The Communication Process

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Communication Components

The communication process contained in this lesson is made up of five components. The components are the sender, the message, the receiver, feedback, and barriers.

Clear communication indicates that the message sent was received the way that the sender intended and validated via feedback from the individual who received the message.

Unclear communication is often indicated by the feedback that the sender receives and suggests that the message which was received was NOT, in fact, what was intended and distortion was involved at some level.

↓

Barriers to the message

| SENDER | The Message | RECEIVER |

Feedback

Each of these components in the communication process is necessary for effective and accurate communication. The Sender has a message to convey to the Receiver and desires that it be heard and understood accurately.

The Message is transmitted to the receiver primarily through visual, auditory, and tactile means. The medium is chosen to enhance the message. Visual stimuli connected with appropriate auditory stimuli can accurately communicate a product, a service or a theme of interest. In a relational communication process Senders who send a verbal message toward the receiver use voice tone, speed and volume to communicate. Additionally, the sender may use facial expressions, hand gestures, clothing and attire and/or some sort of object or picture to help convey the message. Individuals also use touch to convey the meaning of what they’re trying to relate as they interact with one another.

The Receiver’s role initially in the communication process is to listen attentively to the message in order to accurately interpret what is being sent. There are a multitude of skills in which the Receiver and the Sender both must attend to within the context and content of their interaction.
Feedback is probably one of the most important components of the communication process. Feedback can be thought of as a network of integrated processes in which information is received, transmitted, interpreted and communicated back in the direction of the Sender for the purpose of clarifying, interacting and understanding the message that was sent as well as the message received. Without feedback, communication can be considered a one-way process. An example of a one way communication would be a student who reads assigned material, answers questions, turns in work and does not receive feedback or test results. Two way communication is intended to complete an exchange or interaction and bring closure.

**Barriers** to communication are those hindrances that affect the communication process by inhibiting or preventing part of the Sender’s message from reaching the Receiver in the way that the Sender meant for the message to bring received. There are many barriers to communication including:

**Physical Barriers**

- Physical appearance
- Physical posture
- Room Setting
- Interruptions
- Eye Contact
- Language
- Facial expressions
- Phone calls
- Tone of voice
- Other distractions

**Psychological Barriers**

- Hostility
- Mind Wandering
- Charisma
- Hidden Agendas
- Stereotyping
- Self-centeredness
- Emotional blocks
- Defensiveness
- Past Experiences
- Status
- Preconceptions
- Inability to Speak Accurately
Effective Communication Skills

Having a general understanding of communication, however, does not guarantee that one will be able to communicate well. It is also essential to translate this understanding into specific behaviors — to be able to speak and act in a way that will promote a productive exchange. In addition to the types of barriers mentioned previously, it is critical to identify other common roadblocks to effective communication and to learn proven and effective communication skills and techniques.

It is important for counselors to learn good communication skills and to understand that being a good communicator is as much about attitude as it is technique. It is vital to examine our patterns and habits and notice what fosters willingness or reluctance in ourselves and in others regarding communication. “Receivers” can learn potent behaviors to enhance the communication process that are collectively referred to as “Active Listening.”

**Active Listening** is a way of responding to the speaker which implies that the listener is trying to understand what the speaker is saying, feeling and doing. It shows the listener's belief that communication is not a one-way process and that what is being said deserves to be heard and understood. When empathy and respect are shown, and judgment is reserved, people are encouraged to continue talking and will feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings. In using the techniques of active listening, it helps to keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. **Empathize.** Try to put yourself in the other person's place to understand what the person is saying and how he/she feels.

2. **Demonstrate your understanding and acceptance by nonverbal behaviors:**
   - Tone of voice
   - Facial expressions
   - Gestures
   - Eye contact

3. **Do not interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions.** Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
Active Listening Techniques

Active listening may seem difficult at first because it requires strict attention and the ability to be objective in situations that often trigger our own strong opinions, reactions and judgments. Like most aspects of good communication, it can be practiced and should arise from the individual's true willingness to be part of a fruitful exchange. Whether it is completely natural or learned, all good active listeners do the following:

1) **Encourage and/or Clarify**

This technique is used to convey interest and to encourage the speaker to continue talking. To encourage, the listener should use neutral words, and avoid agreeing or disagreeing. One sign of encouragement is nodding of the head. Or, encouragement might be accomplished verbally.

