

## DESC Communication Tool

**D** – Describe the behavior  
**E** – Explain the effect of the behavior  
**S** – State the desired outcome  
**C** – Consequence: say what will happen if the behavior continues  
(Cox 2007)

Some people prefer to memorize the key words that represent this model because it gives them a consistent structure to follow:

**D**      When . . .  
**E**      I feel . . . because . . .  
**S**      Therefore, I want/need . . .  
**C**      So that . . .

Nurses can apply the model to communicate effectively when confronting unprofessional behavior in several situations. Here are a couple examples of the DESC model in action, answering questions frequently asked by staff nurses.

### **1. How do I talk to an experienced nurse when she makes it obvious in many ways that she has no time, patience, or empathy for my concerns?**

**D**      “I noticed today that you seemed bothered by my questions, and I felt in the way.”  
**E**      “I understand you have a heavy workload, but when you ignore me, I feel terrible. I feel unimportant and get the message that you wish I wasn’t here.  
**S**      “I need to find some way or some time when I can connect with you. I want to learn and be the best nurse I can be.”  
**C**      “If you continue to ignore me and act like I am in the way, I can’t stay. I love nursing, but I simply can’t learn in this environment.”

### **2. What do you say after you hear that someone has been backstabbing you?**

**D**      “I’d like to talk with you in private. I heard from another nurse that you said I didn’t know what I was doing, that I am a terrible nurse.”  
**E**      “When I hear that someone has been saying things about me and I don’t know why, or even what situation it pertains to, I feel sabotaged and set up to fail.”  
**S**      “I want to be a good nurse, and I can’t do that without your honest feedback and support. Can you say what you feel and think directly to me in private?”  
**C**      “Without that support, I am sure to fail. I will have to find another place to work, even though this is the specialty I had chosen.” (Bartholomew 2007)

#### References:

- Bartholomew, K. (2007). *Stressed Out About Communication Skills*. Marblehead, MA: HCPro, Inc.  
Cox, S. (2007). “Good communication: Finding the common ground.” *Nursing Management* 38(1).