

# Learning to Communicate

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# WELCOME!

This may be the first time you've had an actual course on communication, but you are already quite an experienced communicator. In fact, you've been communicating since the moment you were born. Back then you communicated by crying. Different cries gave the people who took care of you a clue about what you needed. Soon you learned to smile and giggle and make all kinds of faces. You were able to convey a variety of messages using these skills. Finally, you learned to talk. Then the doors of communication were wide-open for you.

You have spent a lot of time since you were about two years old trying to say things in such a way that other people would listen and understand. And you've spent a lot of time listening to and trying to understand other people. That's what this course on communication is about. It's about saying what you want and need to say in a way that will help your relationships grow.

In the next few weeks, you will learn a lot more about communication. You will also get a chance to practice many of the things you learn. Keep in mind that the basis of all good communication is respect for yourself and other people. After all, that is Jesus' main message to each of us:

*Love one another as Jesus loved us.*

# My Style

## A COMMUNICATION SELF-ASSESSMENT

Read the following situations and for each one circle the letter of the answer that best resembles how you might respond. If none of the responses comes close to what you would say or do, write your own response on the blank line.

1. I am walking by myself when I come upon a group of kids from my school. One of them calls my name out loud and says, "Hi." The whole group then looks at me.
  - a. I wave and keep going.
  - b. I say, "Hello," to the person who called me and then move on.
  - c. I smile and say, "Hi," to the person who called me and then talk to the rest of the group too.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
2. In the situation described above, I notice the group first and no one notices me.
  - a. I just keep going.
  - b. I say something like, "Hi, everyone!" and make sure they hear me.
  - c. I walk up to the group, say, "Hello," and join the conversation.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
3. After school someone I helped in class comes up to me and says: "Thanks for your help. I just wasn't sure how to begin the assignment. You really cleared things up."
  - a. I change the conversation by talking about something else.
  - b. I say something like, "Thanks a lot for saying that."
  - c. I say something like, "No problem."
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Someone in the group has been ignoring me for a week or two, and I am tired of it.
  - a. I ignore the person who is ignoring me.
  - b. I tell another friend about it.
  - c. I go to the person who is ignoring me and ask what is wrong.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_





5. My best friend has been making fun of another person in class. Even though the other person does act weird sometimes, I think that my friend is being cruel about it.
  - a. I tell my best friend to stop.
  - b. I pray that my best friend stops.
  - c. I drop some hints and hope that my best friend gets the message.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. One of my friends has an older sister who is a senior in high school. One day, while I am at their house, my friend's older sister and her friends walk in and hang around for a while in the den, where my friend and I are.
  - a. I slouch in my chair.
  - b. I get up and stand with my arms folded.
  - c. I look down at the floor.
  - d. I turn toward my friend's sister and her friends and talk to them.
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. I am on the phone for forty-five minutes talking to my friend about a problem I have. I suddenly realize that my friend has been a good listener, and I appreciate all the support and care I have received.
  - a. I say something like, "Thanks for listening."
  - b. I say something like, "See you tomorrow," and trust that my friend knows that I am grateful.
  - c. I say something like, "You really are a good listener and a good friend."
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. I am confused about what other people at my lunch table are talking about. They seem to be talking about something important, but I don't know exactly what it is.
  - a. I just keep quiet.
  - b. I say something like: "Wait a minute, I'm lost. What are we talking about?"
  - c. I try to crack a few jokes.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. A friend comes to me with a problem.
  - a. I try to find a solution.
  - b. I tell my friend about a time when I had a similar problem.
  - c. I ask my friend questions about the problem.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. During supper my dad asks me what kind of day I had at school.
  - a. I say something like, "It was okay," and keep eating.
  - b. I stop eating and tell about the best or the worst thing that happened.
  - c. I nod my head to show that everything went well and go on eating.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_



# Helping My Relationships

## GROW

From the list the group created during the session, write down some suggestions for communicating with people that will be most helpful for you to remember.

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Think of the different relationships you have—with family members, relatives, friends, teachers, and classmates. Now think of a person or a group of people with whom you want to communicate better. In the space below, write the initials of that person or those persons and describe how you think you can communicate better.

Initials:



I think I will be able to communicate better if I \_\_\_\_\_

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### Remember That . . .

- To be human means to communicate with other human beings.
- Communication happens in many different ways. We use words, facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, or even silence to communicate.
- Good communication helps to enrich and strengthen our relationships.
- Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and tension in our relationships.

Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment, and do not hide your wisdom.

For wisdom becomes known through speech, and education through the words of the tongue.

(Sirach 4:23–24)

Your feelings count. Your opinions matter. And your words deserve to be heard. (Pamela Espeland and Rosemary Wallner, *Making the Most of Today*, page 294)



## Remember That . . . .

- Everyone communicates nonverbally through facial expression or body posture.
- Nonverbal expressions send loud messages.
- Nonverbal messages are often unconsciously communicated.
- Good communication requires careful attention to nonverbal messages.

