

COMMUNICATION BY CARE-FRONTING

■ FIVE OPTIONS OF DEALING WITH CONFLICT

I'll get him --

"I win, you lose because I am right and you're wrong." This is all power and little or no love.

I'll get out --

"I'm uncomfortable, so I'll withdraw from the conflict." "The situation is hopeless because people cannot be changed." A way of avoiding conflict: can be advantageous for instant safety. There is no risk of power and no trusting love.

I'll give in --

"I'll yield to be nice since I need your friendship." "I will be nice and submit to your demands so that we can be friends." You become a doormat who is frustrated and smiling.

I'll meet you halfway --

"I have only half of the truth and I need your half." The attitude of creative compromise. Compromise is a gift to human relationships, and conflict is natural. Compromise is the willingness to give a little to work out a satisfactory solution for everyone. The danger of compromise is the risk that my half-truth and your half-truth may not give the total truth. You may have two half-truths, or it may produce a whole untruth. You must care enough to tussle with truth so it can be tested, retested, refined, and perhaps you'll find more of it through working together.

I care enough to confront --

"I want a relationship and I also want honest integrity." Conflict is viewed as neutral (neither good or bad) and natural (neither to be avoided or short-circuited). This says, "I want to stay in a respectful relationship with you, and I want you to know where I stand and what I am feeling, needing, valuing, and wanting."

■ DEFINITIONS

CARING --

A good word.

CONFRONTING --

A word with bad connotations because it's often done when angry.

CARE-FRONTING --

A good word because it is confronting in a caring way. Caring is the first word. Therefore, the caring must be genuine. Then confronting is not negative because it is done out of love.

Care-fronting is a way to communicate with love and truth, with both impact and respect.

CARING	AND	CONFRONTING
I care about our relationship.....	and.....	I feel deeply about this issue.
I want to hear your view.....	and.....	I want to clearly express my view.
I want to respect your insights.....	and.....	I want respect for mine.
I give you my loving, honest respect.....	and.....	I want your caring-confronting response.

Care-fronting invites another to change but does not demand it.

■ WAYS OF CARE-FRONTING WITHOUT BEING JUDGMENTAL

Focus your feedback on the action, not on the actor. This gives the person the freedom to change his behavior without feeling personal rejection. **Example:** “When someone criticizes people who are not present, as you were doing a moment ago, I get uptight. I’d encourage you to say what you have to say to the person.”

Focus your feedback on your observations, not on your conclusions. Comment not on what you think, imagine, or infer, but on what you have actually seen or heard. Conclusions will evoke immediate defensiveness. **Example:** “You are not looking at me and not answering when I speak. Please give me both attention and answer.”

Focus your feedback on descriptions, not on judgements. Do not comment on another’s behavior as nice or rude, right or wrong. Use a clear, accurate description in neutral language. When a value judgment is received there is a momentary break in contact. **Example:** “If I am aware that your reply to my request for information was silence. Please tell me what this means.”

Focus feedback on quantity, not on quality. Comment not on character, trait or classification (qualities) of the other person, but on the amount of feeling, expression or action (quantity). Use adverbs (which tell how much) rather than adjectives (which tell what kind of). Use terms denoting more or less (quantity) rather than either/or categories (quality). **Example:** “You talk considerably more than others.” Not “you were a loudmouth.” “You have asked for and received more of my time than any other student,” not “you are clinging, dependent, and always demanding my time.”

Focus feedback on ideas, information, and alternatives, not an advice and answers. Comment not with instructions on what to do with the data you have to offer, but with the data, the facts, the additional options. The more options available, the less likely is a premature solution. **Example:** “I’ve several other options that you may have thought about, but let me run them by you again.”

Focus feedback not on why, but on what and how. “Why” critiques values, motives and intents. “Why” is judgmental. “What” and “how” relates to observable actions, behaviors, words and tone of voice. **Example:** “Here is where we are, let’s examine it.”

Care-fronting focuses on action, observations, descriptions, quantity, information, alternatives, and dealing with what and how in the here and now. It does not focus on action, conclusions, judgments, qualities, advice or why.

When you are care-fronting, it should be done caringly, gently, constructively, and clearly. Never care-front with any possible interpretations of blaming, shaming, or punishing.

I care about you.

If I care about you I
must tell you the truth.

I want your care in
return.

I want your truth.

Care for me enough to
tell me the truth.

■ CONFRONTATION

It takes courage to risk confronting. We have all traded our honesty for the approval of others in the past. However, if we care about our fellow group members, and if we want them to be honest with us in return, we will present them with our picture of them.

Confrontation is defined as presenting a person with himself by describing how I see him. Confrontation is most useful when spoken with concern and accompanied with examples of the confronted behavior or data.

