

AN ATTITUDE OF OPENNESS

Creating an attitude of openness will help you express yourself in healthy ways while allowing others to share their thoughts and feelings with you. It starts with knowing what you think and feel and putting those thoughts and feelings into words. This does not mean sharing your personal feelings and thoughts with everyone. Choose wisely! Individuals who have qualities you admire and a personal interest in your well-being are good choices. Openness is a two-way street. Opening up to others encourages them to share openly with you.

Here are a few tips for increasing openness in your relationships:

- ✓ Choose a good time to talk: Don't bring up potentially touchy or stressful subjects when you or the listener is stressed or busy.
- ✓ Listen as much as you talk: Give the listener a chance to express themselves. Do not think about what you plan to say when the listener is talking. Listen to their words and try to understand their perspective. Paraphrasing can help assure understanding.
- ✓ Deal with conflict calmly: Learn to discuss your feelings openly and honestly and in a respectful manner. Using "I"-statements can minimize blame and help with openness.
- ✓ Don't make assumptions: Approach the conversation with an open mind. Try to learn something new about the listener's perspectives. Listen without judgment and allow them to talk.
- ✓ Explain what you want: Be direct. Help your listener truly understand your thoughts and how the situation has affected you. Hurt feelings are often caused by lack of empathy, misunderstanding, and uncaring attitudes.
- ✓ Have an open dialogue: Ask open ended questions to invite conversation. It's hard for some people to be open when all they are receiving is a "yup" or a "no" answer in the conversation. While single phrases are direct, they don't really explain a lot.

Practicing openness can be scary! But without it, you will likely feel distance, resentment, and even regret within your relationships. Openness will help you build a strong foundation that will ensure that you create lasting connections with others.