

WEEK 3

CONTENT



CONVERSATION ON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

5 MINUTES

Now we're going to discuss verbal communication. The styles we use to communicate with others can sometimes change after experiencing a brain injury. This change can make it more difficult to communicate our needs to others, in a way that is clear and concise. By learning the different styles of communication and new communication skills, we can work to help each other learn new strategies for more effective communication. Let's start with some questions.

- What do you find difficult about communicating with others?
- How do you feel when you must advocate for yourself?
- How do you think your ability to communicate with others has personally changed since your brain injury?



DISCUSSION PROMPT

What do you hope to get out of today's session?

The purpose of the preceding questions and discussion prompt are to encourage participants to consider the areas in which this curriculum can help them build communication skills. Make sure answers stay focused on either positive interactions or on constructive review of situations that did not go well.

Note: Effective communication takes time to develop and some people have trouble mastering it. Just remember to be patient and keep trying the skills you learn today, even if they're hard at first. Think of it like learning a new sport; once you learn the correct skills, you will feel more confident in your performance.



VERBAL COMMUNICATION STYLES

5 MINUTES

There are 4 main communication styles we are going to discuss today: Avoidant, Indirect, Aggressive, and Clear.

1. Avoidant: When you avoid expressing your opinions and feelings and do not respond to upsetting situations. Instead, you allow your frustration or anger to build up until you have an outburst that is going to make things worse. Afterward, you might feel shame, guilt, or confusion, and go back to being passive.

- Imagine I am holding a bottle of soda in my hand and begin to shake it up. What do you think would happen to the soda if I opened it? (Allow participants time to respond.) Similar to the soda, avoiding expressing emotions often leads to an explosion.

2. Indirect: When you appear calm 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. You feel unable to directly deal with what is upsetting you. Instead, you express anger through nonverbal behaviors like silence or tone of voice.

Facilitators role-play a conversation in which one of them expresses emotions through nonverbal behaviors (e.g., saying, "I'm fine," in an angry or upset tone of voice).

3. Aggressive: When you express your feelings and opinions in a way that violates the rights of others. You can be verbally or physically abusive.

Facilitators role-play a conversation in which one of them expresses emotions using verbal aggression (e.g., yelling).

4. Clear: When you clearly state your opinions and feelings without violating the needs of others. You value yourself and are a strong advocate, while being very respectful of the rights of others.

- I would like you to think back on our soda example from before. Imagine I opened the soda slowly after shaking it to allow it time to depressurize. This is what clear communication looks like; taking time to let feelings out in a respectful way to avoid an explosion.

Ask the following:

- What are your experiences with each communication style?
- Which communication style do you think is best?
- Which style feels most natural to you, or you use the most?
- How do you think having a brain injury may affect these styles?

BREAK

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to take a five-minute break. I will let you know when time is almost up. At that time, I would like you all to come back to your seats.

**Distribute snacks (optional) to participants at this time. (*For DYS participants only – inform them that snacks must be consumed during the training and may not leave the room with them, per DYS staff's directives).*



NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

5 MINUTES

As we said earlier, we are always communicating, whether verbally or nonverbally. In fact, most of our communication is done without words. We do not normally think about body language, but it is just as important as the words we say. Some of the nonverbal communication skills we use include eye contact, body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. Here are some examples:

- **Making eye contact shows confidence in your words and shows others you are interested in theirs.**
- **Be aware of everyone's personal space; being too far away or too close to someone could make the situation uncomfortable.**
- **Be aware of your posture when speaking with others.** A straight, forward stance shows you are engaged in a conversation.
- **Facial expressions can tell a lot about someone's mood.**
Try offering a smile when appropriate to convey a comfortable, friendly environment to everyone in the conversation.

Because nonverbal communication is so important, I want you to listen to the following scenario and be prepared to answer a few questions.

