



February Benefits News: How to Build Strong Relationships

Stay in the know about your PEBB benefits.

Nine tips to improve any relationship

Words matter. Healthy relationships depend on effective communication. Here are nine tips for improving the communication in any relationship. Note: In this article, “partner” refers to anyone, not necessarily a significant other.

- 1 **Avoid criticism/reinforce the positive**—Instead of focusing on what’s going wrong, reinforce the positive. For example, say something like “I really like how you took the initiative on doing the laundry” instead of something like “I see you forgot to take the trash out again.”
- 2 **Use “I” statements**—You’ll be better heard if you take responsibility for your feelings. For instance, say, “I feel frustrated when you...” instead of saying, “You make me mad when...”
- 3 **Be open to feedback**—If you expect your partner to hear you, then your communication needs to be a two-way street. Perhaps your partner sees things differently, and their perspective matters too.
- 4 **Actively listen**—Instead of focusing on what you’re going to say next, really listen to what your partner is saying. Nod your head and maintain eye contact. Repeat what they said to ensure correct understanding.

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- 5 **Ask for a time-out when one is needed**—Sometimes you might need time to think through a situation or topic before responding. It's better to say nothing at first than to respond in a way you'll later regret. During these times, it's fine to say, "Can I think about that and get back to you?"
- 6 **Don't interrupt**—Avoid the temptation to jump into the middle of your partner's sentence to defend yourself. Let them finish sharing the thought.
- 7 **Watch your tone**—In the heat of a disagreement, it's easy to dominate the conversation, get hostile, or use sarcastic tones. Avoid using language that minimizes your partner's feelings or position.

- 8 **Ask for what you need**—None of us are mind readers. If you need something, speak up. Use a specific statement like "It would help me feel less stressed if you emailed me the weekly file on Mondays instead of Wednesdays."
- 9 **Express appreciation**—It's easy to overlook the little things. When you thank your partner for something they have done, it can go a long way. It can be as easy as thanking them for the yummy dinner they prepared or finishing the project ahead of the deadline.

When these tips aren't enough, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help. Check out additional articles in its library and/or chat with a counselor over the phone or in person. It's completely confidential and can make a big difference. The EAP is available 24/7/365.

- **Canopy EAP (except OSU):** Visit [Canopy](#) or call 1-800-433-2320.
- **Beyond Benefits EAP (OSU only):** Visit [Beyond Benefits](#) or call 1-855-327-4722.

[PsychCentral](#), 2021, and [Psychology Today](#), 2014







Great ways to manage family conflict



Disagreeing now and then is a normal part of family life. Sharing your feelings—and your frustrations—is important even if it sometimes causes an argument. And avoiding all conflict can be unhealthy for relationships.

But arguing all the time—with your partner or other family members—can be harmful to your kids and the family. So, it's important to be careful about how you deal with conflict in your family. You can learn to disagree in respectful, constructive ways.



Here are some ideas:

 Be a role model. Your kids learn from your examples. They will learn to resolve conflicts with others by watching how you act. So, avoid being disrespectful or having big arguments in front of your children. They'll likely act the same way that you do when you're in an argument.	 Give your kids reassurance. Remind them that even parents who love each other argue sometimes—and it doesn't mean you're going to stay mad. Explain that arguing once in a while is normal when you live with other people. Encourage your kids to share how they feel about family disagreements.	 Choose your battles. Try to deal with bigger issues that need to be addressed. With smaller issues, sometimes it's okay to let it go. Ask yourself: Will it matter to me next week?	 Find the cause. If certain disagreements happen often, figure out what's causing the issue. Work together to find a solution. Try to focus on solving the problem instead of blaming the person. If serious arguments with a spouse or partner happen often, consider getting professional help from a counselor.
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 When you have a disagreement, deal with it in a healthy way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be calm and respectful. Listen to the other person's side. Then work toward a solution. ● Avoid yelling or name calling. This is especially important around kids. Being exposed to yelling or violence has a harmful effect on kids. ● Take a break if you need to. Go for a walk or try deep breathing. Or go to another room to calm down. Decide on a time to discuss the problem later. ● Be willing to admit when you're wrong and apologize. Let your loved ones know that you're trying to see their side of the issue. ● When you can, try to come to an agreement. What was decided? What are the next steps? But know that sometimes you may have to agree to disagree. <div> <p>When disagreements turn abusive</p> <p>If you feel the need to escape a relationship that is emotionally, mentally, or physically abusive, help is available 24/7 each day of the year. Obtain the essential tools and support you need to live a life free of abuse.</p> <p>Call or visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit thehotline.org.</p> </div>	 Respect your teen's independence. As older kids and teens become more independent, conflicts are more likely to happen. Arguments can be stressful. But they can also help teens build communication skills and learn how to set boundaries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Let your teen know that you value their opinions. But remind them that you're also trying to keep them safe and guide them in making good choices. While it's good to respect your child's independence as much as you can, it's also important to discuss how they can make choices that keep them healthy and safe. ● Be respectful of their views. Try to find ways to solve problems without having fights. ● Be willing to compromise at times. Remind your teen that sometimes they'll need to compromise too.
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Build healthy relationships with these guided exercises and activities

Check out a [variety of articles](#) on these topics and more:

Building healthy relationships takes work—but it's worth it. Practicing self-care and positive communication can help you have more compassion for yourself and your loved ones.

