

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

1. Be accepting of everyone's opinion.

Every member of VTDDC is entitled to his/her own opinion. While members might disagree with an individual's opinion, it is important to honor that person's right to that opinion.

2. Be honest.

It is important that members state their feelings and opinions honestly. While being honest about what you really think and feel may be difficult, members are encouraged to do their very best in this regard.

3. Take risks.

Members acknowledge that being honest, pushing oneself beyond the usual limits, and truly listening to others may involve a degree of personal risk taking. Members feel that such risk-taking assists the VTDDC to be more effective.

4. Ask questions to learn more.

Active listening is important. Ask questions to learn more about what another person thinks or feels. Asking questions helps them feel more valued.

5. Be all of who you are.

Sometimes VTDDC members present only a certain side of themselves, i.e., as a parent, or as a service provider, etc. All VTDDC members have feelings and opinions that may not be reflected in their particular role. Members are encouraged to share their full perspectives and resources in VTDDC activities.

6. Identify specific goals.

By defining tasks and goals in specific terms, accomplishments and successes are more obvious and more tangible.

7. Listen to each other.

In any group where there are individuals with strong personalities and opinions, it is difficult for people to effectively listen to each other. In order for people to feel comfortable participating fully and to ensure that the diverse opinions of members are heard, people need to actively listen to each other. In some cases, this might mean waiting before you react to someone's comments. You might want to ask questions to find out more before you respond, or you can paraphrase what someone has said to ensure that you heard them correctly before you respond. However it is accomplished, listening to each other will positively support overall communication.

8. Work to balance participation.

Sometimes, talkers need to be quiet while non-talkers need to push themselves to participate more.

9. Close the gap.

Often in large groups, individuals go along with decisions or the public discussion, but later, outside of the meeting and in a smaller group, they express their discomfort with the decision or the discussion that occurred. People who have feelings contrary to the group must make an effort to raise their concerns before a decision is made. This will allow the group to benefit from everyone's thoughts and feelings.

10. Bring discussions to closure.

We need to provide enough time and information for members to make effective decisions. We need to bring discussions to adequate closure so that everyone feels comfortable about moving on with the next order of business.

11. Talk about our successes.

Given the advocacy nature of VTDDC and the large amount of work it seeks to accomplish, people often focus on what still needs to be done rather than on what has been accomplished. We need to pay attention to VTDDC successes so members can approach activities in a positive manner and be more aware of the positive results of our efforts.

12. Evaluate our progress in communicating effectively.

At each meeting, we will provide an opportunity for the group to evaluate their progress using these Communication Guidelines.

[Adopted 1990. Revised March 19, 2000.]