

# The Rules of Polite Discourse

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*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,  
but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs,  
that it may benefit those who listen. — Ephesians 4:29 NIV*

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**Address issues promptly.** If you let feelings fester, that is just what will happen: They will rot you from the inside out.

**Express your feelings and thoughts.** How can you expect the other person to understand if you don't express yourself completely?

**Listen actively.** Active listening involves eye contact, nods, and affirmations. Listen both for what is said and what is not said, for feelings expressed and feelings suppressed.

**Don't get upset.** Allowing yourself to become driven by emotion indicates that your reason has taken a back seat. If you notice yourself or the other person becoming agitated, call a 'Time Out.'

**Validate the other person.** Each person's feelings and concerns are important, however misguided they may seem. Realize that other people's perspectives are their reality, the way they honestly see the world.

**Don't get defensive.** If you notice yourself becoming defensive, say so, or ask for a 'Time Out.' If you sense the other person becoming defensive, try to ease the tension and examine what could have triggered such a response.

**Avoid 'You . . .' generalizations.** Accusatory statements usually trigger defensive behavior and do not promote free expression. Try to use specific examples - 'always' and 'never' statements are weak, needing only one exception to be disproved.

**Stay on topic.** Do not allow other issues to enter into the discussion. Though important, these issues deserve to be addressed separately.

**Check understanding.** Try restating what you heard to see if that was the intended message. It takes two to communicate - the speaker and the listener. Both parties share the responsibility for clear communication.

**Don't be repetitive.** If you repeat a statement to clarify a misunderstanding, be sure to emphasize the difference in meaning - otherwise you may seem to be merely grandstanding.

**Always be respectful.** Rudeness is never appropriate or acceptable. Remember that to earn respect you must first show respect for others.

**Don't interrupt.** No one likes to have a train of thought derailed by an impatient listener. What you have to say is very important, but listening to the other person is even more important. Frequent interruptions indicate a lack of concern for what the other person has to say.

**Let the other person respond.** If you launch into a tirade, listing a multitude of offenses, you are inviting an interruption. The other person surely has a response for each of your statements and, denied the opportunity to express these thoughts, will rapidly become impatient or agitated.

**Suggest solutions.** It is easy to complain about a problem - Actually suggesting solutions requires much more time, effort, and thought. The very act of developing a solution requires viewing the problem from a new perspective and, possibly, realizing how difficult it is to design and implement a workable solution.

**Agree to disagree.** Sometimes a solution cannot be found. In such cases, agree that you will not resolve the issue during this session and end the discussion on good terms.