



## Cascade Christian Counselling E-News

Cascade Christian Counselling Annual Spring  
E-Newsletter

## COMMUNICATING IN THE TIME OF COVID

by **Jacoba Leyenhorst**

We have been created with the ability to communicate, or to share information. We have vocal cords, mouths, ears, and a myriad of facial expressions. Communication enables us to get our needs met, to share ideas, and to build and maintain relationships. Although there are many ways in which COVID has made our world a more difficult place to be, it has also had a significant impact on personal communication. Restrictions and social distancing have made it difficult to get together with others face to face and have forced us to rely on alternate means of communication. Most notable has perhaps been the rise in technology-assisted communication. Although we have, of course, used the telephone and the computer for many years to communicate, never before have modes such as video platforms (e.g., Zoom) been used to such an extent.

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Thinking back, could you ever have imagined attending most church services or a choir practices via video, much less 'meeting' with your family doctor or a specialist by a phone call? Could you ever have imagined a world in which it is commonplace for everyone in a public place to have their faces half-covered by a mask or other facial covering?

Regardless of which means we use to communicate; the basics of good communication remain the same. It involves a 'two-way' street, in which both parties participate, taking turns to listen and to respond. Many people have commented on the difficulty of hearing others through the barriers of masks and plexiglass shields. Some options might be to ask the other to slow down, to raise their voice volume, to use a clear mask/face shield, to remove their mask if safe to do so, to telephone you, to use more body language/gestures, or to write some things down. Try to remain patient with each other. Be sure to ask for clarification if you are not sure what the other is trying to communicate - a good skill to use in any communication situation!

Another impact of COVID on personal communication has been its divisive nature, as people disagree widely on many COVID-related topics.

How to engage with others, particularly when you are in total disagreement?

Here are some suggestions:

1. We can agree to disagree. This method involves choosing not to engage with others on topics you know might lead to argument. Think of a tug-of-war game: you can choose not to pick up the rope if you do not want to. This includes social media!
2. If you choose to engage, try to remain calm, concise, curious, and respectful. If you feel your emotions rising, that may be a sign to leave the conversation. Take some time to calm, and then re-engage if you choose to.
3. When communicating, try to use "I-statements" followed by the word "feel." For example, "I feel hurt when you question my decision."
4. Remember that an opinion is simply an opinion, not a fact. You are entitled to your opinion; and others are entitled to theirs. Do not assume that others will share your opinion or take it personally if they do not.
5. At the end of day, what is the most important thing to you? Being right, or preserving a relationship?

# CIRCLE BACK

by Mike Ayers

Have you ever had a difficult conversation, only to think of something later you wished you had said at the time? Of course you have! Everyone does this. It is a common experience. I am a quick-on-my-feet thinker, and yet not a day goes by in my counselling work that I don't wish I had said something different in session. Or sometimes in reviewing my notes, I realize I missed something of significance that the other person was trying to communicate to me.

So what do I do about this? When I see the client again, I circle back to the conversation we had earlier. I might say, "Last session you were discussing X, I was thinking about that conversation and I wanted to add to it." Or if I did miss something, I might say, "In thinking about our last conversation, I realize I totally missed something you were trying to tell me. I'm sorry about that. Would you like to tell me more about that now?"

*I use this in my personal relationships as well. I regularly circle back to a prior conversation whenever I am with someone I care about. An example would be, "Last time we were talking, you mentioned X. How is that situation going now?" Or if I misspoke about something I might say, "I need to apologize about something, last time we spoke I said X, but I wish I would have said Y and Z instead."*

The value of circling back is immense! Circling back communicates that you care about what the other person wanted to express to you. Circling back shows the other person that their words and ideas impact you and you continue to think about them even when not in their presence. Circling back communicates respect and deepens the relationship. Circling back, when you've made a mistake, communicates humility and that you value relationship repair with the person.

Many of my clients who are conflict avoidant are afraid of circling back. They are afraid of going back to a difficult conversation, especially if that conversation ended poorly. However, circling back is not rehashing the fight. Circling back is expanding on content that you said earlier or expanding on content said by the other person. More often than not, circling back helps to clear the air, rather than restarting an argument.

Circling back is a skill. It can be learned. And I can almost guarantee that it will improve the quality of your conversations and your relationships if you use this skill.

