

4. Know What You Want, Say What You Want

OBJECTIVE: Improve money communication by turning complaints into requests.

TIME: 35 minutes

NOTE TO TRAINER:

This activity has the potential to create real discussion of family issues. Therefore, it is good if the class already has some experience with problem-solving or conflict resolution techniques like the two preceding activities: ABC's of XYZ or Talking Tips.

ACTIVITY:

Without much introduction, two instructors or the instructor and an aide present the following role play.

ROLE PLAY: Money Complaints

Charniece: You never help me around here. I've been to work, made dinner, and put the kids to bed. Here you are watching the football game again. What good are you?

Bruce: [*He looks into space, avoiding her*] I do plenty. And I work hard to pay for dinner. All you do is complain. You're just like my mother!

FREEZE. One trainer says, "If you know and say what you really want, you're more likely to get it."

Ask the class if this scene sounds familiar. Explain that people often tell their partners or other family members about something that is bothering them by accusing or complaining. It's normal. We all do it. But it is not very effective in changing behavior. It more often causes arguments and hurt feelings. So, we are going to talk about how to know what you want, say what you want, and get what you want. Well, you will not always get what you want, but you will increase your chances of it!

However, some people have a hard time making requests. It may be a part of a shy or quiet personality. Some women have been brought up to put the needs of others first and to not focus on themselves. Some men have been brought up to give orders rather than make requests. Even if it is hard for someone to make requests, it is an important communication skill to practice and develop. We can't expect others to always know what we are wanting and thinking, and most people don't like to be ordered around.

Talk with the class about what a request sounds like. Most people start a request with "Could you....?" "Would you....?", "Please, ...", "I want you to", or "I request..."

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Here are some examples of turning a complaint into a request:

Complaint	Request
You never give me enough money for groceries!	Could we sit down tonight and go over our grocery bills?
Why is it always me who puts gas in the car!?	I request that we alternate each month putting gas in the car.
You spend far too much money on your hair and nails! We just can't afford it!	I need us to talk about how much we can afford for personal expenses.

Notice that requests are for very specific, clear behaviors or actions. Saying what you don't want or giving vague generalizations about being more helpful or responsible does not give the other person enough information to know what you want them to do. Instructors, coach participants to clarify exactly what they want the other person to do. This may take a little work as sometimes people are not clear about specifically what they want.

Step 1: What are some frequent complaints in your family? As a class write five frequent complaints on a flip chart.

Step 2: How can we turn these into requests? As a class, turn each complaint into a specific request.

Step 3: Add one more layer if the class really seems to grasp this activity well. Explain that often requests are stronger if you can add an explanation about how you would feel if your request were fulfilled and why it is important to you. For example, "Could we sit down tonight and go over our grocery bills? I'm running out of grocery money each month. I'm really worried about this because I want to stick with our budget, and I'm having trouble doing it." Go back over the examples, and add some possible feelings and reasons for each request.