



There are skillful ways to manage interruptions that can take a toll on physical and mental health.

Interruption Awareness Improves Quality of Life

Interruptions are part of daily life. Although they are more noticeable and irritating when they occur at inconvenient times, routine interruptions can be cumulatively disruptive.

Research shows that it can take up to 25 minutes to fully resume work after an interruption in an office setting, with an average productivity loss of 12-13 minutes depending on task complexity and the type of distraction, whether it's a colleague stopping by to ask a question, a phone call, email or online chat. Once work resumes, there may be "attention residue" while the interrupted person regains their train of thought.

A study on the [Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress](#) found test subjects completed interrupted tasks in less time with no difference

in quality. However, they compensated for the interruptions by working faster. Pressure to produce is associated with sleep disturbances, exhaustion, stress-induced physical ailments such as headaches, stomach upsets and high blood pressure, mental health conditions including depression and anxiety, and increased risk for accidents, injuries and errors.

Interrupting during social interactions can abruptly alter the dynamics of a conversation. Most people have experienced a situation in which a conversation seems to be going well until it suddenly "goes south" due to an ill-timed remark. After being interrupted by a loved one, for example, a person may feel shut down, angry, disrespected or misunderstood.

Types of Interrupters

Most adults are both interrupters and interrupted. (Parents of children who interrupt are advised to ask a child development professional for guidance.) While most intentions are good, it helps to understand underlying motivations for one's own and other people's actions. With that understanding, efforts can be made to change behaviors and enhance communication with co-workers, friends and family members, Roberta Satow, Ph.D., says in a *Psychology Today* blog post on [How to Respond to Being Interrupted](#).

Satow identifies three types of serial interrupters: narcissistic, empathetic and mind-reader. A narcissistic interrupter is thinking about what he or she wants to say next to redirect, take control and become the topic of conversation. The narcissistic interrupter is difficult to handle because their attitude implies condescension. The empathetic interrupter listens but doesn't wait before interrupting to share a similar experience as a way to validate the speaker and offer reassurance. The mind-reading interrupter is listening, becomes over-engaged and interrupts to finish the speaker's sentences, usually in an effort to demonstrate understanding.

How Often Do You Interrupt?

If you find yourself interrupting more often than not, think about your motivation. Common underlying reasons include:

- Excitement or enthusiasm
- Fear of forgetting
- Impatience or time constraints
- A subconscious need to gain control
- Poor listening skills

To help reduce a tendency to interrupt:

1. Use non-verbal cues like nodding and maintaining eye contact to show that you are engaged and acknowledge you have heard the person.
2. Give your partner a specific amount of time to express thoughts without interruption, then paraphrase what was said before taking your turn.
3. Pause, breathe or silently count to three before responding if you find yourself cutting someone off during a conversation.
4. During a meeting, if you are afraid you will forget to say something you consider important, take notes. When it's your turn to speak, refer to your notes to refresh your memory.
5. If you are consciously trying not to interrupt and slip up, apologize to the speaker and tell them you are working on it.
6. Seek support. There are lots of resources available to people who want to be better communicators in their professional and personal lives.

Dealing with Interruptions

Satow says many people respond to different types of interrupters in the same way when it would be more effective to tailor their response. For example, one might say to a narcissistic interrupter, "Please don't change the subject when I'm explaining something to you." For an empathetic interrupter, an appropriate

When to Interrupt

There are times when it's necessary to interrupt someone in order to clarify an important point or there is imminent danger.

While interrupting is often considered impolite or downright rude, it can improve communication and enhance connectedness when it's done in a skillful way, John Amodeo Ph.D., a marriage and family therapist, explains in a *Psychology Today* blog post on [Why It's Sometimes OK to Interrupt Your Partner](#).

Amodeo says a mutually agreed upon understanding about when interrupting is acceptable helps build safety and trust in relationships.

response might be, "Thanks for being supportive. I have more I want to tell you first before we talk it over." For a mind-reading listener, an explanation such as, "It would help me if you don't finish my sentences. Sometimes I need more time to think about what I want to say," may produce the desired result.

To regain focus after an interruption:

- Block out time for uninterrupted work. As feasible, reduce digital distractions.
- Develop a routine to help you pick up where you left off when you get interrupted.
- During personal interactions, ask your partner for space before re-engaging.
- Engage in mindfulness exercises to improve your ability to stay present and focused.
- Tell colleagues, friends and family members you need uninterrupted time and assure them that you will re-engage.

If resuming a complex task after an interruption seems particularly daunting, breaking it down into manageable steps can help rebuild momentum. Being aware of the ways in which interruptions can affect daily life helps lessen their impact.