For example, "Can you tell me more ...?"

Clarifying means literally "to free from confusion." Clarifying is helpful in getting the information you need in order to understand what is being said or to gather information necessary to understand a problem.

Examples of clarification are:
- What happened?
- How did you react when?
- How long has this situation been going on?
- Have you been friends in the past?

2) **Attending**

Guidelines for effective attending are:
- To communicate listening through frequent and varied eye contact and through facial expression
- To relax physically and lean forward occasionally, using natural hand and arm movements
- To "follow" the client verbally, using a variety of brief encouragements such as "um-hum," "yes," or repeating key words. Indications that effective attending is NOT taking place include:
  - Little eye contact, a fixed stare, a frozen expression
  - Stiff or tense posture, no head movements, no hand movement, slouching
  - Topic jumping, cutting off the client.
3) **Restate and/or Reflect**

Restating is repeating in your own words the main thoughts and ideas the speaker has expressed. This demonstrates that you have heard and understood what is being said and allows you to check the meaning and interpretation of what you have heard. Restating does not mean that you agree or disagree with what the speaker is expressing.

Examples include:

"Then you see the problem as ..."
"So what you're telling me is ..."
"So you would like to trust your parents more. Is that right?"

Reflecting shows that you understand the feelings behind what is being expressed. Reflecting can help the speaker clarify what he/she is feeling or may serve to acknowledge the feelings being expressed.

Examples of reflecting are:

"You seem frustrated because you didn't get the grade you were expecting."
"It sounds like you feel pretty angry about what happened."

By pulling all the information together — both facts and feelings — summarizing can help the speaker be sure that he/she has given you all the information. Summarizing may also give the speaker a chance to correct or add anything and can serve as a way to focus further discussion.

For example:

"You have spoken about A and B and C. Could you talk a little more about X?"

4) **Validation statements** acknowledge the speaker's worth, efforts, and feelings. Examples of validating statements: "I appreciate your taking the time to talk about this." "You've really worked hard to solve this problem.""It must be difficult to do."

5) **Reflection of Feelings**

The basic components in reflection of feelings are:

- To identify the basic feeling(s) being expressed, verbally or nonverbally
- To formulate a response which captures the essence of the feelings

Indications that effective reflection of feelings is not taking place include:
• Responding solely to content and not to feelings
• Using words to respond to feelings which are at a different level than the client expressed
• Assuming the client accepts a reflection of feelings without checking it out

Avoid personal habits or mannerisms that could distract while you are sending the message.

Look at the person you are speaking to.

Evaluate the person's interpretation of the message by asking specific questions about the message, or having the person repeat and explain your message.

6) **Paraphrasing**

The basic components of paraphrasing are:

• To determine the basic message that is being expressed in the verbal content of the client's communication
• To rephrase the verbal content in similar but fewer words

Indications that effective paraphrasing is not taking place include:

• Missing the basic message of a client statement
• Rambling on at length after a client statement
• Assuming the client accepts a paraphrase without checking it out

7) **Summarizing**

The basic components of summarizing are:

• To review progress
• To pull together important ideas and facts
• Establish a basis for further discussion

Indications that effective summarizing is not taking place include:
Missing the basic need to bring closure to a session

While all of these techniques encourage the speaker to talk and indicate your understanding and acceptance, it is important to remember that none of these techniques imply agreement by the person using them.

8) “I” and “You” Messages

Active listening is just one-half of the effective communication equation. While we can use all of the skills we've learned as an active listener, providing the other person with accurate information is just as important as listening in ensuring effective communication.

The speaker, as the initiator of a conversation, sets the tone and therefore can do much to keep a conflict situation from escalating. When we're angry and upset with other people, it’s easy to blame them for what has happened or accuse them of ill will.

For example, Marie, upset when she learns her friend, Anita, has divulged a personal secret, confronts Anita after school: "You're a lousy friend. You're always spreading gossip. You just can't keep anything to yourself..."

Although there may some truth in Marie's accusations, approaching Anita in this manner only serves to make her defensive. Most likely Anita will counter with her own accusations, and the dispute will escalate.

