Conflict Resolution Made Easier

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DESC Model

D – DESCRIBE the behavior that you like or dislike. Describe the behavior without insulting the person. Be very specific about what the behavior is – describe exactly what they did.

E – EXPRESS how you feel about the behavior using an “I” statement. Say “I was ___ when you did/said that.” Or “I felt ___ when you did/said that.” The blank can be filled in with angry, sad, mad, glad, proud, happy, hurt, really mad, excited or other feeling words.”

S – SAY what you want the person to do instead of what they did. What would be better for them to do the next time the situation happens. Be very specific, detailed, and clear about the new behavior you wish to see instead.

C – What is the COST if the person does not do what you ask them to do next time? Cost is like a consequence. It is something you will do, or not do, if they do not change their behavior. Make the cost something you can do and that is related to the problem. Don’t make threats about a big cost if you can’t live up to it. An example of a cost that is too big for most problems is – “I’ll never be your friend again” or “I’ll never talk to you again.”

HOW TO USE THE DESC MODEL TO SAY POSITIVE THINGS

If you want someone to know what you think when they did something you like, you would use the D-DESCRIBE and E-EXPRESS. This makes it likely that they will do it again if they feel appreciated.

Examples:

When you helped me with that math problem I couldn’t figure out, it felt great to finally understand it. I was really happy to finish it. Thanks!

It was great when you made that last free throw. I was excited we won the game. Good job.

I was glad when you found my dog for me.

That was cool that you shared that ice cream with me.
It was nice of you when you gave me your old basketball since mine got stolen.

HOW TO ASK PEOPLE TO CHANGE UNDESIRED BEHAVIOR

If you want someone to know what you don’t like about what they did or said, you would use all four letters.

D – DESCRIBE
E – EXPRESS
S – SAY
C – COST

We will now go over a few scenarios. For each we will first look at how one would NOT want to use the DESC model, and then we will look at a correct way to use it. Compare the wording in each and consider the outcomes each might create.

Example 1:

Say you are having a conflict with your roommate because he/she has been continually having friends over on weeknights and they are always being loud. You are often trying to study and so this really disturbs you. This is the eighth time that they have done it in three weeks. You have tried to intervene in some ways a couple of times before, but have been unsuccessful.

Let us start with a way in which you would NOT want to intervene. For these examples, underline anything that you think could make the situation more tense:

D- When you and your friends were here last night, you were being so loud and obnoxious.
E- It was annoying that you were doing that to me when you know that I am trying to study.
S- Stop inviting anyone over here during the week.
C- Or else I will have to find another roommate.

Now, here is how to do it RIGHT:

D- When you and your friends were hanging out last night, I found you guys were loud.
E- I felt frustrated because I was trying to study.
S- If you have friends over again on a weeknight, it would be cool if you keep the noise level down.

C- If you don’t respect this request, then it will put more strain on our roommate relationship.

Example 2:

Say that you turned in a project to a professor. You worked very hard on it and felt that the grade you received did not reflect what you felt you deserved. How might you approach the professor with this concern?

Again, let’s first look at how NOT do it. For these examples, underline anything that you think could make the situation more tense:

D- When you gave me the grade that you did on my project

E- I was aggravated with you.

S - Next time I turn something in, I want you to take into account the amount of effort that I put in.

C- Or else I will have to go to the Dean about it.

Now, here is how to do it RIGHT:

D- When I received the grade that I did on my project

E- I felt disappointed and believed I deserved a better grade.

S- Would you mind looking at this again to help me understand the grade.

C- If I don’t know how to do better, I will lose motivation.
Here are some examples for you to try. Apply the DESC model to the situation. We have given you an idea of common mistakes in implementing the DESC model. Develop responses that would be effective implementation of the DESC model.

Example 1:
For this example, you will be working first individually and then with a partner.

You are working on a group presentation with some of your fellow students, and one of your members does not do the work that he/she was supposed to do. His/her lack of work is going to sacrifice the quality of the presentation and will put more pressure on the other group members. How would you deal with this?

D-

E-

S-

C-
Example 2:
For this example, you will be working with a group.

Say the president of your organization is being over-controlling and not giving anyone else a say so. You find this very upsetting, considering you have also put forth a lot of effort for the organization. How can you tell the president how you feel without sounding controlling yourself?
Example 3:
For this example, you will be working with a group.

Think about when you and your significant other get into an argument about jealousy issues. It doesn’t help that you have been hurt in the past with similar situations, and he/she is so social. You feel left out when you are around a group of his/her friends. How can you communicate with him/her in a way that your feelings are conveyed, but he/she feels like he/she can still have friends?

D-

E-

S-

C-