

Teaching Guide for
Learning
to Communicate

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Contents

Introduction	7
<i>Session 1</i>	
Being with Others	16
<i>Session 2</i>	
Expressing Yourself	29
<i>Session 3</i>	
Listening Carefully	42
<i>Session 4</i>	
Responding Kindly	56
<i>Session 5</i>	
Resolving Conflicts	68
<i>Session 6</i>	
Moving Ahead	80



Introduction



THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

The Discovering Program consists of fourteen six-session courses for use with middle school or junior high students. *Learning to Communicate* invites students to deepen their relationships by developing the skills necessary to effectively be with others.

Young adolescents want desperately to relate well with their peers and with adults. The way in which they relate often serves as a barometer of their self-worth. When they feel that they are relating well and getting along with the people who matter to them, their self-image goes up. When their self-image goes up, their anxiety decreases, and their behavior is more apt to be appropriate.

Yet young adolescents also want to relate well for a host of other reasons. They may want to manage the stressful changes they are experiencing. They may want to adequately meet the real or imagined expectations of their peers—to look and perform a certain way, to turn up at the right places, to purchase currently popular items. Many of them also try to meet

the expectations of the media and of their parents and teachers. As if this were not enough, young people often feel that they are expected to exhibit a host of social skills that come with maturity.

Through this course the young people in your program can learn specific, concrete, and attainable communication skills. They can learn to effectively state what is in their heart and on their mind, to actively listen to others, to give and accept compliments and constructive criticism, and to work toward mature conflict resolution and reconciliation. This course introduces these new skills and invites the young people to apply them to the many personal relationships they experience.

Learning to Communicate is one of the most skills-based courses in the entire curriculum. It is intended for older junior high students. It will work best with eighth graders, or seventh graders who are a little more mature than average. Courses in the Discovering Program that provide a strong foundation for this one are *Understanding Myself* and *Becoming Friends*. This course can be offered at any time within the program year. However, consider offering it early in the school year because the activities and skills the students learn will help to break down barriers and build up a sense of group cohesiveness. Refer to the coordinator's manual for more information on curriculum design and the Discovering Program.

The course lends itself to a variety of formats. It has been designed for six 1-hour sessions spread over six to twelve weeks. However, sessions can be combined for longer, less frequent meetings, such as two 3-hour sessions. The course can also function well within a weekend or overnight retreat format.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. The optional approaches at the end of each session plan sometimes suggest adjustments for different-size groups. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

BACKGROUND

The Young Adolescent and This Course

Along with the onset of the emotional and physical changes associated with adolescence, the cognitive skill of abstract thinking makes its grand and baffling entrance during the middle school or early junior high years. The capacity for abstract thinking evolves over time and varies dramatically from one person to another.

This marvelous and necessary ability to understand concepts and ideas makes it possible for young adolescents to imagine the ideal parent, a peaceful world, or God's unconditional love. Abstract thinking enables them to reason, to explain, to make choices based on logic. The ability to abstract makes it possible for them to appreciate symbolism and understand double meanings, puns, wordplay, and jokes. This ability also makes it possible for

young adolescents to communicate more broadly and in more sophisticated ways. This bonding of thinking and speaking is what speech pathologists call the closing of the cognitive-linguistic gap. Young adolescents are able to verbalize a series of logical ideas—one right after another. Because they can imagine an abstraction, they can verbalize it.

This is an exciting new skill, and the use of it brings results and responses that surprise young people as well as those who work with them. Like everyone who acquires a new skill, young adolescents use this one just to be using it. They argue with adults for the sake of arguing. Other missteps also occur. The newfound cognitive and verbal ability can be aimed at cruelly embarrassing others. Young people may also use this new ability to turn every verbal exchange into a debate. For example, when parents want to discuss something, their adolescent child wants to debate it. During the ensuing debate-discussion, volume increases and the argument intensifies and becomes increasingly complex.

Another characteristic of young-adolescent communication is the expanding and sometimes novel use of words. Often words take on meanings for young people that escape everyone else. This novel use of language is frequently the basis of their humor. When young adolescents laugh, they many times laugh alone, for no other member of the human species can see the humor of the situations that so catch their fancy.