A "You-Message" (called so because the emphasis is on blaming the other person) is rarely effective in helping bring people together to work on the problem between them. If Maria truly wants her friend to understand how she feels about what has happened, she can accomplish much more by stating her concerns in the form of an "I-Message."

In an I-Message, the speaker simply describes his/her feelings about the other person's behavior and how this behavior has affected the speaker. For example, Marie might say to Anita: "I felt angry when I heard you had told other people that my parents are getting a divorce, because now I can't trust you to protect my secrets."

I-Messages and You- Messages have very different impacts on the listener. In response to a You-Message, the listener is likely to feel judged or blamed and may conclude that the speaker thinks he/she is a bad person. The listener may be so busy defending him/herself from the attack that he/she has no chance to understand the speaker's side of the story, much less to think about what could be learned from the problem.
Because an I-Message focuses on the speaker's wants, needs, or concerns, the listener is less likely to feel judged. Thus, he/she will be more able to listen to what the speaker is saying. A clear I-Message has four parts.

The four parts of an “I Message” each begin with a specific phrase:

"I feel ..." State the feeling.
"when you… " Describe the specific behavior.
"because ..." Describe the effect of the other person’s behavior on you.
"And what I want is ..." State what would make the situation better for you.

Examples:

"I feel frustrated when you borrow money from me and don't pay me back when you say you will, because I don't have any money now, and what I want from you is to stop asking to borrow money."

“I feel angry and resentful when you don’t complete your paperwork on time because I get stuck working late hours, and what I want is for you to complete your part of the team project by deadline.”

The use of “I” messages must be understood as primary in helping people communicate effectively and relationally for healthy relationships.
Guidelines for Communication

What is not said can sometimes be as important as what is said. Ask yourself, "What is really meant by that? And what is the speaker leading up to?" But be careful you are not diverted to another subject by so-called "branching thoughts." Stick to the speaker and the subject like glue. Another way of capitalizing on the difference between the speaking rate and the brain rate is to listen to the speaker's main theme and put it in your own words. Counselors also redirect around words that hinder communication.

Roadblocks to Communication

Roadblocks to communication are the words used that are not the most effective when attempting to communicate with other individuals. Especially in counseling, the facilitator/counselor needs to listen for and avoid the following types of words to best allow growth to occur within the groups they are operating. Note these roadblock words and what they sound like when others speak them.

Ordering: You must… You have to… You will…
Threatening: If you don’t… You had better or else…
Preaching: It is your duty to… You should… You ought to… You must…
Lecturing: Here’s why you are wrong: Do you realize that is not a correct statement?
Providing answers: What I would do is… It would be best for you if…
Judging: You are bad or lazy. You dress inappropriately.
Excusing: You’ll feel better when… That is not so bad.
Diagnosing: You’re just trying to get attention from the group. You know you’re just being controlling.
Prying: Why do that? What did you do that for? When did you do that? How did you do that?

Speaker responsibilities

- Be sure the person is taking the time and is ready to listen. The timing of your message is essential.
- Give the person the whole message (all the person should know and would like to know). Carefully plan your message around what, why, when, how, where, and who.
- Repeat and clarify the main idea, problem, issue, question, and facts. Avoid clutter.
- Position yourself and the person to avoid distraction.
Listener responsibilities

- Concentrate on listening. Position yourself to ward off distractions. Have the desire and take the time to listen. Look at the speaker. Do not fidget, shuffle papers, clean your fingernails, open your mail, or indulge in other discourtesies.

- Get the whole message. Ask the speaker to repeat or clarify; ask what, when, how, where, and who. (Avoid asking why. People aren't always able to explain why they do something, and it leads to idle speculation.)

- Don't overreact to delivery. "What a slow speaker!" "What a monotone this fellow has!" "Who would want to listen to this drone?" A good listener is not concerned about the speaker's mannerisms or delivery.

- Don't overreact to content, especially when one of your convictions, pet peeves, or prejudices is challenged. From that moment on, emotional filters keep you busy thinking up arguments in defense and the rest of what the speaker has to say may go unheard.

