



Respectful Futures

Shaping Healthy Relationships

Module 3

Building Better Relationships through Better Communication

Abstract

The goal of Module 3 is to help students understand that communication is more than just talking, and listening is more than just waiting for your turn to talk.

Respectful communication is a commitment to:

- Representing yourself well (Module 1: paying attention to yourself, knowing your own thoughts, using the **Me+You+Us** Model)
- Listening deeply to the other person to understand what is important for them in this moment (Module 1: paying attention to the other, getting curious about them, using the **Me+You+Us** Model)
- Being willing to negotiate a solution that works for both people (Module 1: paying attention to the relationship, deciding collaboratively what will support the relationship, using the **Me+You+Us** Model)

In Module 3 students also refer back to Module 2 by looking at communication from the perspective of the ABCDE Model and remembering that in all situations, we have personal power and choices about how we respond. The decision about how to respond will have an effect on the outcome of the situation.

Big Idea

Communication is at the core of building strong relationships, and listening is at the core of communication.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Examine elements of respectful communication, both verbal and non-verbal
- Understand that respectful communication requires skills that we can develop throughout our lives
- Understand that communication takes many forms, including verbal, non-verbal, and listening
- Understand that the majority of communication is non-verbal and that non-verbal communication (especially written communication on social media) can be easily misinterpreted
- Develop skill in “reading” and conveying non-verbal communication
- Understand and develop skill in active listening
- Use the **Me+You+Us** Model effectively to improve communication skills

Learning Activities and Resources

1. Brainstorm and Scribe Exercise: Feeling That You Have Been Heard
2. Communication Charades
3. Obstacles to Effective Listening
4. Useful Listening Habits
5. Useful Speaking Habits
6. Taking Personal Responsibility

For Facilitators

Communicating Well

The goal of effective communication is twofold. We want to understand the other person's message and convey our message clearly. This is also one of the ways we can be **green** in our relationships with others.

Although we spend so much of our time communicating, often we don't do it very effectively. This is because many of us believe that hearing is the same as listening and speaking is the same as communicating. The good news is that we can learn the skills necessary to communicate well, and understand what things get in the way. It feels good to be listened to and understood by someone else, even if they don't agree with you. When people feel heard, they also feel valued and cared for. One of the best things you can do to improve any relationship is to learn how to communicate well.

We all have habitual ways of doing things: some are good habits, like brushing your teeth every day; some are not good habits, like putting things off until the last minute. One dictionary describes habits this way: "An action or pattern of behaviour that is repeated so often that it becomes typical of somebody although the person may not be aware of it." As the poet Maya Angelou has said, "When people know better, they do better."

Feedback as Communication

Feedback is a specific form of communication that is deliberate and considerate of the recipient. Often when someone says, "Can I give you some feedback," we brace ourselves for something negative. Feedback is an investment in the relationship. It is meant to be a way of letting the other person know the impact their behaviour has on us, or asking about the impact of our behaviour on them. Feedback is thoughtful

and is meant to help communication. Criticism is often thoughtless and mean, and is meant to hurt the other person.

For example, imagine you are having lunch with someone you care about and they spend most of the time texting with a friend. Finally, they stop, but they have no idea about the impact their behaviour has had on you. You could say something sarcastic (always critical and indirect!) like, “Wow, you're a lot of fun to be with.” Or you could try this: “May I offer you some feedback? The reason I wanted to have lunch with you is because I like spending time together. I feel unimportant when you spend that much time talking with someone else while we’re having lunch.” Now, your friend knows more about you because you have been deliberate and considerate in letting them know the impact of their behaviour on you.

Feedback will also allow you to learn more about them by how they either react or respond. They might apologize and offer an explanation, or they might think you are being unreasonable. Either way, you will have more information about the strength of the relationship.

Let's get started

The following facilitation notes provide context and strategies that instructors can rely on during their delivery of the resources. PowerPoints have been developed and a small number of short videos have been selected to correspond with the module's materials. Those are located on the Respectful Futures site.

