

Communication in the Family

Instructor:
Office:
Office Hours:

Course aim. Students should be able to synthesize theory and research on family interaction and relate concepts to their present and future family relationships.

Course description. Broad overview of communication issues found in marriage and family, focusing on current topics concerning communication in the family.

Enrollment requirements. Pre-requisites: Minimum 2.50 GPA; COM 207 with C or better; Credit is allowed for only COM 411 or CMN 598 (Communication in the Family)

Human communication is a universal process. All humans communicate. It is a process that encompasses the first signals a zygote sends to its mother through the last glances at death. Existence itself communicates; it is inevitable. So is family. At a minimum all humans receive genetic information from male sperm and a female egg. The experience of family, to be sure, is very different for each individual; nevertheless, family is a universal experience. The intersection of these two universal experiences—communication and family—forms the content material for this course and makes it a fascinating topic to study. Throughout the semester we will examine theory and research related to family communication.

I use two overarching theories to organize our discussion of family communication. First, we will look at family communication as it develops over the lifespan. Obviously a college student does not communicate with his or her parents the way a toddler communicates. Different topics are addressed, different vocabularies used, and so on. There are also different tasks or meanings of family communication at different phases of the lifespan. The task of moving away from a parent or caretaker's home, forming significant, stable, or short-term romantic relationships, communicating with a spouse or cohabiting partner, and transitioning to parenthood have very different implications for how family communication occurs and what it means. We will look at communication as it changes across these developmental phases. The second overarching theme of this class is to look at family communication within an ecological context. Any particular family is situated within a web of relational, social, political, economic, and cultural networks. We will explore ways family communication develops within these various contexts.

Syllabus disclaimer. I view the syllabus as an outline of the structure and assignments required for success in the course. It is my responsibility to present, discuss, and apply material to the best of my ability, address questions as they arise, and coach your development as communicators. It is your responsibility to understand the syllabus, engage in all assignments to the best of your ability (i.e., do all readings, complete all assignments, take and review notes), stay in touch with me, or communicate with other students to remain engaged in the course. I will endeavor to remain faithful to the course schedule but the future is always uncertain and unknown; hence, I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as deemed necessary. When changes are made, I will notify everyone face-to-face, via email or in the course site Announcements. Please remember to check your ASU email and the course site Announcements regularly.

Grades and grading scale. Assignment of letter grades is based on a percentage of points earned. The letter grade will correspond with the following percentages achieved. All course requirements must be completed before a grade is assigned.

Letter	%	Point Distribution
A+	.97-1.0	194+
A	.94-.96	190-193
A-	.90-.93	180-189
B+	.87-.89	174-179
B	.84-.86	170-173
B-	.80-.83	160-169
C+	.77-.79	154-159
C	.74-.76	150-153
C-	.70-.73	140-149
D+	.67-.69	134-139
D	.64-.66	130-133
D-	.60-.63	120-129
F	<.60	<120

Grading	Earned
Participation: 20	
Family in the News: 10	
Short Assignments: 50	
Test 1: 40	
Test 2: 40	
Test 3: 40	
<u>Total: 200</u>	

Integrity. Theft of another person’s ideas or words is a serious societal offence with legal and financial repercussions. Theft of confidential formulas, documents, ideas, and procedures as well as customer contacts lists, or other proprietary confidential information is a prosecutable offence. In academic settings this type of theft is labeled plagiarism and Arizona State University reserves the right to levy disciplinary sanctions. For more information, visit <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>

Student conduct statement. Students are required to adhere to the standards listed in Arizona Board of Regents Policy Manual Chapter V – Campus and Student Affairs:

Code of Conduct

(http://www.abor.asu.edu/1_the_regents/policymanual/chap5/5Section_C.pdf),

ACD 125: Computer, Internet, and Electronic Communications

(<http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/acd/acd125.html>), and the

ASU Student Academic Integrity Policy

(<http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/srr/index.htm>).

In particular, students are entitled to receive instruction free from interference by other members of the class. If a student is disruptive, I may ask the student to stop the disruptive behavior and warn the student that such disruptive behavior can result in withdrawal from the course (see USI 201-10 <http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/usi/usi201-10.html>). For this class, appropriate classroom behavior is defined as maintaining a cordial atmosphere and using tact in expressing differences of opinion.

