

WEEK 3

COMMUNICATION MASTERY

*Make sure you take time to acquaint yourself with this curriculum, so you can be as engaged, energetic, and confident as possible when working with the kids!

*Please refer to the facilitator reading list at the end of the section to further acquaint yourself with more detailed information about traumatic and acquired brain injuries and communication, as discussed in this section.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

To engage members in a conversation about communication skills and how those may change following a brain injury.

- Normalize difficulty in communication and encourage members to share experiences.
- Introduce different communication styles and ask members to identify the pros and cons of each.
- Introduce skills for effective communication and practice skills in an activity.
- Participants will use communication skills to communicate their homework within the group.

TIME:

Allow 1.5 hours for the session.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

A minimum of four participants is recommended.

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PREPARATION



VIDEO

Watch the following video:

<https://youtu.be/Y02clqBzrbs>

Trainer video: <https://tinyurl.com/ahead-trainerinfo>



HANDOUTS AND MATERIALS

- Four-Part "I Statements" Worksheet
- How to Communicate Clearly
- Take-Home Impressions (optional)
- Snacks

*All handouts/forms will need to be provided. Provide enough copies of handouts/forms for all participants and facilitators. Please be mindful to provide extra copies for parents, teachers, probation officers, therapists, etc. as appropriate.



WRITE

Write the following four styles of communication on the white board for the participants to reference while you are presenting them. These will be used later in this treatment group for the activity and group discussion.

- Avoidant
- Indirect
- Aggressive
- Clear

*This curriculum uses the word 'brain injury' but some people will better recognize or respond to 'concussion.' Plan to adjust terminology as necessary.

WEEK 3

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES



ESTABLISH GROUP RULES

2-5 MINUTES

WRITE the following group rules on the white board for reference for participants throughout the treatment group:

1. Confidentiality
2. Respect
3. Participation

I am going to go over the rules for this group. If you have any questions about any of the group rules, please ask, and I can help to explain what that rule means.

There are 3 main rules:

The first is:

- 1. Confidentiality:** This means that what we discuss today stays in this room and is not shared with others.

That brings us to our second rule:

- 2. Respect:** Please be kind to one another, by...
 - Listening when someone else is speaking,
 - Not talking over each other,
 - And encouraging one another

The last rule is:

- 3. Participation:** We ask that you take part in the discussion. Your ideas are important to the group. At times, I may need to cut discussion short. I will tell the group when discussion time is over.

Note: As a reminder, rules only need to be reviewed in depth if there are new members who have not participated in previous weeks. Rules are discussed at the start of each group and only a brief reminder should be utilized for groups with no new members.



ICE BREAKER AND INTRODUCTION

2-5 MINUTES

Facilitator(s) should introduce themselves at this time.

Please share your name, age, and your favorite movie and what you like about it. Also, please share whether you have participated in any of the previous groups. If you have previously participated, please share your favorite thing you've learned so far.

Thank you for coming today. We appreciate your willingness to participate, as it will make the session more fun. At the end of today's session, we will ask you to share one thing you liked and one thing you disliked about today's group. We want to make sure this module is something you find useful, so your input is very important to us.



APPLIED PRACTICE REVIEW

2-5 MINUTES

Ask the participants who were present for the previous module about their practice and if they have new goals based on their practice. For participants who have not done this module, define S.M.A.R.T. goals and ask them to begin thinking about potential goals they have for themselves based on examples presented by peers.

Last week you worked on establishing S.M.A.R.T. Goals:

- Has anyone had the chance to start working toward their goal?
- Has anyone started any new goals?
- What has everyone found helpful about using S.M.A.R.T. Goals?



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Are there any other rules you'd like to establish?

Be sure to write any additional rules on the whiteboard.



EXPLAIN THE NATURE AND PACING OF THE GROUP

2-5 MINUTES

- Since we only have about an hour for each group meeting, it is important that we try to stay on topic.
- Today, we are going to work together and learn about different styles that people use to communicate. We are going to discuss the positives and negatives of each communication style. We will show how to advocate for yourself by learning how to ask for what you need. We will then practice these skills.
- In order to get through all the material, I will give reminders when that section's time is almost up. If at any point I move on from a topic and you would like to continue to talk about it, please let me know after group or during a break.

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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."

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GROUP ACTIVITY

GROUP ACTIVITY

5-10 MINUTES

Now that we have learned which communication styles are least helpful and which is the most helpful, let's continue practicing the skills we have discussed. We're going to try some role-playing using the clear communication style because we know it is the most helpful.

I want you to break up into pairs. I would like you to use all the skills you have learned so far to practice with each other, using the clear communication style. Between you and your partner, decide who is who in each scenario. Here are two scenarios to use to practice using your communication skills:

- 1.** You and the other person made plans to meet during lunch to work on your assigned project together. However, your partner did not show up, which forced you to finish the project on your own. You are upset because your partner left you with all the workload and now you do not want to work on another project with them in the future. Your partner minimizes your feelings.

Allow participants five minutes to discuss the first example before moving on to the second. Either have partners switch halfway between the five minutes or have one partner do scenario 1 and the second partner do scenario 2.

- 2.** You agreed to let your friend borrow your favorite jacket on the condition they give it back in one week. It has now been two months and you see your friend wearing your jacket at school. You are upset and ask for it back but your friend insists it is their jacket and they returned your jacket.



DISCUSSION OF ACTIVITY/WRAP-UP

5-10 MINUTES

- Did anyone have difficulty using the clear communication style? If so, why?
- How did using “I Statements” and avoiding absolutes make the conversation or confrontation easier?
- What strategies can you use to remind yourself to use these skills when you are in an emotionally heated situation?
- We have covered a lot of material today about communication and how to communicate with others effectively. What challenges do you foresee in using the skills you learned today?
- As mentioned earlier, your feedback is an important part of this group. What were the most and least helpful things that we went over today?