Facilitation Notes

Brainstorm and Scribe Exercise: Feeling That You Have Been Heard

This simple brainstorming exercise is a good way to open up discussion about communication.

Brainstorming

Invite the students to brainstorm using the following questions as a guide:

1. How can you tell that you are being listened to?
2. How do you know when you are not being listened to?

Debrief

As you debrief the ideas generated, look for openings to explore the notions of verbal and non-verbal communication. Listen also for ways to open discussion about what active or respectful listening looks and feels like. Encourage some thought about how taking the approach of I count, You count (being **Green**) can improve the relationship.

There are three forms of communication:

- Verbal: What we say and how we say it; our words, tone of voice
- Non-verbal: Communication without words; facial expressions, body language
- Effective listening: Indicates our level of interest in the other person and what they are saying

Whether we are speaking or not, we are always communicating something. Our facial expressions and body language are constantly sending messages that others are aware of, even if it is not a conscious awareness. It is estimated that we gather 80% of our information from non-verbal body language that helps to convey feeling, context, and intention. Without this very important aspect, communications are easily misinterpreted. When our verbal and non-verbal communications are incongruent, the person who is receiving the communication can get confused.

Culminating Questions

1. How do the components of communication relate to the Me+You+Us Model?
2. How can paying attention to the other person help us communicate more effectively?

Communication Charades

Exercise 1

1. Use the emotion cards provided in this module, beginning with the most straightforward emotions. Ask a student to act out the emotion, and have the other students guess what it is. Move to the more complex or difficult emotions.
2. Debrief by eliciting the difficulties of “reading” exact emotions through body language alone.

Exercise 2

1. Have your collection of emotion cards at hand. Divide them into two piles, and put them in increasing order of difficulty of portrayal (e.g., angry versus uncertain).
2. Have the class form two groups, forming two lines facing each other about two metres apart.
3. Show a card to one group. Have the entire group demonstrate the emotion simultaneously without speaking or planning together.
4. Have the other group guess the emotion.
5. Repeat the exercise with the other group.
6. Continue by alternating between groups.
7. Encourage groups to do a small skit to act out more challenging emotions (e.g., jealous).
8. Debrief by eliciting the differences among students who portrayed the same emotion differently.

Exercise 3

Conduct a small role-play, choosing a scenario that is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the class. These could include:

- A parent telling a child that they are paying attention to the child when the parent is texting at full speed
- A teen slumped in a chair and staring off into space but telling his teacher he is paying attention
- A person telling her friend that she is concerned that the friend has been ill but immediately changing the subject to her own issues

Culminating Debrief

Here are some ideas for the final debrief of these exercises:

- Thinking back on the exercises, how would you determine what a person really thinks or means? Would you rely on words or non-verbal cues? Why do you think so?
- It may be that non-verbal messages can be easily misinterpreted by the other person. How can we ensure that we do not misinterpret non-verbal messages? What should we do?
- When verbal and non-verbal messages appear contradictory, how can you ensure that you've understood the other person correctly? What would you do?
- People express their emotions differently. How might this complicate your ability to understand another person?
- When you can't see or hear the other person, you are missing up to 80% of the information. How does this influence your ability to understand another person through texts or other electronic apps and media?

Obstacles to Effective Listening and Useful Listening Habits

1. Distribute the page on Obstacles to Effective Listening and go through it with the group.
2. Ask students if they have noticed these behaviours in others.
3. Ask them to describe how it feels to interact with someone who does not really listen to what you are saying.
4. Facilitate a discussion on the following question: *When you are listening to someone else, what can you do to ensure that the person feels "listened to"?*
5. Distribute the pages on Useful Listening/Speaking Habits.

Taking Personal Responsibility

Understanding how to take personal responsibility in communicating with others is critical to building strong and respectful relationships.

1. Provide students with the handouts. Have them complete the worksheet on changing "You" statements to "I" statements.
2. Reiterate that not all "You" statements are harmful and that being able to recognize the harmful ones is critical.

