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## Boost Your Skills

### Communication Skills

#### How to Talk the Talk

Communication is usually taken for granted -- that is, until it breaks down. Why didn't my teacher get my point? How can I get my counselor to understand what I'm saying? Why does every discussion with my mom turn into an argument?

Good communication skills help you express your ideas clearly, learn from other people, and resolve any conflicts. Most of these skills you'll pick up with life experience. Here are a few tips for improving your communication skills:

#### Be Clear

- Make sure you understand what you want to say before you start.
- Explain the context of your point so your listener clearly understands why you're talking to them -- Are you asking for a favor? Are you trying to tell an important fact? Do you want to know something?
- Use simple words and language to express your point.

#### Stay Positive

- Phrase your ideas and suggestions in a positive, rather than critical way.
- Be confident. Don't assume that what you have to say isn't worthwhile.
- Keep in mind, a listener's silence doesn't necessarily mean consent or disapproval. It may just mean that the person needs to think about a response before answering.

#### Listen Actively

- Make sure you understand what the other person is trying to say. Try paraphrasing someone's point -- "So, what you're saying is..." -- and see if you got it.
- Don't get so preoccupied planning what you'll say next that you don't pay attention.
- Keep an open mind. Be flexible about compromises and alternate solutions.
- Make sure you understand someone's point before you react. Speak with self-control -- don't just say the first response that comes to mind.

#### Learn from Experience

Review situations in which you had to communicate with different people, such as a friend, parent, or a study group. Ask yourself:

- How did I handle the situation?
- Was I able to make my point understood?
- Did the discussion have a positive outcome? If not, why?
- What could I have done differently?