- Listen between the lines. Try not only to listen to what is said, but also to understand the attitudes, needs, and motives behind the words. Also, remember that the speaker's words may not always contain the entire message. Being alert to nonverbal cues increases your total comprehension of the speaker's message. For example, a speaker's verbal message may convey excitement about the subject, but a lack of spontaneous movement, wandering eyes or a downward gaze, an unanimated tone of voice, a mask-like face, or a slumped or hunched posture are some of the indicators that the speaker does not mean what is said.

- Adapt your thought speed. We can think about three to four times faster than we can talk. Since the brain is not idle even while we listen, it is difficult to slow down our thinking speed. To use your thought speed to advantage, attempt to anticipate what the speaker is getting at. Mentally sum up what has been said. Weigh the information.

- Don't listen only to what you want to hear. People tend to believe what they want to believe, and we frequently hear only what we listen for, but what we listen for is often rather limited. We also block out things we do not want to hear. You can try your own experiment. Have an acquaintance listen to an opposing political party's speech and then report it to you. You will be amazed at the amount of negative distortion and bias displayed.

- Listen for ideas, not facts. The importance of facts has been drilled into us since childhood; hence, when we listen we tend to focus on them. But this can obscure the ideas behind those facts. A good listener makes an effort to understand what the facts add up to, weighing them and relating them to each other to see the key ideas that bind them together.

- Practice listening. Put these guidelines to work whenever you are listening to friends, family, co-workers, or strangers. If you use them only when listening to clients, you will not become as skillful as you need to be.
# Active Listening Techniques

*Statements that help the other person talk.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>To do this…</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>1. To convey interest</td>
<td>…don’t agree or disagree</td>
<td>1. “Can you tell me more?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To encourage the other person to keep talking</td>
<td>…use neutral words</td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…use varying voice intonations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifying</td>
<td>1. To help you clarify what is said</td>
<td>…ask questions</td>
<td>1. “When did this happen?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. To get more information</td>
<td>…restate wrong interpretations to force the speaker to explain further</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To help the speaker see the other points of view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restating</td>
<td>1. To show you are listening and understanding what is being said</td>
<td>…restate basic ideas and facts</td>
<td>1. “So you would like your parents to trust you more, is that right?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To check your meaning and interpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>1. To show that you understand how the person feels</td>
<td>…reflect the speaker’s basic feelings</td>
<td>1. “You seem very upset.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. To help the person evaluate his or her own feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>1. To review progress</td>
<td>…restate major ideas expressed, including feelings</td>
<td>1. “These seem to be the key ideas you have expressed.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To pull together important ideas and facts</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. To establish a basis for further discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Validating</td>
<td>1. To acknowledge the worthiness of the other person</td>
<td>…acknowledge the value of their issues and feelings</td>
<td>1. “I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>…show appreciation for their efforts and actions</td>
<td>2.</td>
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Active Listening Triads

Now that you have understood the communication model presented, it will be helpful for you to pair up with another class member and practice the active listening and communication skills put forth in this lesson. It is most effective if three students get together to form a triad. Two students are to be Sender and Receiver while one student observes the other two. Of the two students who are speaking to one another, one is to have the role of caretaker or counselor while the other is to discuss some frequent problem/event and/or disruption in their life in a normal discussion of the event.

The counselor is to use the following skills: attending; validating; paraphrasing; and reflecting back to the individual speaking. The individual observing the other two persons is to make notes of the communication style of the counselor and give feedback after a 5 to 6 minute dialogue has transpired. Then the individuals will change roles within the triads. The person who was doing the speaking now becomes the counselor; the observer becomes the speaker; and the person who was doing the counseling is now the observer.

The following statements and considerations are a basic guideline for you to follow while doing the listening exercise. During the discussion between the speaker and the listener, the observer should note:

- What active listening techniques did the listener use?
- What did the listener do that was effective?
- What could the listener have done differently?

The observer should call time after 5 to 6 minutes and ask the following questions:

- What did the listener do that encouraged you to talk more?
- Did the listener do anything that discouraged you from talking?
- How did you feel at the end of this interaction?
- What did the listener do that you found especially helpful?
- What made it difficult or easy for you to listen?
- What techniques were easiest for you to use? Which were the most difficult?
- What active listening techniques would you like to practice more?