Passive/Aggressive/Assertive Communication

1. Using the graphic as a template, ask students to give their own examples of statements that illustrate the four types of communication.
2. As you collect examples, ask students to explain how the example meets the criteria implicit in the Me+You+Us Model. Look for understanding especially of the passive-aggressive model, which is the most complex.

Replay/Assessment

Here are a few ideas for wrapping up this session. Feel free to choose from among them, depending upon the flow of the class and/or students' preferences.

- Have students work individually or in small groups to design and make a poster that pulls all of the concepts in this module together.
- Ask students to write on the following:
 - What are two or three things you learned today? Why is this learning important to you?
 - What are you prepared to use in your communications with others and why?
 - What do you need more information about? Do some research to provide further information that answers your questions.
 - How does the Me+You+Us Model “fit” with the characteristics of respectful communication? Does it seem Green to you?
 - How does the concept of self-talk (either positive or negative) support a positive communication style?
 - How does assertive behaviour differ from aggressive behaviour? How can assertive communication improve your relationships? How do aggressive, passive, or passive-aggressive behaviour harm communication/relationships? Where do you draw the line between assertive and aggressive communication?

In Conclusion

This module has focused on healthy communication, specifically how well we listen and how carefully we respond. Understanding that we do have control over how we respond is empowering and liberating. Understanding how our responses impact what happens next is illuminating. By turning passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive communication into assertive communication, we can influence our relationships in a positive way.

The next module will focus on understanding and managing anger. As anger can block us from thinking clearly and cause us to react rather than respond, learning to control our angry impulses can certainly improve our relationships.

The following pages are the handouts and resources to be provided to learners.

Communication Charades

See following pages.

Anger

Fear

Confusion

Joy

Rejection

Loneliness

Helplessness

Guilt

Stress

Sadness

Insecurity

Betrayal

Judged

Bitterness

Frustration

Anxiety

Abandonment

Ignored

Inadequacy

Hopelessness

Resentment

Happiness

Vulnerability

Grief

Challenged

Tiredness

Jealousy

Shame

Obstacles to Effective Listening

While everyone is capable of listening well, it is more difficult to do this when we are stressed or preoccupied. It takes time and effort to listen well, especially when it is challenging or inconvenient. There are many obstacles to effective listening (listed below), but we can overcome them by being aware that we are exhibiting these tendencies and then actively working to change our behaviour.

- Being judgmental: Judging too quickly and critically
- Selective hearing: Hearing only what we want to hear
- Interrupting to make your point before the other person has made theirs
- Making assumptions: Believing you already know what someone else is thinking
- Blaming: Holding the other person responsible for all that is going wrong
- Multitasking: Paying attention to something other than the person talking to you (for example, your phone or the TV). People do not feel heard when the other person is doing something else while they are talking.
- Mental interruptions: Planning/deciding what you are going to say while the other person is still talking
- Debating: Turning every point into an argument
- “Scorekeeping”: Mentally keeping score of every “wrong” or hurtful thing the other person says, with the intent of getting even later

Useful Listening Habits

Here are some helpful behaviours that will improve your listening skills and allow you to truly hear what another person is telling you.

- **Attend:** Pay attention to the other person. Effective listening is a skill that takes effort, energy, and practice.
- **Attune:** Stay connected to the other person. Be kind.
- **Be curious:** Your job is to try to understand them and their world.
- **Be empathetic:** Try to understand the whole message, not just the words but also the feelings. Listen to the story and the storyteller.
- **Avoid rehearsing your response** while the other person is still speaking
- **Check in with the speaker** from time to time to make sure you are not misinterpreting their message
- **Interrupt respectfully** for clarification only or to gather more information
- **Be aware of your filters or obstacles** to effective listening
- **Ensure that your own body language** is inviting and open to the other person.