Although young people are theoretically able to communicate in more sophisticated ways, this does not necessarily happen. They may be frustrated because they cannot accurately name the new emotions they often experience and because they feel misunderstood by peers and adults alike. Young adolescents may want to leave childhood; however, they often do not possess the values, perceptions, manners, or words that seem to be part of adulthood. Few adults are patient enough to support the struggle of adolescents to clearly and confidently converse in ways that warrant mutual respect.

Clearly, young adolescents want and need to develop effective communication skills. As they acquire these skills, they will be able to do the following:

- make better friends
- be a better friend
- more clearly explain how they feel or think
- function better within their groups
- get along better with their teachers
- reduce conflicts with their parents or guardians

Studies of young adolescents repeatedly show that programs on learning to communicate with adults and talking with friends about things that are really important are of great interest to them. This course provides young people with such opportunities.

The difference between this course and one that might be offered in public schools or through community programs is its foundation, context, and message. The foundation of *Learning to Communicate* is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The context of the course is the Christian community. The fundamental message is Jesus' call to love others.

The Theology of This Course

Many verses in the Book of Proverbs praise the gifts of good communication, which fosters honesty, respect, sensitivity, care, and love. Persons who communicate well do so because they look outward to the other, keep the welfare of the other in mind, and take the other's concerns to heart. When young people learn the skills of good communication, they become active listeners, are encouraged to reach out, and are able to speak their heart. They also learn to reconcile broken relationships, to work toward conflict resolution, and to become peacemakers. In other words they embrace many of the qualities that distinguished the person of Jesus.

This course defines communication as the process of *being with* another. Therefore, the better people communicate, the better they are able to be with another person. And the better they are able to be with another, the better they are able to experience God through the following:

- the gift of friendship
- the strength of self-disclosure
- the comfort of a listening ear
- the affirmation of a compliment
- the gentle correction of constructive criticism
- the healing of reconciliation and conflict resolution
- the satisfaction of adult-level conversation

Communication skills open young adolescents to hear others and to hear God's voice within the experiences of empathy and understanding and within their own prayer life.

A theology of the Incarnation undergirds this course. Incarnational theology recognizes that God lives in each of us. Don Kimball, in his book *A Spirituality of Relationships*, states:

Our search for happiness calls us to relationships. . . .
 The Gospel calls us to relationships. . . .
 Spirituality calls us to relationships. . . .
 Personal renewal calls us to relationships. . . .

Spiritual growth is a journey through relationships. We may remain in some relationships longer than others, but all are opportunities to love and be loved. All are events that can reveal God. (Pp. 18–23)

To the extent that we are able to teach young people to be with one another—to that extent they will be able to experience God through the many gifts they receive within their relationships with others.

This Course and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

All Discovering courses rely on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a primary resource and a guide to theological accuracy. The *Catechism* can also serve as a valuable source of both information and inspiration for the teacher. We encourage you to review and reflect on certain sections of the *Catechism* as you prepare to teach.

This course focuses on learning to *be* with others in relationship. The *Catechism* discusses who we are as persons in part 3, “Life in Christ.” Specifically, numbers 1700 to 1706 discuss the dignity of the human person and the need to grow spiritually and emotionally as we grow physically. Numbers 1878 to 1883 deal with the person and society and the notion that we develop our potential by interacting with others. The need for reconciliation with others is discussed in number 1459 as part of the section on the sacrament of penance. The section on virtues, numbers 1803 to 1845, contains much information that may come up for discussion as you teach this course.

Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars and quotes related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet’s attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

Student Booklet Sidebars

The student booklet includes a number of quotes, recommendations, and summary statements that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally

not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students' interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Learning to Communicate* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

Prayer Experiences

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during each session. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the room attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Prayer opportunities are used in each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

Teaching Strategies

Each session of *Learning to Communicate* is designed to help young people identify, clarify, and practice communication skills. Throughout the six sessions, the young people hear, see, apply, and reflect on essential skills for building and maintaining relationships.