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PRACTICE



2 MINUTES

If a conflict arises between now and our next meeting, give these skills a try. Please be prepared to share in our next meeting.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Do you have any questions?

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HANDOUTS

FOUR-PART “I” STATEMENTS

HOW TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

TAKE-HOME IMPRESSIONS (OPTIONAL)

FOUR-PART "I" STATEMENTS

'I' statements allow you to clearly state how you, personally, perceive and respond to a situation. You tell the other person how you feel, but you do not blame them for your feeling that way. 'I' statements can be an effective way of getting your message across when you are angry, irritated, upset or just not getting what you want or need.

THE FOUR PARTS OF AN 'I' STATEMENT ARE:

The action:....."When..."

Your response:....."I feel..."

Preferred outcome:....."I would like..."

The benefit:....."That way..."

Saying to someone "I think", "I need", "I want" or "I would like" is more likely to result in a positive outcome than starting with something like "You should" or "You are".

This approach also encourages the other person to tell you how they feel and be clear and specific about their needs.



THE ACTION

You need to describe the action or situation causing the problem objectively. Give a true description of what happened.

Begin with something like: "When messages are not passed on . . ." "When I hear a raised voice . . ." "When I'm told we are going out . . ."

Rather than: "When you don't pass on a message . . ." "When you rant and rave at me . . ." "When you don't bother to tell me you've arranged to go out ..."

The last three ways are likely to cause the other person to be defensive. An objective description of the event can help the other person understand the effect their action has on you.



YOUR RESPONSE

People do not always know the effects of their actions. When you are talking about your response you are on safe ground. You are discussing the facts. People are less likely to argue the point if you say, "I get angry" or "I feel frustrated".

1. Your response might be *an emotion*. For example, you might explain that you feel hurt, angry or ignored.
2. Telling people *what you do* can sometimes be easier than saying how you feel. For example, "I withdraw"; "I shout at you"; "I do everything myself".

3. You might tell the other person *what you feel like doing*, even if you do not do it. For example, "I feel like ignoring you"; "I want to walk out".

Avoid blaming others for how you feel, or they may get defensive and reject the accusation with statements like: "If you get angry, that's your problem!"



YOUR PREFERRED OUTCOME

Discuss what you would like to be able to do or have: "I'd like to have messages left for me in" This focuses on what would improve the situation for you without blaming the other person.

1. When I am told we're going to a party at the last minute (*action*).
2. I feel angry (*response*).
3. I would like to have a day's notice, so that I can plan for the evening (*preferred outcome*).
4. That way I can arrange a babysitter and be ready on time (*the benefit*)

HOW TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

WHAT IS CLEAR COMMUNICATION?

- Influencing others
- Setting your boundaries
 - Respecting your own rights, while keeping a positive relationship with the other person.
- A form of persuasive communication

The difference between being aggressive and clear and how to avoid crossing the line:

SPEAKING UP FOR YOURSELF WITHOUT BEING AGGRESSIVE

Use the three C's

- 1. Clear:** When you want to be heard, make sure that your messages are straightforward and understandable. Use language that makes the listener clear on what you are saying. Avoid big or flashy words that can cause confusion.
- 2. Concise:** Do not beat around the bush or avoid the topic. By getting to the point quickly, you are able to limit the amount of confusion or misunderstanding distracting from your concern or issue at hand.
- 3. Conscientious:** This means giving respect to the others in a conversation. When people in a conversation feel respected, they are more willing to listen to what you have to say. Starting a conversation with a calm greeting or refraining from aggressive body language are two ways you can be conscientious in a conversation.

The goal of assertive communication is to get your point across in a way that the other person wants to hear. Speak to other the way you want to be spoken to.

HOW TO DEFEND YOURSELF WITHOUT LETTING YOUR EMOTIONS GET THE BETTER OF YOU

- 1. 🚗 😡 The hit and run:** they dump on you then leave. Tell them you would like to revisit that issue after you have had time to consider what they need. Give yourself time to think first.
- 2. 😱 ⏰ The hallway ambush:** they corner you as you are on your way to do something else and want a response now. Tell them you will get back to them as soon as you have had time to think about it.
- 3. 😞 😡 The misplaced blame:** not even your fault or responsibility. Say, "I can see that you're frustrated by that. Why do not you talk with "Joe" about why things were handled that way."
- 4. 😡 😡 The appropriately placed (but over the top) blame:** Your slip. Do not over-apologize, just acknowledge your mistake and move on. Say, "I'm sorry that I did that. I will try to make it up to you."

*Adapted from: Assertiveness Skills: A Guide to Positively Successful Communication
Rockhurst University Continuing Education Center, Inc (2008).*

TAKE-HOME IMPRESSIONS

You are encouraged to fill out this handout after attending each meeting of this group. Doing this is optional, but it is designed to help you retain as much of what you learned in today's session as possible. In your own words, please answer the following prompts:

1. SOMETHING I LEARNED ABOUT TBI TODAY THAT I DID NOT KNOW BEFORE IS:

2. SOMETHING I LEARNED TODAY THAT I WANT TO SHARE WITH SOMEONE IN MY LIFE IS:

I will share this with: _____

because: _____

3. I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT:

4. ONE STRATEGY I LEARNED TODAY THAT I BELIEVE WILL HELP ME IS:

5. THESE ARE THREE SITUATIONS WHERE I CAN SEE MYSELF USING THAT STRATEGY/SKILL:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____