- “You seem self-centered to me because you only talk about yourself...”
- “You seem hostile because of the sarcastic answers you give...”
- “Your voice sounds so sad, I see you feeling sorry for yourself...”
- “Your face is so red; you seem very angry...”
- “John, each time Joe confronts you, you explain yourself instead of leveling with him. How do you feel about what Joe told you?”
- “John, you go into a long silence after each confrontation instead of leveling. How are you feeling when you withdraw in silence.?”

For the most part defenses, including attitudinal postures, are unintentional and automatic shields against a real or imagined threat to our self-esteem. By pointing out the defenses we are using, we have a better chance of letting down this wall that is locking others out and keeping us prisoners. This blocks our getting close to others as well as our getting closer to ourselves. Coming to recognize these blocks to self-discovery may enable us to look behind them to discover the feelings concealed from view. Long explanations may hide feelings of inadequacy and guilt.. since defenses and attitudinal postures do hide us from ourselves, as well as from others, it is important to identify them. A lot of this is new, so while you are getting used to it, just trust your impulses. Spontaneous expressions tend to be much more honest. It is more helpful to be revealing than to be right.

Most of us tend to think we already know ourselves and are afraid of looking bad, so it is hard for us to take the risk of being revealing and genuine. But what have we got to lose? Since we can't change something until we really see it and accept its existence, we should ask ourselves, “Do I really accept something if I keep it a secret?” Risking openness is the key. When you are tempted to withdraw into silence, remember that we are all in the same boat, and that a feeling common to everyone when being introduced to a group is fear.

Frequently, in place of confronting a person with some data that we have observed (what they said, how they look or sound, etc.) we make the mistake of guessing, of asking questions and giving advice.

A guess or a question is not confrontation.

- “I bet you fight a lot with your wife.”
- “Did your parents raise you very strictly?”

The other mistake is advice-giving in place of confronting:

- “Don’t let people walk all over you so much...”

To state this as a confrontation would be:

- “You seem like a doormat the way you let people walk all over you...”

This way we are not playing God by advising, but we are letting the person see himself from another point of view and trusting him to seek advice if he wants it.

Confrontation describes what we have observed in the person we are confronting. Guesses, advice or discussions about something we have not witnessed is not confrontation. In a sense, when we confront, we hold up a mirror to let another person know how he appears to us.

We are most useful as confronters when we are not so much trying to change another person as we are trying to help him see himself more accurately. Change, if it comes, comes later when the person chooses it and enlists the spiritual help that the sixth and seventh steps of the A.A. Program describe.

Picture a gardener preparing a proper environment within the soil so that the seeds he plants may receive the gift of growth from a power greater than himself. Imagine a physician cleaning a wound to provide an environment to receive the gift of healing. The change we all are seeking might be labeled more correctly as healing or growth and, while it is largely a gift of a power greater than ourselves, the necessary environment for the gift is an honest picture of how and what we are like now. Because of our egocentric blindness and self-delusion, we all are dependent on others for that completed picture. Confrontation provides it.

■ LEVELING

To respond openly to being confronted is to level. We level when we take the risk of being known by spontaneously reporting our feelings. For example: We level when we let someone know we are hurt, or afraid, or angry.

Using these feelings as an example of leveling is probably useful for two reasons. Anger bottled up, or fear kept hidden, seems to lead to more relapses than any other feelings. Also, anger and fear (along with affection) are usually the hardest feelings for us to report. Frequently, people make the mistake of assuming that the purpose of group therapy is to make someone angry. Anger is an important feeling. But it is only one feeling among many that we want to discover and level with.

If, instead of leveling, we respond without naming a feeling, we are hiding. The way we hide our feelings are many, and we call them defenses, each defense prevents us from being known. One of the most helpful things the group can do is to help a member identify his defenses.

Defenses which we all use to some extent are:

Rationalizing	Minimizing
Justifying	Evading, dodging
Projecting	Defiance
Blaming, accusing	Attacking, aggression
Judging, moralizing	Withdrawing
Intellectualizing	Silence
Analyzing	Verbalizing, talking
Explaining	Shouting, intimidating
Theorizing	Threatening
Generalizing	Frowning
Quibbling, equivocating	Glaring
Debating, arguing	Staring
Sparring	Joking
Questioning, interrogating	Grinning, smiling, laughing
Switching	Protecting
Denying	Agreeing
Being smug, superior, or arrogant	Complying

Try leveling with that feeling of fear for a starter, and discover how that makes you feel. You'll probably find, as others have, that when you report a feeling, you modify it. Keeping it a secret seems to increase its power. If we don't begin now to risk being genuine and self-revealing when will we ever do it.