Whenever possible emphasize the importance of communication between an individual and a group as well as communication between individuals. Frequently young people equate group membership with individual identity. Also, young people, as individuals, are called upon to communicate with peer groups as well as with individual peers and adults. Help the students develop ease and facility with each form of communication. Keep in mind that all communication—person to person, person to group, and group to group—is personal communication and that care and respect are required in all cases.

The principles of active learning, which are foundational to the Discovering Program, are employed throughout the course. All the sessions include large- and small-group activities, discussion, presentation, and prayer. Some include things like role-plays and community-building exercises. In addition,

the participants have many opportunities to reflect privately on how they can apply each communication skill to their life. All these approaches can help the students to become more aware of the need to communicate more effectively with others and to become responsible for making it happen.

Create a welcoming and comfortable environment for the group by making the room in which you meet less formal than the typical classroom with rows of desks. At the same time, keep the environment conducive to learning. For example, you might want to arrange chairs in a circle. When setting up small-group activities, try to allow enough space between groups so that they do not disturb one another. Also, when asking the students to take time out for private reflection, try to provide enough space so that they can find a truly private place they can claim as their own. Proximity is often distracting or intimidating.

Before teaching each session, read the plan and become comfortable with the learning strategies. Note the materials and preparation required. If your group is scheduled to devote more than an hour to any session, or if your teaching preference or the learning style of the students requires changes in the step procedures, consult the optional exercises suggested at the end of the session plan.

Special Considerations

Consider incorporating the following options as standard practices in this course.

High school students as team members. Invite senior high students to be part of the leadership team and to help you with this course. The young people in your program can benefit greatly from the participation of high school students as models and teachers. As young people form their attitudes and values, they often look to and imitate senior high school students.

Besides helping to lead small-group activities and discussions, the high school students can demonstrate many activities within the session plans, do role-plays, and share their own experiences of the benefits of using good communication skills.

If you plan to include high school students, carefully recruit and prepare them. Be sure that they represent various groups in your parish—gender groups, ethnic groups, athletes, musicians, all the high schools attended by students in your parish, and so forth. Also be sure that your recruits feel comfortable working with junior high students.

Videotaping. Consider videotaping students as they practice the communication skills covered in each session. During each session select students to demonstrate a skill they have learned. Record these demonstrations and replay them for evaluation. If you use this option, consider recruiting a high school student or other volunteer to set up and conduct the video sessions.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Learning to Communicate*

Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students recognize that effective communication makes possible the enriching relationships that God intends for all people
- that they understand the basic principles of effective communication
- that they identify their own need to communicate effectively
- that they identify personal relationships that would benefit from the application of newly developed skills

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Learning to Communicate* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

Session 1: "Being with Others"

The students will do the following:

- identify their communication patterns
- explore the need for effective communication
- discuss various methods of communication
- learn guidelines for good communication

Session 2: "Expressing Yourself"

The students will do the following:

- recognize and practice nonverbal and verbal self-disclosure skills
- identify something they individually want to express to someone

Session 3: "Listening Carefully"

The students will do the following:

- learn skills for active listening
- practice active-listening skills
- identify someone in their life who needs them as a listener

Session 4: "Responding Kindly"

The students will do the following:

- develop the skill of giving and receiving compliments
- develop the skill of giving and receiving constructive criticism

Session 5: "Resolving Conflicts"

The students will do the following:

- identify the benefits of conflict resolution
- learn the steps of conflict resolution
- use prayer as a way to focus on a specific situation in their life that calls for reconciliation

Session 6: "Moving Ahead"

The students will do the following:

- identify effective and less effective levels of communication
- analyze communication between themselves and adults
- practice communicating maturely
- prayerfully consider their need to effectively be with others in their life



SESSION
1

Being with Others



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

Objectives

The students will do the following:

- identify their communication patterns
- explore the need for effective communication
- discuss various methods of communication
- learn guidelines for good communication

Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 4 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. the student booklet activity “Welcome!” and an introduction (5 minutes)
- B. the student booklet activity “My Style” (15 minutes)
- C. a group exercise on forms of communication (10 minutes)
- D. a discussion on giving advice (15 minutes)
- E. the student booklet activity “Helping My Relationships Grow” (10 minutes)
- F. a closing prayer (5 minutes)

BACKGROUND

Perhaps now more than ever in their life, young adolescents' sense of well-being depends on effective communication with their peers and adults, now. This session attempts to help junior high students assess their own ways of communicating, identify different ways in which people communicate, and recognize their own need to communicate clearly.

