

COMMUNICATION STRESS STYLES



We all react to stress or discomfort in different ways. In relationships, stress can result in defensive communication with a partner. Pioneering family therapist Virginia Satir identified four patterns for defensive communication or "**communication stress styles.**" Each communication stress style ignores an important part of the issue and relationship - self, other, and/or context. Some people show one style and feel another on the inside. Many of us, at one time or another, have tried all of them.

1 Placater

Individuals with the Placater stress style aim to avoid anger and achieve this by considering the needs of their partner above their own. They are often eager to please, apologetic, and verbally send messages such as "whatever you want...never mind about me." The Placater needs to learn to speak on their own behalf, including their own anger and power.



2 Blamer

Individuals with the Blamer stress style often desire appearing strong and do so by dropping the needs of the other. They anticipate not getting what they want and respond by criticizing or controlling their partner. They are fault-finding, angry, and verbally send messages such as "you never do anything right." The Blamer needs to learn to acknowledge their own pain or disappointment to find what is possible or workable for both partners.

3 Computer

Individuals with the computer stress style often avoid any emotion and drop the needs of their partner or themselves. Instead they often deal with the facts, expectations, or statistics related to the problem. They send verbal messages such as "I'm fine...obviously ...why do you say I'm upset?" The Computer needs to acknowledge and develop comfort with the wide range of feelings to understand their position and to be able to empathize with their partner.



4 Distracter

Individuals with the Distracter stress style are often talkative but avoid direct answers or change the subject. In that way, they ignore/deny their own and their partner's thoughts, feelings, or needs in the situation as well as the problem itself. They believe that ignoring the problem will make it go away. The Distracter needs to develop strength in their skills and gain information that helps them to grapple with reality.



To successfully work through issues with a partner, effective communication needs to address aspects of self (our own needs), other (needs of others), and the context or the task/problem. Satir referred to this as the **leveling or congruent style** of communication. The Leveler is able to pull from the strengths of each of the stress styles to: (1) be sensitive and caring (Placater), (2) be assertive without demolishing a partner (blamer), (3) use reason, logic, and feelings together to problem solve and plan (Computer); and (4) balance fun and pleasure with purposefulness.