



7 Steps of Positive Communication

There are often many less than optimal conversations that occur when substance use is in the picture. Yelling, pleading, nagging and lecturing are common, but typically ineffective.

Making requests can be even more difficult as either it is presented as a demand or ultimatum, or sometimes you may think, "why bother" - as it won't get done or be honored anyway.

The *7 Steps of Positive Communication* are helpful in any communication, but especially so for making requests. They offer a more constructive, collaborative approach. The steps are:

1. **Be Brief** – Rather than gearing up for a big lecture, try to be brief, using the **KISS** principle (Keep it Short & Simple). Plan what you are going to say in advance and practice it if necessary.
2. **Be Positive** – Instead of telling someone what you don't want, tell the person what you want them to do. This reframes the request from being critical and complaining to something that is achievable and can be reinforced. For example, saying, "Stop leaving such a mess in the kitchen" is replaced with, "Put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher."
3. **Be Specific and Clear** – It helps to concentrate on one topic at a time with some degree of specificity. Telling them, "You should be more motivated" is not as helpful as saying, "I'd like you to spend 3 hours a day looking for job leads".
4. **Label Your Feelings** – Describe how you feel using an "I" statement. It helps to state your feelings in a calm manner and to adjust them to what is appropriate for the situation. Saying, "I'm furious" with bulging eyes and a red face probably indicates that you need to take some time to cool off before having a conversation.
5. **Offer an Understanding Statement** – Demonstrate empathy by sharing your understanding of how difficult the situation might be for the person.
6. **Accept Partial Responsibility** – Sharing in the problem to whatever extent you can, can go a long way toward decreasing defensiveness and fostering collaboration. You may say something like, "I know I've been nagging you...." Or, "I don't think I've been clear about my expectations..."
7. **Offer to Help** – Suggesting ways in which you can help or asking what you can do to assist in making the request happen can also reduce defensiveness and promote collaboration.

It is not necessary to use ALL the steps in every situation, nor is it necessary to use them in the order presented.