Accessibility statement. In compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, professional disability specialists and support staff at the Disability Resource Centers (DRC) facilitate a comprehensive range of academic support services and accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. DRC staff coordinate transition from high schools and community colleges, in-service training for faculty and staff, resolution of accessibility issues, community outreach, and collaboration between all ASU campuses regarding disability policies, procedures, and accommodations.

Students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) for their campus.

Tempe Campus

<http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc/>

480-965-1234 (Voice)

480-965-9000 (TTY)

Assignments

All assignments are listed on the syllabus as are their due dates. Therefore, **late assignments will not be accepted.**

Attendance. There is no formal attendance policy in this class, however, it is expected that you not only attend class but also that you have completed the assigned readings and are prepared for discussion of material. Your thoughtful contributions to the class will enhance all of our learning.

Reading/Participation. A participation grade will be determined by 1) in-class assignments/activities that will be collected and graded at random throughout the semester, and 2) active engagement in and contribution toward class activities.

- 1) Topics for each class session are listed in the attached schedule as are assigned readings (listed below topics in *Italics*) for that day. Class sessions will sometimes reinforce or expand course readings; however, these will not always be covered in detail. It is expected that you will be able to recall and discuss key points from each reading.
- 2) Engagement during class activities will be observed and evaluated.

Family in the News. You will work with one other person on this assignment. With a partner, you are asked to lead a 5-8 minute “family in the news” class discussion. The purpose of this assignment is to illustrate how concepts discussed in class relate to current events or to bring up family topics we have not covered. To complete the assignment, locate an article from a national, state, or local news source (e.g., Wall Street Journal, Arizona Republic, The State Press) that relates to some aspect of family life. Present a summary of the article to the class and facilitate a discussion over its content, focusing specifically on how family communication is related to the issue or event. Conclude the discussion after a few minutes by sharing a key observation, important critique, or insightful question. The conclusion should be designed to represent your own opinion about the article and demonstrate relevance to family communication. *On the day you lead the discussion, you will turn in a link to your chosen article, your set of discussion questions, and your concluding statement.* Failing to submit this document will result in lost points. Both partners will receive the same grade

Short Assignments. Short assignments are short papers that are no more than **2 pages** (APA style: double spaced, 1 inch margin, 12 point, Times New Roman font– see What is APA Style? available from [ICA website](#) and from [OWL at Purdue University](#)). Possible grades for these paper range from 0 to 10. Papers that do not complete the stipulations of each specific short assignment will not earn full credit.

Content will be evaluated as follows:

7=	adequately complete the assignment
8=	adequately complete the assignment + relevant personal connection/application
10=	adequately complete the assignment + relevant connection/application to scholarly material (i.e., academic article, course reading)

To receive more than 7 points, additional effort which demonstrates critical thinking and/or application of material must be expended. **You will offset your critical thinking section with the heading “Applications.”** Papers not containing the heading “applications” will receive no more than 7 points. Further, papers should be free of any grammatical, syntactic,

organizational, or spelling errors and papers not conforming to these standards will not earn full credit. Specifically, papers containing more than two errors result in lost points.

There are six short assignments. The lowest score will be dropped, so only the top five will count toward your final grade. If you do not complete an assignment you will earn 0 points for that assignment. All short assignments are due in **hard copy** at the beginning of class on **Tuesday** the week they are due (see schedule). If you cannot attend class, you may email the paper to a colleague and have them submit it in hard copy for you. Assignments are to be completed individually or with a partner as indicated in the instructions. When completing joint work, both partners will receive the same grade.