This session introduces communication as a skill that can be mastered and shows the students how effective communication can enrich and improve their relationships. The session responds directly to the students' negative and positive communication experiences, targets individual communication goals, and sets the tone and the rationale for the ensuing sessions.

An initial communication self-assessment helps the students identify their present skills in greeting others, initiating conversations, accepting compliments, confronting others, giving and interpreting nonverbal messages, expressing appreciation, communicating about themselves, listening actively, and communicating with adults. This self-assessment serves four purposes:

- It helps the students identify how they usually communicate.
- It helps them see the need for better communication.
- It prepares them to recognize that not all their peers communicate in the same ways.
- It provides a starting point against which the students can measure their growth during this course.

The activity that follows the self-assessment consists of situations that involve communicating feelings or wishes. This activity helps the students see that messages are communicated in many ways and that messages can easily be miscommunicated. This is followed by an activity in which the students work together to give a fictional newcomer to their school advice about meeting people and communicating with them.

The reflection exercise near the end of the session enables the students to name what they learned in the session and target a particular relationship that needs improved communication. The students are asked to think of a relationship with a single person, or with a group, such as their family. (Keep in mind that young people need help recalling that their personal relationships involve communication with groups of people as well as with individuals.) This step provides the students with a concrete goal to work on as the program progresses. It also becomes the basis of the closing prayer.

During this session use every opportunity to talk about the benefits of good communication. Emphasize that God wants everyone to enjoy and grow in their relationships. Let the students know that God's love is present in the love that comes from good friendships. God is present when people welcome and accept one another. Specifically, this means that God is present when someone listens well to problems, when someone gives clear and helpful advice, when someone shows appreciation, and even when someone finds a way to kindly and clearly offer constructive criticism.

PREPARATION

Materials Needed

- student booklets, one for each student
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- pens or pencils
- a copy of resource 1–A, “How Do You Know If . . . ,” cut apart as scored
- a scissors
- a basket or other container
- newsprint
- masking tape
- markers, one for each student
- a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music (optional)
- a Bible; a pillow or a Bible stand; a table and a cloth; a cross or a statue; a live plant, a picture, or a flower; and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)
- pieces of paper (about 2-by-2 inches), one for each student

Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you complete them:

- For step C.* List questions on newsprint as directed in step C.
- For step C.* Make up a container of questions as instructed in step C.
- For step D.* Across the top of a sheet of newsprint, write the words, “We agree that to be a good communicator you have to”
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

Teacher Prayer

Take a few moments before the session begins for quiet prayer. Calm your thoughts, deepen your breathing, and be silent in the presence of God. When you are ready, read the following scriptural passage:

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my mind
always find favor with you,
O God, my rock and my redeemer.

(Adapted from Ps. 19:14)

Prayerfully consider the following questions:

- What are your strengths as a communicator?
- What are the challenges you face as a communicator?
- What one message do you want the young people in your group to take to heart in this session?

Close with the following short prayer:

Loving God, silent God, be with me this day as I prepare to teach the young people you have placed in my care. Let my words be your words. Let my hands be your hands. Amen.

PROCEDURE

A. Booklet Activity: “Welcome!” and Introduction (5 minutes)



Booklet page 1

1. Open this initial session by using the following technique: Welcome the students twice, each time communicating a different message with your body language and manner of speaking. The first time greet the group with a smile and an enthusiastic tone of voice. Tell them how glad you are that they are there, and assure them that they will enjoy the course on communication and will learn to handle their relationships more positively. Then leave the room or turn and face away from the the students.

After a few seconds, enter the room again or turn around and face the students. Greet them again using approximately the same words, but do it without enthusiasm and without a smile. You might also mumble the words and look out a window or down at the floor.

