

unit **5**

activity **35**

active listening

OVERVIEW: Students practice behaviors that enhance (or impair) communication.

OBJECTIVES: To enable students to adopt behaviors that enhance communication.

INSTRUCTIONS

DURATION:

50–60 minutes

MATERIALS:

Board+chalk; cue card handouts.

TO PREPARE:

Review the information about effective communication in unit 5 of the **GUIDELINES** book (or in your own curriculum). Review the list of specific behaviors in Step 6 and modify if acceptable behaviors vary in your culture (for example, eye contact is not considered polite in some settings; shaking one's head sideways may have different meanings). Identify one (or two) pair of volunteers who are likely to be effective role-play performers, and prepare cue cards for them (see sample cue cards). Ideally, prepare the volunteers the previous day so that they can rehearse before performing. Finally, be aware of your own listening skills — especially during this lesson!

1 Give the role-play volunteers one cue card for each skit. If necessary, allow them to take a few minutes to prepare or rehearse while you go through Step 2.

2 Introduce the topic to the rest of the class by explaining:

- We say that communication is a two-way process. When one person is speaking, what is the other person doing? [*Listening.*] So is listening part of communication? [*Yes.*] Today we will explore what we communicate when we are listening. We will learn about what a big difference “active listening” makes in communication between people.
- We will start with a demonstration. Take out your notebooks. Observe the listener, and write down each behavior you observe that you think gets in the way of effective communication.

3 Have the volunteers enact the “negative” communication skit (skit #1).

4 Reflect on the skit by asking:

- How would you evaluate this conversation? Was it satisfying and effective?
- What verbal and nonverbal behaviors did the “listener” display? [*On the board, write each negative behavior that students mention. Probe for the following:]*

Nonverbal behaviors:

Frowning

Looking dismissive, rolling your eyes toward the sky

Shaking your head as if to say “no”

Looking or moving away, looking bored or uninterested, yawning

Verbal behaviors:

Interrupting the speaker, showing impatience, indicating that the speaker is taking too long

Expressing negative judgments of the speaker, such as “you are wrong” or “that is a dumb idea”

- Ask the “speaker” how it felt not to be listened to.

- 5 Have the volunteers enact the “positive” communication skit (skit #2).
- 6 Reflect on the skit by asking:
- How would you evaluate this conversation? Was it more satisfying?
 - What verbal and nonverbal behaviors made this conversation more successful than the last one?
[On the board, write each positive behavior that students mention. Probe for the following:]

Nonverbal behaviors:

Maintaining eye contact

Nodding your head (as if to say “yes”)

Leaning in a bit toward the speaker to show that you are listening

Offering a smile or a pat on the back

Verbal behaviors

Asking for clarification to make sure that you understand the speaker

Showing interest in hearing more (for example, “Tell me more about that . . .”)

Validating the speaker’s feelings (for example, “I can understand how you feel.”)

Validating the speaker’s ideas (for example, “Good point.”)

Avoiding making any statements that make the speaker feel judged as inadequate

Thanking the speaker for trusting you to share what is on his or her mind

- 7 Have students form groups of three to practice active listening. Explain:
- In each group, one person will speak for two minutes. When it is your turn to speak, you will speak about something that you are concerned or upset about. For the purpose of this exercise, select a topic that is not confidential and that you can speak about comfortably with your classmates. You might feel hopeful, angry, worried, hurt, or anxious. If you cannot think of anything to speak about, practice asking the person to vote for you to become head of the youth council.
 - The second person will practice active listening, and the third will observe and give feedback. Mostly you will give feedback to the listener, but you may also give feedback to the speaker. After two minutes, you will rotate roles. Then we will have a third round. In this way, each of you takes a turn in each role.
- 8 Start Round 1:
- Speakers, start to tell the listener something that you are upset about in your life.
 - *[After 2 minutes:]* Stop. Observers, give 60 seconds of feedback.

