

# Guidelines for Communication

**ToolTip #5**  
**Mar. 2003**



Good communication skills are essential for conducting effective neighborhood association meetings. When members attend meetings where positive dialogue occurs, they are more likely to enjoy the meeting and feel it was valuable to them.

They are then more likely to become an active participant in the neighborhood. Please share these tips with your association members and others.

1. **Begin with a Clear Mind:** Take a moment and *Acenter@* yourself before you say, write or do anything. (Take a deep breath, say a prayer or refocus on your purpose.)
2. **Use Clear Language:** Keep in mind that your purpose is to communicate with the people with whom you are speaking. Using esoteric or technical jargon may detract from this purpose. Keep it clear and simple.
3. **Speak Only for Yourself:** Remember the saying that you can't know what a person is thinking or feeling unless you have *Awalked a mile in their shoes@*.
4. **Be honest:**
  - Don't feel you must answer every question. Sometimes you don't know.
  - Speak directly without using a lot of words to try to avoid topics or skirt issues.
5. **Emphasize the positive:**
  - Try to translate the negative to positive and a crisis to an opportunity.
  - Don't appeal to peoples' fears.
  - Never blame or accuse anyone nor repeat or bolster a negative accusation.
6. **Stay in the Center:**
  - Never underplay or make light of a situation.
  - Don't overreact or exaggerate.
  - Don't be sidetracked by focusing on extreme situations, impossible dilemmas, questionable *Aauthorities@*, or false premises.
7. **Remember Your Opinion Has Value:** Don't be threatened or defensive. You have right to speak.
8. **Respect Other Speakers:**
  - Encourage each person in a group to speak. Some of the quietest people have the wisest things to say.
  - Allow each person to finish speaking. If a group has some *Along winded@* people, you may want to agree on a time limit for each speaker and **STICK TO IT.**
9. **Be a Good Listener:**
  - Listen carefully to what each person has to say. Don't assume anything.
  - For group discussions, you might want to jot down some thoughts ahead of time to help you remember what you want to say. This will help you to focus your full attention on what others are saying when they speak.

**Try out the following *ASelf-Quiz@* to see what kind of listener you are.**

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## How do You Listen? A Self Quiz

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Your answers to the following quiz may help you discover where you may have habits that keep you from being a good listener. Read each question without trying to *As*second guess@ the intent. Answer with yes or no, according to your usual behavior.

1. Science says you think four times faster than a person will usually talk. Do you use this excess time to turn your thoughts elsewhere while you're keeping general track of a conversation? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
2. When somebody is talking to you, do you try to make him or her think you are paying attention when you a not? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
3. When you are listening to someone, are you easily distracted by outside sights and sounds? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
4. When you are puzzled or annoyed by what someone says, do you try to get the question straightened out immediately ... either in your own mind or by interrupting the speaker? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
5. Do certain words, phrases, or ideas so prejudice you against the speaker so that you cannot listen objectively to what is being said? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
6. When someone is speaking, do you listen primarily for facts, rather than ideas?  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
7. If you feel that it would take too much time and effort to understand something? Do you go out of your way avoid hearing about it? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
8. If you want to remember what someone is saying, do you think it is a good idea to write it down as she or he goes along? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
9. Do you deliberately turn your thoughts to other subjects when you believe a speaker will have nothing particularly interesting to say? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
10. Can you tell by a person's appearance and delivery that he or she won=t have anything worthwhile to say? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

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**If you have answered "no" to every question you are a rare individual - the perfect listener. Each "yes" (or even a *As*ometimes@) indicates a very specific listening habit for you to consider changing, if you want to improve your communication skills.**

<p>This Quiz has been copied with permission from the <i>Community Leader=s Guide</i> by the Institute for Extended Learning, Community Colleges of Spokane &amp; Cooperative Extension, Washington State University, adapted by Family Community Leadership from <i>Listen to Hear</i>, Ohio State University Extension Service.</p>
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