

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Learning To Overcome The Fear Of Speaking Up

from the American Counseling Association

Some people have strong opinions about everything and no hesitation in sharing them, even when those opinions aren't wanted. While that's certainly not a formula for social success, many of us face a problem that's quite the opposite – being hesitant to speak our mind and voice our opinions, even when invited to and when doing so could offer some real help.

There may be many reasons why we're reluctant to speak up. We may doubt the value of what we have to offer, or fear our views will be criticized or rejected. Although such fears are very real, you don't want to let them define you.

Managing your fears can be a valuable skill. Rather than being silent and then regretting not saying something, learning to express yourself can bring a sense of accomplishment and involvement.

Speaking up doesn't mean that you've made your self-doubts disappear, but that you're courageously taking action in the face of those doubts. The key to speaking up is to mix the acknowledgment of self-doubt with refusing to accept the status quo.

Being respectful is an important element in learning to speak your mind. It starts by learning to listen first. You need to show you understand the views and opinions being expressed by others before sharing your own.

Your goal is not to convince others or to start an argument, but rather to express any differences you feel. By sharing your own experiences and opinions you let others see new sides of you and your thoughts on a subject.

One way to avoid arguments is by stating your views with "I" phrases like "I feel..." or "I think..." rather than stating your views as absolute truths only you see. It's important to accept that while what you're expressing is what you know to be true, others will be feeling exactly the same way about their opinions.

You also want to be decisive, clearly and strongly stating your thoughts without worrying about the outcome. Don't undercut your views with phrases like "Now this may not be true..." or "I'm not sure about this..." Instead, be bold, take a stand, and allow others to do the same.

Speaking up allows us to interact with others and live life more fully. Sometimes your opinions may not win out, but at other times you'll really communicate and make a difference.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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