

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION SKILLS*

▶ ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

🕒 **Time:** 70 minutes

➔ **Objectives:** By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Define verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal communication.
- List three barriers to effective communication.
- List three ways to enhance communication.
- Define active listening.
- Identify 3 active listening techniques.

★ **Training Methods:** Brainstorm, Role Play, Lecture, Small Group Activity, Skills Practice

✓ **In This Activity You Will...**

- Explore communication concepts and skills through a series of exercises.
- Develop and validate definitions for communications concepts. (10 minutes).
- Illustrate the definitions through a discussion of two role plays (15 minutes).
- Discuss and practice “active listening skills” including open and closed-ended questions, focused questions, and paraphrasing. (45 minutes).

(continued next page)

Instructions

1. Introduce session and ask participants for a definition of communication. The definition should include the idea that communication is a two-way exchange of information which takes the following forms: verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal.

2. Discuss each form of communication with the class.

• **Verbal** – Communication through language

• **Nonverbal** – Communication other than through spoken language. More powerful messages are usually conveyed through nonverbal cues than through words themselves. 70-90% of our communication is nonverbal. Examples of nonverbal communication include:

Body language (e.g., folded arms)

Eye contact

Muscle tension (are neck or jaw muscles taut, fists clenched?)

Posture

Mannerisms (e.g., fiddling with hair, biting nails)

Proxemics (how close we stand when talking. In the US, we stand between 18 inches to 2 ft. from each other; we get uncomfortable if that boundary is violated. Proxemics vary from culture to culture.)

• **Paraverbal** – Communicating not by what you say, but how you say it. Examples of paraverbal communication include:

Voice qualities/voice tone (is voice flat or monotone?)

Rate of speech (how fast or slow one talks)

Cadence/rhythm of voice

Volume

Inflection

* This module comes from the Comprehensive Peer Worker Training, Peer Advanced Competency Training (PACT) Project Harlem Hospital Center, Division of Infectious Diseases, 2008.

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ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY (CONT.)

Materials:

- Tape
- Markers
- Handout- Role Plays #1 and #2 (2 copies for trainers)
- Handout - Types of communication
- Handout - Definition of Active Listening
- Handout - Barriers to Effective Communication
- Handout - Effective Communication Strategies
- Handout - Active Listening Strategies
- Handout - Open and Closed-Ended Questions
- Handout - Focused
- Handout - Paraphrasing
- Flip chart paper for exercise, 1 each entitled Barriers to Effective Communication, Strategies for Improving Communication, Active Listening Strategies

Preparation:

- Prepare flip charts
- Copy handouts

3. To illustrate how powerfully messages are conveyed both nonverbally and paraverbally, the facilitators will act out two short role plays in front of the class. The facilitators start by acting out Role Play #1: Nonverbal Communication.
4. Ask the class to analyze what was going on in the role play. Participants should note that in spite of Isabel's statements that she was listening to Donna, her nonverbal cues were saying more convincingly that she did not have the time or the desire to listen.
5. Ask the class to observe Role Play #2 and to note the differences in the attitudes portrayed. After the facilitators act out the role play, ask participants what messages they feel were being conveyed in both versions of the role play. The class should note that in the second interaction, the tone and volume of the voice (and perhaps some of the body language) conveyed an entirely different message than came through in the first interaction.
6. *Lecturette:* At the beginning of the session, we talked about how communication is a 2-way process. One part of that communication process is how we send messages out, either verbally, nonverbally or paraverbally. The other part of the communication process is how we understand the message that is being sent to us, in other words, how we listen. Have you ever heard the term active listening? How would you define active listening?
7. After acknowledging the participant responses, read and distribute the following definition of active listening:

Active listening is a way of listening that focuses entirely on what the other person is saying and confirms understanding of both the content of the message and the emotions and feelings underlying the message to ensure that understanding is accurate.

