question

similar to this one, rather than being asked to determine whether or not they are actually good at communicating. It would be interesting to find out which route they would take.

Another interesting find from this survey is that many people resulted to choosing c, neither agree nor disagree, as their answer for most questions. Specifically the three questions asked specifying communication between parents and children, significant others, or friends. I thought this could be because they did not want to admit they did the wrong thing, or because they did not want me to know what they did. If I were to conduct this survey again, I would probably have a bag or a box that the person could put their answers in so it could remain completely anonymous. I felt like some people may have skewed their answers slightly since it was done individually, and I would know each person's answers. Personally, I would have a hard time admitting my flaws in communication knowing the person collecting my answers would read them and know it was me. A problem like this could be fixed by using an anonymous online survey, but I would not have as much control over who actually received the survey and whether or not they are a reliable source.

Some bad communication may result in something much more serious than a bump in a relationship or friendship. Many of these errors have to do with misunderstanding what someone else said. These confusions may result from an error in translating a language, a misinterpretation, or even just not knowing what something means. According to an article about miscommunication, written by Rama Rao in 2008, a plane crash was caused by miscommunication between the pilot and the emergency team on the ground. An alarm began to go off, signaling danger. Right before impact, the cockpit recorder picked up on the crewmembers asking each other what "pull up" meant. The crewmembers were Chinese, therefore their English was not very good. They did not understand the command "pull up," and

therefore stared at each other, dumfounded, rather than flying higher in the air to avoid crashing. Although this doesn't directly relate to frustration in a relationship, it does illustrate that good communication is necessary and can be life threatening if it is misunderstood. Something had gone wrong, but the crew members were not aware of what exactly they were supposed to do to counteract it. This example is a harsh one, because it resulted in the death of twelve people upon the plane's crash into high-voltage power lines, all of which could have been avoided by better means of communicating. Since this instance does not focus on relationships like my earlier examples, I think a question could have been added to the survey to more directly reference misunderstandings and their consequences. As mentioned earlier, some follow up questions could be added to focus more on the consequences of poor communication. Another question could be added referencing a tense situation where there was some sort of misunderstanding due to language differences or slang. I think that this would be a harder question to ask because not many people have been in a situation like this; and if they have, the consequences probably have not compared to those of this example given. I could do one of two things: either take this example out of my paper, or do as I did and ignore it for the survey. I think it is a nice, different example that still emphasizes the problems with communicating, just in a different way. It shows an extreme consequence from miscommunication, hopefully making the reader realize how important their communication really is.

Communication is key when it comes to interactions between people. Whether it is a simple bump in a friendship or a huge disaster, errors in communicating can have very serious consequences. While difficult for many of us to recognize our own miscommunication, it is good to remember how important communicating really is. To save your relationships with others, or even your life in extreme circumstances, it is always good to let the other person know

exactly what is wrong. If you do not, nothing good can come from it, as you may lose those you care about the most. While my data supported my claim that poor communication is a problem, it did not show that people are conscious of their behavior. My examples leaned towards people's conscious decisions to ignore others while they are upset, whereas my data seemed to show that people thought they were open with their feelings while in reality they were not. Either way, it shows that people are not always good communicators and bad communication can result in very bad circumstances.