2. After welcoming the students in these two ways, ask them what message you sent them in the first greeting. Then ask what message you sent them in the second greeting. Affirm and restate their responses.

Point out that from this first greeting in this session to the last activity in the final session of this course, communication will be happening. The things being communicated may be ideas, feelings, facts, directions, or a number of other possibilities. Tell the students that communication refers to the process of being with and relating to other people. Note that this course will help them improve their ability to be with others and enrich their relationships.

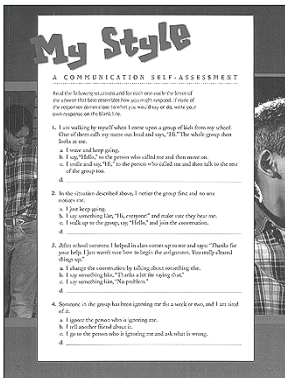
If the students do not know you, briefly introduce yourself by telling them your name and something about your family and your interests. If you are working as part of a team, ask the other team members to do the same. Express a sincere welcome to the young people and let them know that you are indeed happy to have them in the group.

3. Present in your own words the following rationale for taking this course on communication:

- ▶ Being in relationship with others is the best part of living, and communicating well helps people grow in their friendships and other relationships.
- ▶ Most people—no matter what age they are—want to know how to communicate better. Most people admit that they need some help to accurately convey what is on their mind and in their heart. They know as well that they need to be able to understand when others try to share such information with them.

- Communicating well is a skill. Like any skill—skating, using a computer, swimming, playing a musical instrument, dancing—people have to practice it in order to do it well.

4. Distribute the student booklets, blank self-adhesive labels, and pens or pencils. Tell the students to write their name on the label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Direct them to “Welcome!” on page 1 and read aloud the paragraphs that introduce the course. Express your confidence in the students’ ability to learn about and use new communication skills. Tell them that during this course they will frequently practice these new skills. Assure them the course will be fun as well as helpful.



Booklet page 2

B. Booklet Activity: “My Style” (15 minutes)

1. Tell the students to turn to the self-assessment activity titled “My Style” on pages 2 to 3 of their booklet. Go over the directions with them, emphasizing that if none of the options come close to what they would do, they should write on the blank line a sentence describing how they would respond. Stress that they should do the activity on their own. Permit them to move to a place in the room where they can be alone if they think they will be distracted by someone else. Allow 3 or 4 minutes for the students to complete the assessment.

2. Gather everyone together for discussion. Read the first situation aloud and ask the students to respond to the following questions:

- Which response seems to be the best way to handle the situation? Why?
- Why might the other responses present a problem?

Follow the same process for each of the scenarios. Keep the discussion moving briskly. Time does not allow for extended conversation on any one scenario. The intent here is to give the students an initial awareness of their own communication style.

3. Close the activity by explaining that the self-assessment helps the students get a clear picture of their present style of communicating. Summarize that messages are communicated in many ways, and unless they are communicated well, misunderstanding results. In your own words, make the following points. Because young adolescents still vacillate between abstract and concrete thinking, try to be as simple and clear as you can be.

- All people need to communicate.
- Communicating well helps to enrich and deepen relationships and brings the rewards and satisfaction that come with truly being with others.
- Even in the best of circumstances, people can unconsciously communicate the wrong message or pick up an unintended message.
- When people communicate poorly, they send unclear messages or misinterpret messages. Poor communication brings misunderstanding and unnecessary pain.

C. Group Exercise: How Do You Know If . . . (10 minutes)

Before the session. List the following questions on newsprint. Post the newsprint, but cover it until it is needed.

- What does that person say that directly sends the message?
- What does that person say that might indirectly send the message?
- What does that person do, or how does the person act?
- What words or actions do people sometimes use that could be misleading?

Make one copy of resource 1–A, “How Do You Know If . . .,” and cut it apart as scored. Choose as many question slips as you have students. Fold the papers and put them in a basket or another container.