- 9** After one minute: Start Round 2:
- Speakers, you become the listeners. Listeners, take the part of the observers. Observers, you will be the speakers.
 - *[After 2 minutes:]* Stop. Observers, give one minute of feedback.
- 10** After one minute: Start Round 3. While students are completing this round, you may wish to write the following statement by physician-writer Karl Menninger on the board, simply to inspire their thinking: “Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.”
- Rotate parts one more time and begin again.
 - *[After 2 minutes:]* Stop. Observers, give feedback.
- 11** Reserve ten minutes to discuss, drawing from any of these questions:
- How does it feel when you are the speaker and the person is not listening well?
 - What happens when the two people have a real conflict and they are both upset? Is it harder or easier to communicate well?
 - Some researchers have observed that males and females have different styles of communication. What are girls and women taught about how to express themselves when they are upset?
 - What are men and boys taught about how to express themselves when they are upset? Can people learn to communicate in a way that is not violent or aggressive?
 - How do you think aggression or violence affects communication between adolescent males and females in an intimate relationship?
 - What can people do to improve communication between males and females, especially when they have a conflict? How many of you were able to give constructive feedback when you were the observer?
 - *[If time allows:]* What do you think of the quotation on the wall? Comments?
 - Think of one thing that you would like to improve in your communication style. Practice that behavior tonight and during the week with others. Notice, also, how people listen when you are trying to express yourself.

cue card for “the poor listener” skit (#1):

One of you will be the “speaker” and one of you will be the “listener.”

SPEAKER: Develop a script based on an imaginary situation. Select either: (1) something that (you are pretending) happened to you that you think was unfair; or (2) a wild plan or idea you (are pretending to) have that you are excited about. For the skit, you want to express your experience or ideas and the feelings you have very clearly. You will spend several minutes trying to talk with your partner about this, trying to be heard. Plan to speak for two to three minutes.

Respond according to the way your partner is listening to you. If you feel that he/she is not listening to you, show your frustration, raise your voice, or respond in whatever way might feel natural in such a situation. If the other person is listening carefully and respectfully, behave accordingly.

LISTENER: You are a POOR LISTENER. When the speaker is trying to talk to you, demonstrate poor listening skills. Your job is to use as many of the negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors as you can from the list below:

Nonverbal behaviors:

- Frowning
- Looking dismissive, rolling your eyes toward the sky
- Shaking your head as if to say “no”
- Showing impatience — looking or moving away, looking bored or uninterested, yawning

Verbal behaviors:

- Interrupting the speaker, starting to talk about yourself or changing the subject
- Expressing negative judgments of the speaker (such as “Wrong!” or “That is a dumb idea.”)

cue card for “the good listener” skit (#2):

One of you will be the “speaker” and one of you will be the “listener.”

SPEAKER (Instructions are the same as for skit #1): Develop a script based on an imaginary situation. Select either: (1) something that (you are pretending) happened to you that you think was unfair; or (2) a wild plan or idea you (are pretending to) have that you are excited about. For the skit, you want to express your experience or ideas and the feelings you have very clearly. You will spend several minutes trying to talk to your partner about this, trying to be heard. Plan to speak for two to three minutes.

Respond according to the way your partner is listening to you. If you feel that he/she is not listening to you, show your frustration, raise your voice, or respond in whatever way might feel natural in such a situation. If the other person is listening carefully and respectfully, behave accordingly.

LISTENER: You are an ACTIVE LISTENER. When the speaker is trying to talk to you, demonstrate active listening skills. Your job is to use as many of the positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors as you can from the list below:

Nonverbal behaviors:

- Maintaining eye contact
- Nodding your head (as if to say “yes”)
- Leaning in a bit toward the speaker to show that you are listening
- Offering a smile or a pat on the back

Verbal behaviors

- Asking for clarification to make sure you understand the speaker
- Showing interest in hearing more (for example, “Tell me more about that...”)
- Validating the speaker’s feelings (for example, “I can understand how you feel.”)
- Validating the speaker’s ideas (for example, “Good point.”)
- Avoiding making any statements that make the speaker feel judged as inadequate
- Thanking the speaker for trusting you to share what is on his/her mind