8. Divide the class into 3 groups. Direct Group #1 to the flip chart, *Barriers to Effective Communication*, and ask them to list all the barriers they can think of that might hinder communication. Direct Group #2 to the flip chart, *Strategies for Improving Communication* and ask them to list all the ways

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► TRAINING TIPS

- Acknowledge that participants are already good communicators and good listeners by the very nature of the positions to which they've been appointed and that they have a lot of expertise which we can all learn from.
- Remind participants that these are difficult skills and we are just introducing them so that they can begin to think about them and work on them when they have the opportunity.
- Handouts can be given out as one packet.

they can think of to improve communication. Direct Group #3 to the flip chart, *Active Listening Strategies*, and have them list all the ways that they can think of to engage in active listening. *Give an example of each.* Give the groups 10 minutes to compile their lists.

9. Ask each group to share their list with the class, making sure that the *Active Listening* group goes last, since this topic will segue way into the next exercise. (See *Communication Brainstorm* cheat sheet for possible answers). The groups' lists may overlap and that is okay. For the *Active Listening* group, make sure to define, discuss, and give examples of the following:

Open- and closed-ended questions

Focused questions

Paraphrasing

10. Tell the class that we are now going to practice some of the active listening techniques discussed in the brainstorming exercise. Hand out the worksheets on *closed-ended versus open-ended questions*, *focused questions*, and *paraphrasing*. Review the characteristics of closed-ended and open-ended questions and ask participants to read one of the closed-ended questions. Ask for a volunteer to re-phrase it as an open-ended question. (*Do the first example together as a class.*)
11. Next, do the same for focused questions and paraphrasing.
12. Ask participants how it felt to use these active listening techniques. Ask participants what differences there will be in both the information they get from their client and the rapport they will be able to establish.

Summary

Summarize these verbal techniques as ways to get more information from clients. Each technique has the potential to provide richer information about what the client has experienced, is feeling, or is thinking.

* This module is part of the online toolkit Building Blocks to Peer Success. For more information, visit http://www.hdwg.org/peer_center/training_toolkit.

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ROLE PLAY #1: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Both facilitators are standing in front of the class. Facilitator A approaches Facilitator B.

Facilitator A: Hi, Isabel. Look, do you have a few minutes? There's something I really want to talk to you about.

Facilitator B: Oh sure, Donna. Of course I have time for you. What is it you wanted to talk to me about?

Facilitator A: Well, I'm having a problem with this client I'm working with. I just can't seem to get a handle on it. I feel I'm getting mixed messages from Lisa. She tells me that she needs to find new housing since she can't keep staying on her sister's couch but then every time I see her – she hasn't made any of her appointments with housing. I feel like she is at risk of ending up on the street.

Facilitator B: *(Acts distracted and annoyed that Donna is taking up her time. She taps her foot, looks at her watch, twirls her hair, looks away, picks her nails, etc).* Oh really? Well, I just want you to know that I'm here for you, Donna.

ROLE PLAY #2: PARAVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Facilitator A: Donna, I put that report on your desk this morning.

Facilitator B: *(in a loud voice, dripping with sarcasm)* Oh thanks, Isabel, I really appreciate that.

(The facilitators remind the class to note how the previous interaction differs from the following one.)

Facilitator A: Donna, I put that report on your desk this morning.

Facilitator B: *(in a sincere tone of voice)* Oh thanks, Isabel, I really appreciate that.

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TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

- **Verbal** – Communication through language
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Proxemics (how close we stand when talking. In the US, we stand between 18 inches to 2 ft. from each other; we get uncomfortable if that boundary is violated.

Proxemics vary from culture to culture.)

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DEFINITION OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a way of listening that focuses entirely on what the other person is saying and confirms understanding of both the content of the message and the emotions and feelings underlying the message to ensure that understanding is accurate.

Active listening is not:

- Quickly agreeing with client before they finish speaking
- Passing judgment
- Asking follow-up questions that are for your own information
- Reassuring the client that the situation is “not that bad”
- Giving advice either from your personal experience or from professionals

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BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Hearing only part of the message
- Failure to listen
- Listening with a particular mind-set/prejudice
- Reacting emotionally
- Making assumptions
- Accents
- Physical barriers
- Cultural barriers
- Religious barriers
- Time pressures
- Distractions/interruptions
- Failure to wait for feedback/response
- Lack of sensitivity to emotions
- Poor volume, tone, emphasis
- Finishing person's sentence for him/her
- Not acknowledging person's experience, emotions, feelings, desires
- Jumping from topic to topic
- Acting phony