1. Gather the participants in a circle. Display the newsprint list of questions that you created before the session and the basket with the folded pieces of paper. Explain that each paper includes a question about a situation in which someone is communicating a message. The question begins with the words “How do you know if . . .,” and includes a situation like the following:

- ▶ someone is angry with you
- ▶ someone wants to be your friend

Tell the students that you will pass around the basket. Each person is to choose one piece of paper and think about the questions listed on the newsprint.

You may want to demonstrate one of the situations to model the responses you are looking for. For example, to demonstrate how you know if someone is angry with you, you might say the following things:

- ▶ I know a person is angry with me if he or she comes right out and says directly to me, “I’m angry” or “I’m mad at you.”
- ▶ A person might express anger in an indirect way by saying something like, “How could you do something like that!”
- ▶ I know someone is probably angry with me if that person slams the door when he or she walks out of the room after talking with me.
- ▶ An unclear way a person might express anger with me is to avoid me or ignore me.

2. Pass the basket and let each student choose a folded piece of paper. Tell the young people that they will have 1 minute to decide how someone would communicate the message on their paper. Be sure to encourage them to use obvious and not-so-obvious words and phrases. Their response should be kept to under 30 seconds. Do not allow more than 1 minute for preparation. Spontaneity can be an asset in presenting the responses.

3. Ask for volunteers to present their responses. If you have a small group, invite everyone to contribute to the discussion. You might choose the order randomly by reading the situations presented in resource 1–A and asking the person who has each situation to share his or her response with the group.

4. Conclude the activity by thanking the students for their participation and making the following comments in your own words:

- ▶ People send messages using a variety of methods. If a message is clear, a relationship can grow in healthy ways. This is true of both positive messages, such as “I want to be your friend,” and negative ones, such as “I am angry with you.” If a message is not clear, it may be perceived by the recipient in the wrong way, causing misunderstanding and conflict.

Collect the pieces of paper and dispose of them. While doing so tell the students that in the next activity, they will have a chance to summarize what they have learned about good communication.

D. Discussion: I Need Advice (15 minutes)

1. Point out that the students have already had a lot of experience communicating with people. Tell them that they will now have a chance to draw on this experience to make a list of ways to be a good communicator.

Form small groups of three or four students and distribute a sheet of newsprint to each group and a marker to each student. Direct someone in each group to divide the newsprint into four equal sections by drawing a line down the center of the paper and another line across the center.

2. Read the following letter to the group:

- ▶ Hi, everyone. My family is moving soon, and I will be transferring to your school. I’m kind of shy, and I don’t have a lot of friends. I want to get started on the right foot when I move, but I could really use your help. I’m not very good at meeting people or communicating with most people. What are some good ways to meet people and make friends?

3. Tell the students to sit in a circle around their group’s newsprint and use the section closest to them. They are to work alone for 3 minutes to make a list of suggestions for the person who wrote the letter. You may want to give suggestions such as the following:

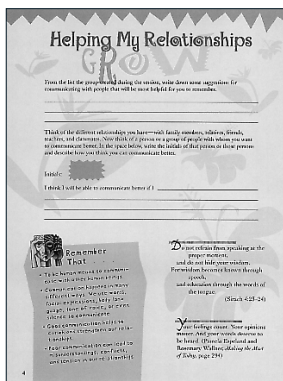
- ▶ Look at people when you are talking to them.
- ▶ Listen to others as much as you talk to them.
- ▶ Smile often.

While they are working, post the newsprint sheet that you created before the session. Circulate among the small groups and help anyone who seems to be having difficulty.

4. After 3 minutes direct the participants to read their list to their entire small group. When everyone in a group has read their list, they should circle the suggestions that appear on more than one list.

Ask someone from each small group to read aloud to the large group the items that appeared on more than one list. Write these items on the newsprint titled “We agree that to be a good communicator you have to . . .” After all the small groups have shared their common ideas, point out the items that were expressed by more than one small group.

Note: Save the newsprint list of combined ideas for use in step E and in session 2.



Booklet page 4

E. Booklet Activity: “Helping My Relationships Grow” (10 minutes)

1. Thank the students for their efforts and cooperation during this opening session. Summarize the main lessons of this session by making the following points in your own words:

- ▶ To be human means to communicate with other human beings.
- ▶ Communication happens in many different ways. Words are the primary way we communicate with others, but we also communicate using facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, or even silence.
- ▶ Good communication helps to enrich and deepen understanding and to strengthen relationships.
- ▶ Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and tension in a relationship.