Scenario: You're walking down the hallways when notice someone looking at you. The other person has started using certain body cues and facial expressions that make it look like they want to fight. What do these nonverbal cues look like? How could you respond with your eye contact in this situation? How could we be aware of our body language in the hallway? Are there any ways you could use your facial expressions to respond positively? What negative nonverbal cues should you make sure to not give off?

Ask the following:

- Are you able to read body language?
- Do you think you misread body language?

Please pair with the person next to you and practice using the nonverbal cues we discussed. For example, you may talk to your partner about how your day has been. During this conversation you can try using appropriate eye contact and posture.



CLEAR COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

10 MINUTES

Distribute How to Communicate Clearly handout.

If you attended the previous weeks of this program, you would have participated in a breathing exercise. Breathing exercises are well-researched strategies for helping us manage our emotions and focus our attention. This exercise can also be useful in teaching us how to pause before we respond to someone. However, rather than relying on breathing alone, we are going to teach you how to manage your emotions and focus your attention using communication skills.

If you look at your handout, you'll see a concept called the Three C's. The Three C's stand for clear, concise and conscientious. Clear communication is used to make your message straightforward and understandable. Concise means short, so you are getting to the point quickly. Conscientious means you are thinking about who you're talking to and how your conversation may affect them.

We are going to practice using the Three C's in a way that also allows you to pause and think before responding to someone. If someone you know, like a parent, a friend, or teacher, asks you a question you are not prepared for you

can use the Three C's to ask for a minute to collect your thoughts. You can also use this time to prepare an answer in an upsetting situation.

For example, if your teacher confronts you about an assignment you don't remember, you can say, "I'm not sure what you're talking about. Can I have a minute to think about it?" Another example is if you are asked a surprising question. You might respond with, "that's a good question. I'll need a minute to think about that." These responses let the other person know you've acknowledged their concern, but you need time to figure things out before you respond to them.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Try to think of a situation where the Three C's and asking for time might have come in handy.



INTRODUCE ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

10 MINUTES

Now we are going to discuss other effective communication skills. Earlier we talked about different verbal and nonverbal communication styles. Now, we are going to go over communication skills.

Some skills that can help communication are:

- Frequent eye contact. This lets the person you are talking to know that you are interested and engaged in what they are saying.
- 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 an angry 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.)

- Using “I Statements” is a great way to get across what you are truly thinking or feeling without causing the other person to get defensive. The best part about “I Statements” is that you approach the issue from your own point of view and talk about how the other person’s actions make you feel without attacking or blaming them.

Distribute Four-Part “I Statements” handout

Here’s how an “I Statement” is structured:

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

Example: You were expecting your friend to respond to an important text, but they never responded. Instead of saying, “I can’t believe you ignored my text! You don’t care about me!” You could use an “I Statement” and say, “When you didn’t text me back, I felt disappointed, because I really wanted to discuss something with you.”

- Which approach do you think would lead to a better conversation? Why?

Ask participants to rephrase the following statement a student said to his teacher:

“You’re completely unfair! You only call on me when you know I don’t know the answer. You just want to embarrass me. It’s your fault that I’m failing.”

Rephrase options could include:

- “When you yell at me, it makes me feel angry, because I feel like you are trying to intimidate me rather than teach me.”
- “When you yell at me, I feel angry because I am working hard even though I don’t get the material. Can you explain this in a different way?”

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 oversimplify and cause the other person to feel defensive.) Let's look at an example to see how staying away from "absolutes" makes conflicts less threatening.

Example: Your parent yells at you for forgetting to do the dishes for the third day in a row. Instead of saying, "You never do the dishes when I ask!" they might say, "I know sometimes you forget to do the dishes, but will you remember to do them today, so we have dishes to use for dinner this evening?" Which statement do you think would make you more willing to help?

Let's practice these new skills. Try taking the absolutes out of the following statements and/or re-wording them as "I Statements" for better communication:

1. "You always take hours to respond to my text messages. You must not care about me!"
2. "Whenever I have friends over, you always yell at me in front of them."
3. "It's never my turn to pick what we watch on TV. You always choose!"
4. "You're never honest with me about your feelings."