Use **SO L E R**:

- **Square:** Face the other person squarely
- **Open:** Keep an open posture
- **Lean:** Lean slightly forward to show that you are paying attention
- **Eye contact:** Making eye contact will help you notice any non-verbal cues. There may be exceptions to making eye contact; for example, certain cultures or individuals may find it more respectful not to look directly into another person's eyes.
- **Relax and breathe:** Keeping your body relaxed will help you keep your mind more relaxed.

Useful Speaking Habits

- Speak with others in the same manner in which you would like to be spoken to
- Be clear, and talk about one thing at a time
- Show respect for the other person's feelings, dignity, values, and beliefs whether you agree or not
- Share the speaking time fairly – a conversation has two or more sides
- Check with the listener to make sure you are expressing yourself clearly
- Use "I" statements. Be responsible for your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Express your opinions or observations in a respectful manner.

Taking Personal Responsibility

Helpful “I” Statements

When we communicate in situations where there is no conflict or disagreement, we can often communicate freely. However, when we are in conflict or disagree with another person, or when feelings are hurt and tempers are running high, how we communicate can have a profound effect on the outcome of a situation. “I” statements help others understand what we are thinking and feeling, and what we might need or want, in a way that does not blame, shame, or judge other people. “I” statements are a way to have others understand us better.

The first step is to be clear about your own feelings and what you want to communicate. Sometimes the most helpful thing is to slow down and pay attention to what it is you want to communicate. “I” statements are born out of holding a “Me” awareness; they are about paying attention to yourself and communicating honestly and respectfully.

When we are in conflict or feeling hurt or angry, we may want to find someone else to blame for what we are feeling. We may make assumptions about the other person’s intentions. This can lead to “You” statements; for example, “You make me angry.” In this context, “You” statements:

- Tell people what to do and make judgements
- Try to make other people responsible for your thoughts and or feelings
- Attempt to manipulate people using guilt, shame, blame, or defensiveness
- Are not self-responsible language

It is better to use “I” statements because they:

- Communicate how you think and feel, and what you might need and want
- Communicate – without blaming or shaming – how other people’s behaviour affects you
- Are responsible and empowering language
- Show respect for yourself and others

Examples of rephrasing “You” statements to more helpful “I” statements:

“You make me so angry! You are so lazy! Look at the mess you made! You should clean it up!”



“I feel frustrated when the kitchen is so messy. I would appreciate the peanut butter going back in the fridge and the bread bag tied up and back in the cupboard.”

“You never listen to me. You don’t care what I want. We always do what you want to do and never what I want to do.”



“I want you to listen to me. I’d really like to see that movie I’ve been talking about on Saturday night with you.”

Not every statement that begins with “you” is unhealthy or blaming; for example, “You are caring and respectful.” Not every statement that begins with “I” is helpful; for example, “I hate your guts!”

“I” Statements Exercise

Turn these “You” Statements into “I” Statements:

You never listen to me!

You never let me do what I want!

You’re so mean! You won’t let me have anything I want.

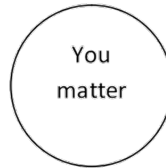
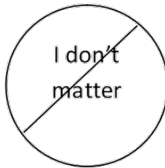
You always stick up for everyone but me!

You really make me mad when you yell at me!

You always blame me when things go wrong!

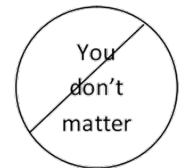
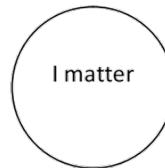
Passive/Aggressive/Assertive Communication

PASSIVE BEHAVIOUR



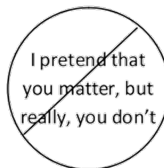
I don't care ... whatever you want is fine for me.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR



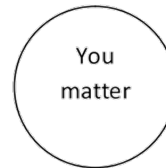
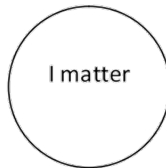
I don't care ... it's my turn, and I'm taking it.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR



Oh sure ... we can do that sometime (as if...).

ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR



What I need and want is as important as what you need and want.

ME+YOU+US

