

WEEK 4

CONTENT



CONVERSATION ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

10 MINUTES

- What do you find difficult about communicating with others?
- How do you think TBI may affect communication?
- How do you suspect your ability to communicate with others changed since your TBI?
- Remember, communication is difficult. It is normal to have the difficulties we are discussing after a TBI.



ORAL COMMUNICATION STYLES

5-10 MINUTES

Facilitator should distribute the “Understanding Your Communication Style” handout (found below in the handout section for this week). There are four main communication styles we are going to discuss today: Passive, Passive-Aggressive, Aggressive, and Assertive..

- **Passive:** When you avoid expressing your opinions and feelings, and do not respond to hurtful or anger-inducing situations. Instead, you allow annoyances to mount, until you have an explosive outburst that is out of proportion to the triggering incident. Afterward, you might feel shame, guilt, or confusion, and go back to being passive.
- **Passive-Aggressive:** You appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. You may feel powerless, stuck, and resentful and feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of your resentment. Instead, you express anger by subtly undermining the person who you resent.

- **Aggressive:** When you express your feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others. You can be verbally or physically abusive.
- **Assertive:** You clearly state your opinions and feelings without violating the needs of others. You value yourself and your time, and are a strong advocate for yourself while being very respectful of the rights of others.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Open discussion for participants on their thoughts on the above.

- What are your experiences with each communication style?
- How do you think a TBI may affect these styles? (Examples: struggling to make/maintain eye contact, experiencing difficulty noticing subtle social cues such as body language, difficulty establishing and maintaining a comfortable sense of one's or others' personal space, being unaware of the appropriate time to enter a conversation and interrupting others as a result)
- Which of these four communication styles feels most natural to you? Which one do you think you use the most?
- Do you believe that any aspects of your communication may have changed since your TBI?

BREAK

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to take a five-minute break. During this break, we are going to do a guided breathing exercise. Breathing exercises are well-researched strategies for helping us manage our out-of-control emotions and they help us focus our attention.

- Let's focus in on a specific breathing technique called square breathing. Imagine drawing a square in the air in front of you. As you draw your finger across the top of the square, breathe in and count to 7. As you draw the side of the square, hold that breath for 7 seconds. As you draw the bottom of the square, breathe out slowly through your lips. As you draw the other side of the square, hold once more for seven seconds before drawing in a new breath.



INTRODUCE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

10-20 MINUTES

Now we are going to discuss effective communication skills.

- Talking alone does not facilitate a discussion. There are certain aspects of interaction with others that you may not necessarily think about, but which have significant effects on the interaction.
- Can anyone name some of these (e.g. eye contact, tone of voice, body language)?
- These are some skills that can help communication:
 - **Maintain frequent eye contact.** This lets the person you are interacting with know that you are interested and engaged. Use “open” body language. Open body language means not crossing your arms, not looking away, and facing the person you are interacting with. (Here, the facilitator may illustrate the difference between open and closed body language.)
 - **Keep a positive or neutral tone of voice.** Much about a person’s thought process can be understood from *how* they say something, not *what* they say. For example, if you suspect your friend is upset and you ask them what’s wrong, and they respond by saying, “I’m fine,” with a negative tone, you know that they are not actually fine. (Facilitator may demonstrate how saying the same statement, such as, “Today is an awesome day,” using different tones communicates very different meanings.)

Facilitator should distribute “Four Part I-Statements” handout (found in the handouts section for this week).

- **“I Statements”** are a great and simple conversation tool that people can use to get across what they are truly thinking or feeling to someone else, without causing the other person to get defensive. The important thing about I Statements is that rather than approaching an issue in a way that attacks or places blame on someone else, you approach the issue from your own point of view and speak about how you are feeling because of the other person’s actions. I Statements are assertive, not aggressive, because they allow you to stand firm in your own point of view without attacking the other person.

Here's how an I Statement is structured:

“When you _____, I feel _____, because _____.”

Example: Say your friend was supposed to return your phone call, but didn't. Instead of saying something like, “I can't believe you forgot to call me back! You don't care about me!” You could use the I Statement technique to say, “When you forget to call me back, I feel disappointed, because I really look forward to our conversations.” Which approach do you think would lead to a more productive conversation? Why?

Example: “When you criticize my driving in the car, it makes me feel nervous, because I cannot concentrate on the road.”

Example: “When you yell at me, it makes me feel flustered and upset, because I feel like you are trying to intimidate me rather than communicate with me.”

Have group participants come up with their own scenarios and I Statements.

- o Another important communication skill is **staying away from “absolutes.”** Absolutes are words such as “always,” and “never.” For example, “You always do this!” or “You never listen to me!” Why might these statements cause problems in communication? (Answer: They overgeneralize, and cause the other person to feel defensive.) After all, is anything in life ever ALWAYS or NEVER true? Very rarely. Let's look at the following examples to see how staying away from using absolute terms makes a conversation or conflict less hostile.

Example: Your spouse forgot to take out the garbage for the third week in a row. Instead of saying, “You always forget to take out the trash when it's your turn!” you might say, “I've noticed you've forgotten to take out the trash the past few weeks. Is there something I can do to help you remember?”

Practice taking the absolutes out of the following statements and/or re-wording them as I Statements for better communication.

1. “You never ask me how my day was when I get home. You must not care about me!”
2. “Whenever we are out with friends, you always put me down in front of them.”
3. “It's never my turn to pick where we go to dinner. You always choose!”
4. “You're never honest with me about your feelings.”