1. **History Assignment:** *Individually*, you will write an essay to consider the historical context of family communication. Given that family has changed over the past 200 years in America, how would communication look different during different historical time periods? Support your assertions with readings, citing historical ideas or data from both Coontz and Carlson at least once. Note: For the applications section you will need to cite a third source in addition to these two.
2. **Film Critic:** *With a partner*, analyze a film that realistically depicts family life using one of the following theories: Communication Privacy Management, Family Communication Patterns, Interdependence Theory, or the ABCX Family Stress Model. *Provide examples of how the theory plays out in one or two scenes of the film. Then, critique the theory. How is it useful? What are its limitations?* To adequately complete the assignment, you will need to demonstrate that you can describe the tenants of the theory and apply them to the movie.
3. **Couple Interview:** *Individually or with a partner*, interview a couple who became engaged or married within the past year. You should not interview members of your own family (e.g., siblings, cousins, your own parents). Ask them to share the story of their engagement or wedding. Listen specifically for the types of interaction the couple report as they recount their courtship (e.g., verbal phrases, nonverbal communication, gift exchanges, common rituals, etc.). *What types of symbols and messages did they report using in their engagement story?*
4. **Family Observation:** *With a partner*, go to a public location where couples or families are present (e.g., mall, restaurant, public park). How can you tell who is married or related? Focus on one family in particular. *How do they communicate with one another? What ways was their communication different from non-family communication?*
5. **Parenting Interview:** *Individually or with a partner*, conduct an interview (either face-to-face, skype, or phone) with an individual or couple who has acted as a parent for at least 3 years. You should not interview members of your own family (e.g., siblings, cousins, your own parents). Ask them to share stories about what they have learned about parenting. You might ask about specific topics (discipline, family rituals, household chores, support) or about specific time periods in their child(ren)'s life (infancy, toddler years, adolescents). *What do you learn about parenting from the interview? How does the age of the child influence parenting decisions?*
6. **Child Training Plan:** *Individually*, pretend you are a parent. Write a tentative training plan for a particular domain of life across the first 20 years of life. *Select the domain (e.g., etiquette, sports, religion, media consumption, etc.) and describe at various points in the lifespan (e.g., childhood, adolescents, young adult) what lessons you would teach within that domain and the methods you would use to teach them.*

Tests 1-3. Each of three Scantron tests will contain some true/false and multiple-choice questions and primarily will cover material from readings and lectures. You are responsible for material in readings even if it is not explicitly covered in class. Questions will test knowledge of the major concepts presented as well as the application of concepts to various scenarios.

Readings

- Blankenhorn, D. (1995). *Fatherless America*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Braithwaite, D. O. & Baxter, L. A. (Eds.) (2005) *Engaging theories in family communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Koerner & Fitzpatrick: Family communication patterns
 - Afifi & Nussbaum: Family stress theories.
- Carlson, A. (2005). *Fractured Generations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2010). Demographic Trends in the United States: A Review of Research in the 2000s. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 403–19. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00710.x.
- Coontz, S. (2004). *Marriage, a history*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Edin, K. & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Esolen, A. (2013). *10 ways to destroy the imagination of your child*. Intercollegiate Studies Institute.
- Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2015). *The seven principles for making marriage work, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Harmony.
- Huston, T. L., Caughlin, J. P., Houts, R. M., Smith, S. E., & George, L. J. (2001). The Connubial Crucible: Newlywed Years as Predictors of Marital Delight, Distress, and Divorce. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 237-252.
- Olson, L. N. & Rauscher, E. A. (2011). We'll never be that kind of couple: The variability of intimate violence. In D. O. Braithwaite & J. T. Wood (Eds.) *Casing interpersonal communication* (pp. 149-156).
- Petronio (2000). The embarrassment of private disclosures. In D. O. Braithwaite & J. T. Wood (Eds.) *Case studies in interpersonal communication* (Case #13).
- Popenoe, D. & Whitehead, B. D. (2002). *Should we live together? The National Marriage Project State of Our Unions*. . <http://www.stateofourunions.org>
- Rusbult, C. E., Agnew, C., & Ximena, A. (2011). The Investment Model of Commitment Processes. *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology: Volume Two*
- Socha, T. & Yingling J. (2010). *Families communicating with children*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Steinberg, L. (2001). We Know Some Things: Parent-Adolescent Relationships in Retrospect and Prospect. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 11, 1–19. doi:10.1111/1532-7795.00001.
- Wilcox, W. B. & Marquardt, E. (2011). *When baby makes three: How parenthood makes life meaningful and how marriage make parenting bearable*. National Marriage Project State of Our Unions. <http://www.stateofourunions.org>