- **How to connect more with others:** Use these tips to build stronger connections with the people in your life.
- **Moving forward when you've been hurt:** Learn how to move your relationship—and yourself—forward in a healthy, positive way when you feel you've been wronged.
- **Befriending yourself:** Learn to direct kindness inward.
- **Getting along with everyone:** Cultivate kindness toward yourself and diffuse stress with others.
- **11 ways to bond more with people:** Build stronger connections with these simple tips.
- **The art of mindful listening:** Practice "mindful listening" to make the most of your conversations.

Source: Kaiser Permanente, 2022



Six ways to lower your stress

Feeling uptight? Need to relax? Here are six proven ways to reduce stress. They can help give you relief right away.



- 1 Practice deep breathing to calm and relax your body.** Sit in a relaxed manner in a quiet setting. Slowly breathe in, filling your lungs. Let your stomach relax and expand. Hold your breath for a moment and then slowly exhale. Feel your body relax and your tensions ease as you exhale. Repeat four or five times. You can do this anytime you feel yourself getting upset.



- 2 Do gentle stretching to relax your muscles.** You can do this while sitting in a chair at the office or at home. Slowly stretch your neck by bending your head forward and then back, and then slowly from side to side. Stretch your shoulders by putting your fingers on your shoulders and pulling your elbows back. Hold the stretch. Then relax. Lean forward slowly and stretch the small of your back. Stand and turn slowly from side to side. Reach over your head high with one hand. Hold the pose, and then repeat it with the other hand. Stretch your feet, ankles, and other joints as well. As you tense and stretch your muscles and joints, relax your whole body.



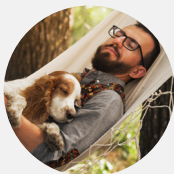
- 3 Be active.** Keep your body active. Lift weights or go for a long walk. This can relieve a lot of built-up tension. It's also a good way to distract you from problems—you really can't think intensely about your problems at work while playing a fast game of tennis or racing down the street on your bike.



- 4 Talk over a problem with a friend, family member or counselor.** Sharing a problem often brings relief, support, and the courage to press on.



- 5 Learn to forgive.** Bad feelings toward someone can last for days or even months. As you recall the hurt, you feel sad or, worse, angry. These emotions are hard on your health. Learning to forgive is a great way to find peace for yourself, even if you don't think you were at fault. Doing this is proven to lower blood pressure and even relieve pain.



- 6 Relax.** Find something you enjoy. Read a book. Take a bath. Listen to music. Watch a funny movie. Do a fun puzzle. Weed a garden. Go fishing. Get a massage. Sing. Bake something. Paint a picture. Take a nap. Remind yourself that it's OK to relax and enjoy life. Balance work with play. Plan for an hour or two of fun each day.


It helps to talk over your problems with a counselor. Getting help is not a sign of weakness—it's a sign of strength. It shows that you intend to solve your problems. Often, it takes a trained counselor to help you know how to solve problems and deal with stress.

Source: Moda, 2020

PEBB at your service

What's the Board up to this month?

Even though we just celebrated the new year, the Board is already planning for the next plan year. Beginning in January and February of each year, the Board begins the renewal process for next year's benefit offerings. To start this process, they will look at things like:

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- **How members used the plans last year.** For example, what services were highly utilized by members? Did members spend more than projected on services or prescription drugs?
 - **Whether there were "hiccups" in the plan design.** For instance, was it difficult for members to get certain care they needed? If so, what stood in the way?
 - **Changes they want to make for next year.** Are there any coverage enhancements the Board, vendor partners or members have suggested that need to be considered?
 - **Opportunities for cost savings.** As health care costs keep rising, are there ways to continue offering comprehensive coverage while decreasing things like administrative costs?
 - **Recommendations from the vendor partners.** For example, have supply chain issues impacted the availability and cost for a specific prescription drug?
 - **New laws, regulations, and medical data.** Are there any new state or federal requirements? Has the American Medical Association announced new recommendations, like the frequency for colonoscopies?
 - **How the plans compare to the competition.** The Board wants to make sure that PEBB's benefits remain attractive to current and prospective members.

The Board works with our consultants at Mercer to gather details and evaluate options. Over the next few months, together they will lay out how the plans will look next year. As always, their ultimate goal is to find ways to offer members a competitive benefits package at an affordable price.

PEBB Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the PEBB website.

Benefit Questions?

Email: pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Call: 503-373-1102