Other things I want to remember:

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## Try This

When communicating with others, we can show care and respect for them. When we do so, they get the picture that we care about them. Here are five ways to truly communicate well:

1. Sit or stand at eye level to the person to whom you are speaking. Avoid standing or sitting too far away or too close.
2. Avoid blocking gestures, such as folding your arms across your chest, and scolding gestures, like putting your hands on your hips.
3. If you are sitting in a chair, try to sit in a position that shows your interest. Avoid slouching. Try leaning slightly toward the other person or persons.
4. Always look at the other person when you speak and when you listen.
5. Be aware of your facial expressions. Are you relaxed or tense? warm or cold? welcoming or uneasy?

Your expression is the most important thing you can wear.  
(Sid Ascher)

# EXPRESS

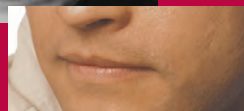
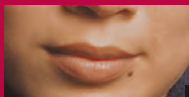
# YOUR

# Real Self



When you want to say what is on your mind and in your heart, try to follow these steps.

1. Stop and think about what you want to say.
2. Pay attention to how your face and body are communicating nonverbally.
3. Speak in an even, calm tone of voice.



4. Look at the person or group to whom you are speaking.
5. Know your thoughts or feelings.  
Be ready to give reasons for what you think and feel.
6. After you have spoken, listen openly for responses.

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Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:6)

# FOR REAL

Think about the person or group you mentioned in “Helping My Relationships Grow” on page 4 of this booklet. Imagine yourself speaking to the person or group. In the space below, write what is on your mind and in your heart. Use the sentence-starters if you wish. Remember that no one will read this.

\_\_\_\_\_ (name or names)

I think that \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ and I feel \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ when (name a specific action or event) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ because (list clear reasons) \_\_\_\_\_

## Try This

Saint Paul said some important things to the people in Ephesus. Look over the passage below. Wherever you see a blank, write in your own name. After you're finished read the passage to yourself, inserting your name in Paul's words. Think about what it means for your life and your relationships.

So then, let us put away false ways of being and talking, and let all of us speak the truth to everyone, for we are members of the same body. \_\_\_\_\_, be angry, but do not act in anger; \_\_\_\_\_, do not let the sun go down on your angry conflicts with others, and \_\_\_\_\_, do not make room for evil in your life. . . . Let no offensive talk pass your lips, \_\_\_\_\_; let your words help other people improve themselves, \_\_\_\_\_. Do good for those who hear you. . . . And \_\_\_\_\_, be kind to others, tenderhearted, forgiving others, as God in Christ has forgiven you. (Adapted from Ephesians 4:25–32)



# Active Listening

These eight reminders can help you be a good listener:

1. Get close enough to hear the person you are listening to.
2. Assume a posture that lets the person know that you are paying attention, that you care, and that you are ready to accept what he or she has to say.
3. Listen closely, right from the beginning.
4. Pay attention to the person's tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions.
5. Focus on what the person is saying. Wait to speak until the speaker specifically asks you a question.
6. Avoid thinking about what you want to say next or using the speaker's ideas as a way to take over the conversation.
7. If the person has a problem, help that person make his or her own decision. Avoid giving advice about what you would do. Help the person understand his or her situation, decide, and feel good about making a personal decision.
8. If the problem involves dangerous risks to the person's physical or emotional well-being, seek the help of a trusted adult.

## Try This

This week observe some of the conversations that happen among your friends and family. See how much active listening is going on. Make it a point to practice your active-listening skills with people you know.

Use these three techniques to become an active listener:

**1 Parroting**

After a person makes a statement, you can repeat what the person said. This shows the speaker that you are listening closely. You might begin by saying: "Okay, let me get this straight. You are worried that you will fail the math test tomorrow because . . ."

**2 Asking clarifying questions**

Ask questions that help the person tell you more. This also helps the speaker understand her or his own thoughts better. You might say, "If you flunk the test, can you make it up?" or "Wait a second, I hear you saying that you are worried you will fail tomorrow's math test, but I don't understand why you feel like you don't know your math."

**3 Restating**

After you have checked to see that you heard the message clearly (through parroting) and after you have helped yourself and the speaker understand better (by asking clarifying questions), you are ready to help the speaker come to her or his own conclusions. You can help by restating what the person has told you. Your restatement can be like a summary recording that plays back what you heard. You can say something like: "So you think you are going to fail tomorrow's math test because you didn't have enough time to study. You seem to have been doing okay every day in math. You don't want to go to the teacher and tell her about your problem because she might say that you are just making excuses. You also think that if you fail you might be able to ask her for makeup work. Is all that right, or did I miss something?"

When it is your turn to be the observer in your group, use the following checklist to rate the active-listening skills of the listener and the speaker:

Communication skill	Speaker	Listener
Looked at the other person		
Used the right facial expressions		
Sat comfortably near the other person		
Was in an open and welcoming posture		
Stopped and thought before speaking		
Spoke in the right tone of voice		
Mentioned specific details		
Expressed ideas		
Expressed feelings		
Spoke clearly		
I also observed		

# Who Needs Me?

Active listening is a gift you can give to others. It is also a gift you can receive from others.

Think about all the relationships in your life.

In the spaces below, write the names of those who need you and then tell how you can make their life a little better by listening well.

Person: \_\_\_\_\_

What might this person need to talk about?

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How can I be an active listener for this person?

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Person: \_\_\_\_\_

What might this person need to talk about?

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How can I be an active listener for this person?

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**B**ear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. . . .

Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all. (Galatians 6:2-10, NAB)

**Y**ou must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. (James 1:19)