2. Make sure the newsprint list created in step D is visible to everyone. Ask the students to turn to “Helping My Relationships Grow” on page 4 of their booklet. Tell them that they will now have a chance to apply everything that they learned today to their own life. Explain the two tasks for this reflection time outlined below, using your own words. You may also want to answer any questions they have.

- ▶ In the first section of the booklet exercise, look at the list that the group created and pick out some suggestions that will be particularly helpful for you. Write these suggestions in your booklet to serve as a reminder when you are having trouble communicating with others.
- ▶ Think about a person or group of people in your life with whom you would like to communicate better. In the second section, write the initials of the person or people and note some ideas that might help you communicate with the person or persons better.

Emphasize that the exercise is to be done quietly and independently. If you wish, play an appropriate song or reflective music while they write.

F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Before the closing prayer. While the students are working on the booklet activity in step E, set up an enthroned Bible in a prayer space in the middle of the meeting area. For this session also include small blank pieces of paper and a basket.

1. If you have been playing reflective music while the young people work, continue the music through the prayer time. Gather the students around the enthroned Bible. Tell them to bring along their booklet and the pen or pencil they have been using. Collect the booklets if you plan on keeping them until the next session. Give each person a small blank piece of paper.

2. Thank the students for their participation in the first session of *Learning to Communicate*. Tell them that they will have a chance to explore many aspects of communication throughout the course. Explain that the Bible is an important form of communication. It is a primary source of communication between God and us and provides some helpful insights into communicating with other people.

Read Sir. 4:23–25,29. Explain that the author of this passage tells us that we must not be afraid to communicate with other people, but we must always speak and act on the truth.

3. Invite the students to write on their piece of paper the name or initials of the person or persons whom they wrote about during their reflection time. When everyone has finished, tell the young people to fold their paper. Pass the basket from the prayer space around the group and direct the students to put their folded paper in it. After everyone has done so, return the basket to the prayer space.

4. Conclude the session by offering a spontaneous prayer that asks for God's help in communicating better. Or simply read the following prayer:

► God, our creator, we thank you for the people you have placed in our life. You know how much we love them and need them. Help each of us learn how to better communicate and be with the person or persons we have named. Help us to understand what they are saying to us by their words and actions. Bless us with your spirit. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our brother and friend. Amen.

Collect the booklets as the students leave.

OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

For step A. If you are leading this session with a team of high school students or other adults, have the leaders enter the room one at a time, each saying the same thing to the students but in a different mood. Two people should enter as described in step A—one speaking in an authentic and welcoming manner and the other seeming to be distant or disconnected. Another person might convey boredom, another anger, and so forth. If you have only one other leader, take turns entering and leaving, each time conveying a different mood.

After the series of entrances, ask the young people what message each person conveyed. Affirm and restate their answers.

For step B. If the students know one another well and seem comfortable sharing their answers, go through each response in the self-assessment and ask for a show of hands. From among those who filled in the blank lines, ask for volunteers to share their own response.

For step B. If the participants have a high need for physical activity, designate each corner of the room as a, b, c, or d. After each scenario tell the participants to move to the corner of the room that represents their response. Ask for volunteers in the “d” corner who wrote their own response to share it with the rest of the students.

This option will take longer, so be sure to make the necessary adjustments in another part of the session. Or simply choose a few scenarios to process in this manner so that you can finish within the allotted time.

For step C. If your group needs more physical activity, tell the students to move one at a time to the middle of the group to share their response. After doing so they should return to their place in the circle.

For step D. If you have a small group, you might work with the whole group to brainstorm a list of solutions to the new student’s problem.

For step D. Instead of having the young people work in small groups, have each student write a letter to the new student, with suggestions for meeting and communicating with others.

For step D. To extend step D, ask individuals to share items on their list that are not on the common list. Write these items on a sheet of newsprint labeled “Other great ideas.”