

***10 Practices to Build Better Communication
based on the Language Lessons of the Horse***

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These practices are inspired by the lessons of the horse—attentiveness, listening, and curiosity—designed to foster emotional safety, connection, and resilience.

1. Practice Grounded Presence

- When listening to someone, take a deep breath and center yourself.
- Maintain soft eye contact and keep your body relaxed.
 - * *Why it works:* A calm presence signals to others that they are safe to express vulnerability.

2. Listen Without Fixing

- When someone shares feelings of shame or rejection, resist the urge to give advice.
- Instead, respond with phrases like, *"I hear you"* or *"That sounds really hard."*
 - * *Why it can work:* Feeling heard without judgment allows shame to soften.

3. Offer Open Body Language

- Face the person directly, uncross your arms, and lean in slightly.
- Keep your tone warm and non-threatening.
 - * *Why it can work:* Open body language creates emotional safety and encourages honesty.

4. Create Space for Silence

- After someone speaks, allow a few seconds of silence before responding.
- Avoid rushing to fill the gap with words.
 - * *Why it can work:* Silence signals that you're processing what was shared, not rejecting it.

5. Get Curious, Not Critical

If someone expresses feelings of shame, ask open-ended questions like:

- *"What is bothering you?"*

"What do you need right now?"

- * *Why it work:* Curiosity helps shift the focus from judgment to understanding.

6. Validate Feelings (Even If You Don't Agree)

- Respond with, *"It makes sense you'd feel that way."*
- Avoid phrases like, *"You shouldn't feel that way."*
- * *Why it works:* Validating emotions helps people feel seen and respected.

7. Reflect Back What You Hear

- Say, *"What I'm hearing is that you felt hurt when that happened. Did I get that right?"*
- Let the person clarify if needed.
- * *Why it works:* Reflection confirms understanding and deepens connection.

8. Listen for What's NOT Being Said

- Notice body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.
- Gently ask, *"It seems like there's more there. Would you like to share?"*
- * *Why it works:* Tuning into non-verbal cues helps surface deeper feelings.

9. Encourage Self-Compassion

- If someone expresses self-criticism, respond with, *"It's understandable to feel that way. Be gentle with yourself."*
- Model kindness toward yourself in your own speech.
- * *Why it works:* Self-compassion reduces the intensity of shame.

10. End with a Connection, Not a Solution

- Instead of trying to solve the problem, say:
 - *"Thank you for trusting me with that."*
 - *"I'm here for you."*
- * *Why it works:* Connection, not fixing, is the key to healing shame and rejection.