

# The Art of Getting Along

Doug Hovatter  
*Extension Agent, Berkeley County*

Are we born with the ability to get along? What happens with our tolerance level for getting along as we develop and age? Why are we attracted to some individuals who seem to have a positive magnet for getting along?

This program topic will assist the participant to:

- ◆ identify how to get along,
- ◆ assess behavior toward getting along,
- ◆ learn positive ways of getting along, and
- ◆ learn effective communication for getting along.

## Introduction

Do you know someone you would cross a busy street just to talk with and be near? Do you notice some people seem unruffled and easy to get along with? Are you easy to get along with?

If you look at people who are easy to get along with, you will notice they have learned the art of getting along. They have learned that their first nonverbal message is their face. Most people whom we perceive as easy to get along with have bright, open eyes and are usually smiling. They appear nonthreatening and open to our approach to communicate. Let's explore how this happens and how you can learn this art of getting along.

## Personality Skills of Getting Along

The following are some "typical" skills common to individuals who have learned the art of getting along. A short description is provided.

**Caring** has a broad meaning but denotes certain characteristics that most people agree on. Caring means to be kind and compassionate through acts of kindness and service to others. It also means to have a servant's attitude in actions and responses toward others: to look for opportunities to serve rather than be served; to express gratitude easily and often to others, with "thank you" and "please" as a part of the daily vocabulary; to forgive others and not hold a grudge; to help people in need without thought of reward or recognition.

Use these skills to become a caring person:

- ◆ Be kind to others through your actions and communication. Look for opportunities to serve others.

- ◆ Express gratitude freely and often to others and let them know how much you appreciate them.
- ◆ Use "thank you" and "please" as part of your daily conversations.
- ◆ Send thank-you notes and tell others about another person's acts of kindness toward you.
- ◆ Forgive others and yourself daily.
- ◆ Help others in need; by doing this, you will fulfill a greater need in yourself.

**Showing Respect** Remember Rodney Dangerfield's famous line, "I don't get no respect!" We all want to be respected, and we work hard to earn the respect of others. How we treat others with respect is learned; we are not born with this ability.

Develop these skills in showing respect:

- ◆ Follow the Golden Rule in your treatment of others.
- ◆ Learn to be tolerant of others and their differences.
- ◆ Use good manners, not bad language.
- ◆ Be considerate of the feelings of others.
- ◆ Don't threaten, hit, or hurt anyone with fist or words.
- ◆ Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

**Fairness** is a very important characteristic in the art of getting along. Everyone has a measuring stick as to how fairness is measured and what is fair. As you develop your skills to get along with others, remember these strategies of being fair:

- ◆ Play by the rules.
- ◆ Take turns and share resources.
- ◆ Be open-minded; learn to be a good listener.
- ◆ Don't take advantage of others.
- ◆ Don't blame others carelessly.

**Inclusive** To be included is something everyone wants. It is a basic human need. When individuals perceive they are not included, their behavior changes. Knowing how to make others feel included (or a part of) is very important in the art of getting along. Try these strategies to include others.

- ◆ Use words like "we" and "us," not "I" or "me."
- ◆ Communicate appreciation or acceptance through body language and the words we choose.

**Affection** can be defined in many ways. Individual needs for affection are different, but all persons need some form of affection, such as a kiss, hug, handshake, or pat on the back. Affection is an emotion that can be very powerful in the art of getting along. It is important for people to understand this human behavior and the need in all of us for some form of affection. Try the following:

- ◆ Give a pat on the back.
- ◆ Give a warm hand shake.
- ◆ Touch the person's hand or arm. Touch is a very powerful way of showing affection.

**Joy** normally comes from within a person. It is expressed in many ways, such as smiles, body stance, posture, walking, and tone and quality of voice. We all know some people who are joyful, and they are a joy to be around. Their personality is like a refreshing wind on a hot day or cool water when we're thirsty. Here is another secret in the art of getting along: Individuals need happiness and joy in their lives. Because they want joy, they are attracted to positive behaviors of joyful, "magnetic" people like bees are to flowers and thirsty people to water.

The following can help you learn to be joyful and refreshing:

- ◆ Smile.
- ◆ Keep a list of happy thoughts.
- ◆ Learn what makes you happy.
- ◆ Learn to say "what's good for you today," instead of saying "what's wrong."
- ◆ Be positive and have faith in yourself and others.
- ◆ Always see the day as partly sunny, not partly cloudy.
- ◆ When you awake each morning, say "This will be a joyful day" and believe it.
- ◆ When you go to bed at night, remember the happiness of the day.
- ◆ Learn that joy and happiness come from within. No one makes us happy or joyful; we do it ourselves.

#### **Five Levels of Communication:**

- ◆ Acceptance
- ◆ Appreciation
- ◆ Tolerance
- ◆ Avoidance
- ◆ Revulsion

#### **Strategies for the Art of Getting Along**

1. Understand the needs of people and work to meet the needs of being *included*, receiving some form of *affection*, and having some *control*.
2. Surround yourself with positive thoughts and ideas. Learn to take the high road of positive thinking and become a positive magnet for others.

3. Learn what makes you happy in life and begin to build on these strong foundations of happiness. Remember that happiness starts from within. It grows as a powerful, positive force that enables us to get along with ourselves and others.
4. Learn to smile and look others in the eye. Your face is your window to the world. It is your billboard to everyone who sees you. It advertises you without you ever opening your mouth.
5. Learn to treat all people equally. Always remember to care for the person. You may not agree with the behavior, but be kind to the person. Give him or her the benefit of the doubt when behavior is not up to your expectations.
6. Find something positive in everyone and build on that something. Learn to be a positive "magnet" with your attitude toward yourself and others. Develop your attitude, which clearly says I care about you and want to get along.

#### **Guidelines for Getting Along**

1. Confirm for yourself that you want to get along with others.
2. Be honest with yourself and others.
3. Keep promises and be loyal.
4. Be accountable for your behavior.
5. Be fair and care about yourself and others.
6. Be appreciative of others and let them know.
7. Remember the good in people and forget the bad.
8. Remember that you can't change people. You can only live a good example that they will see and perhaps want to follow in their life.

**Remember...***Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape!*

#### **References**

McCroskey-Richmond, **Interpersonal Communication**, Burgess Publishing, Morgantown, W.Va., 1992  
Character Counts Conference, Denver, Colo.  
October 1996

**Addressing Diversity**, West Virginia University  
Extension Service, Morgantown, W.Va., April 1990

1997: 10M

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, sexual orientation or national origin. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.