

Mindful Communication

In the next potentially tense conversation with someone you know well, practice mindfulness and observe the other person's physical and verbal behavior. Take note of how they hold their body, their facial expressions, the tone of their voice, and their interactions with the environment around them. Notice your own verbal or physical behavior during the interaction. Consider your feelings and needs in the interaction and how you could express them in a way that maintains the relationship. If you find anything hard to read or understand, ask clarifying questions. Consider the following scenario:

Josh went to school and walked into the classroom. Josh put his things in his cubby and sat at his desk, eating his breakfast and working on his morning school work. Another student and Josh's best friend, Mary, walked into class right after he did. Mary looked upset, as if she had been crying. This was not like Mary, as Mary always had a smile on her face. Mary immediately went to the teacher for help. Mary started crying, yelling, and throwing things around the classroom. The teacher was having a hard time calming Mary down. Josh came over to the teacher and Mary to see if he could help. Mary seemed to calm down, with Josh's help. Mary explained that her mom woke up late and was unable to stop for breakfast, like she had promised the night before. Josh apologized and offered to share his breakfast and snack with Mary. Mary appeared more calm, as she smiled and thanked Josh for sharing and helping her calm down.

In this scenario, Josh was aware of Mary's verbal and nonverbal behavior. He observed that Mary appeared angry and asked her if he could help make her feel better. Josh acknowledged Mary's feelings and offered an alternative to her behavior. Following are some open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no") that may help create a safe environment and constructive conversation in uncomfortable situations with loved ones.

1. How are you feeling?
2. How can I help?
3. You seem to feel _____. Is this an accurate perception of your feelings?
4. I am hearing you say _____. Is that right?
5. How are things between us?
6. How are we doing?
7. Are we okay?
8. I noticed _____. Is there anything you need to talk about?
9. How can I help you feel better about _____?
10. Are you doing okay?