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Making eye contact (like many nonverbal cues, this is culturally specific; in some cultures, direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect)
- Use attentive body language: sit slightly forward with a relaxed, easy posture
- Be aware of your gestures
- Stay on the topic
- Don't be phony, be yourself
- Be cultural sensitive
- Focus on the other person
- Determine what the other person already knows, then fill in the gaps
- Smile or nod
- Don't monopolize the conversation
- Establish rapport
- Arrange for privacy
- Create an atmosphere free of distractions and interruptions
- Be warm and enthusiastic
- Show interest
- Look bright and alert
- Ask open-ended questions
- Use active listening

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ACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

- Focus on the other person.
- Use attentive body language: sit slightly forward with a relaxed, easy posture.
- Use verbal cues such as “um-hmmm,” “sure,” “ah,” and “yes.”
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use focused questions to get a more definitive answer than you would with an open-ended question.

Example: Counselor: “Where do you spend most of your day?”

Client: “I don’t know – it’s hard to say.”

Focused question: “Okay, let’s take yesterday. Was that a regular day for you?
What did you do in the morning?”

- Use laundry list questions to obtain specific information about something by providing a series of choices and to get information you haven’t been able to get at with open-ended or focused questions.

Example: Counselor: “What side effects have you experienced from the HIV meds you got?”

Client: “I’m not sure what’s the disease and what’s the drugs.”

Laundry List question: It’s good to distinguish between side effects and disease symptoms, so let me list what side effects can be caused by... (name of medicine). Have you had ..(list side effects of medicines the patient is taking)?”

- Probe for more information, using open-ended questions or statements to obtain additional information.

Example: “Tell me what you know about HIV.”

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ACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES (CONT.)

- Ask clarifying questions to help interpret what other person is saying.

Example: Client: “Oh, you know I don’t have a fixed address. I am living here and there.”

Clarifying statement: Tell me a little bit more about what you mean by here and there.”

- Paraphrase what the other person has said.

Example: Client: “I have so much to do – medical appointments, working, taking care of the kids. I don’t know how I’m going to keep it all together.”

Paraphrase: “You’re feeling overwhelmed by all of things going on in your life right now.”

- Mirror or reflect what the other person has said.

Example: Client: Why should I tell any of my partners that I’m HIV positive? Let them find out the way I found out – by getting sick.

Mirroring statement: “It sounds like you’re angry because no one informed you that you were exposed to HIV.

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CLOSED VS. OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Closed-ended questions invite a yes or no answer. They begin with Do, Does, Did, Is, Are, Was, Has, Have, Could, Would, and Will.

Open-ended questions cannot be answered by yes or no. They begin with: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

The purpose of open-ended questions is to facilitate engagement with the client so that the client will open-up to the worker. This can help to improve the client-worker relationship as well to help gather more information.

1. Closed: Do you live with somebody?

Open: Tell me about your living arrangements and anyone you live with?

2. Closed: Have you ever been really sick before?

Open: _____

3. Closed: Do you work?

Open: _____

4. Closed: Did you have any side effects from the medicines you had to take?

Open: _____

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FOCUSED QUESTIONS

1. Worker: Where do you spend most of your time?

Client: I don't know, it's hard to say.

Focused Question: _____

2. Worker: Who do you have contact with on a regular basis?

Client: Oh, I guess with some people over at the shelter, and then some other people I meet for a drink now and then.

Focused Question: _____

3. Worker: How have you been feeling recently?

Client: Pretty lousy.

Focused Question: _____

4. Worker: What kind of work do you do?

Client: A little of this, a little of that. I hustle. Whatever it takes.

Focused Question: _____

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PARAPHRASING

How to Paraphrase:

Repeat the meaning of what the client says, but use different words.

The paraphrase should begin with “You” to reflect what the client is expressing.

1. Client: I don't know how I got emphysema. I only smoke one cigarette after each meal.

Paraphrase: _____

2. Client: I feel worse when I exercise, I'd rather just sit around.

Paraphrase: _____

3. Client: I have always taken care of myself. I should not have had a stroke. I blame my doctor for his incompetence.

Paraphrase: _____

4. Client: My boss just fired me even though it was only the second time I was late this week.

Paraphrase: _____