



# Teaching Resources *for* Youth Educators

**T***his manual is a part of the Building Bridges: Reaching People Through Communication program and contains games, activities, worksheets and other learning resources designed to be used in a variety of teaching contexts and group settings. These materials are intended for youth of all ages as well as the adults who work with them.*

## **Communication as a Primary Life Skill**

Communication can be defined as the exchange of thoughts, information or messages between individuals, as well as the sending and receiving of information using speech, writing and gestures. Messages must be sent and received for communication to take place. Some examples of communication life skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, giving feedback and observing. (Hendricks, 1996) The resources in this manual focus on developing these skills by teaching people what's involved in getting along with others, sharing thoughts and concerns, working cooperatively, building strong friendships and resolving conflicts. Also included are resources that focus on public speaking skills.

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# Introduction *and* Rationale

**B**uilding Bridges—Reaching People Through Communication is a collection of curriculum materials and instructional resources for teaching communication skills to youth, parents, and adults who work with youth. The following assumptions about human communication helped guide the development of Building Bridges:

1. It is reasonable to assume that there is a direct link between the quality of our communication and the quality of life we enjoy. As we move through our day-to-day activities, we communicate with others. As relational beings, it is through communication that we become human. When we have friends and family members with whom we can communicate, with whom we feel cared for, loved, and respected, the quality of our lives is most likely positive and we are more likely to feel fulfilled in our interactions with others.

For these reasons, one of the goals of the Building Bridges series is to help youth and adults learn skills, which will enable them to communicate effectively with others by sharing their ideas, thoughts and feelings clearly.

2. A second assumption is that humans are relational beings. That is, we fundamentally need contact with other people. We need to communicate with others to discover who we are as persons, satisfy our need to feel included, meet our needs for affection, respect, and control, and build and maintain relationships. Without the ability to meet these needs through communication, our lives would be empty indeed. It is no surprise then that some communication theorists have argued that because relationships are so vital, communication is the primary goal of human existence.

Thus, a primary objective of Building Bridges is to enable youth and adults to develop the skills they need to build strong and healthy relationships with others, based on cooperation, trust and respect.

3. A third assumption upon which Building Bridges has been developed concerns the fact that quality communication happens when people interact in ways that emphasize one another's person-hood. When we talk and listen to each other as unique individuals, we have the opportunity to discover each other's feelings, ideas, hopes, dreams, and goals. We have the chance to share what makes us similar and what makes us distinct. We have the opportunity to become more open, accepting, and fully human.

For this reason, Building Bridges aims to provide youth and adults with tools and resources for dealing constructively with problems and conflicts that occur between people, as well as to develop empathy in order to respond to the needs and concerns of others.

This approach to the Building Bridges series can be summarized by a brief review of how each of the four H's—head, heart, hands, and health—relates to the study of human communication.

# Head Heart

**Head:** It is important that as communicators we think about what we want to say and how we wish to behave. When considering our communication choices, we need to think about our goals for the relationship, the situation in which we find ourselves, and our knowledge of the other person. We need to consider when we should talk and when we should listen, when we should engage another in conversation and when we should walk away, and when we should stand up for those things in which we believe and when we should be silent.

**Heart:** Effective communicators are those who care about the relationship. We express caring toward others in a number of ways. We demonstrate that we care by spending time with a person, by expressing a willingness to listen carefully to another, and by using language that makes sense to the other person. We also demonstrate that we care about another by working to understand his or her thoughts and feelings, and by demonstrating an openness and willingness to change after listening to him or her.

**Hands:** Communication skills enable people to reach out and respond supportively to the needs and concerns of others in their families and communities. We need to be able to communicate effectively in order to deal constructively with problems and difficulties that are often a part of living together with others. Because communication is crucial in order to resolve conflict and manage anger effectively, it is an essential ingredient in efforts to deal with violence and related issues.

**Health:** Human communication is so important that its presence or absence affects our physical and emotional health. For example, researchers have found that a lack of social relationships jeopardizes coronary health and that people who feel socially isolated are two to three times more likely to die prematurely than those who have strong social ties. Not only are strong interpersonal communication skills linked to our physical well being, but they also play an important role in enriching the quality of our lives.

# Hands Health

The assumptions and framework described on the left are the foundation upon which the entire Building Bridges Communication Curriculum has been developed. We hope the materials will be helpful to you in your efforts to help youth and adults discover the importance of communication in their lives. Regardless of age, ethnicity, race, gender, or class, personal communication is essential to who we are as persons and how well we function in the world around us.

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# Recommended Reading

In this manual you'll find a variety of materials intended to be used when making teaching presentations to adults as well as youth about various issues having to do with the communication process. Included are program planning suggestions as well as communication exercises, overheads, handouts, and other instructional activities and resources that can be used in a variety of instructional settings.

Most of the teaching activities and exercises include recommendations about age appropriateness and teaching context. Look for this information in the upper left-hand corner of the activity.

For more reading about the reading process, the following books are recommended:

Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne, *Looking Out/Looking In*, 9/e (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt, Brace College Publishers, 1999).

Robert Bolton, *People Skills* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

Judi Brownell, *Listening: Attitudes, Principles, and Skills* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).

Joyce L. Hocker and William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 4/e (Madison, Wisconsin: Brown and Benchmark, 1994).

William S. Howell, *The Empathic Communicator* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1982).

*Bridges Not Walls: A Book about Interpersonal Communication*, 7/e, John Stewart, ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998).

Rudolph F. Verderber and Kathleen S. Verderber, *Inter-Act: Using Interpersonal Communication Skills*, 8/e (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1998).

William W. Wilmot, *Relational Communication* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995).

Andrew Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, *Listening*, 5/e (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown and Benchmark, 1996).

Julia T. Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*, 2/e (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1999).

# Understanding *the* Communication Process

**I**nterpersonal communication skills enable people to talk about their thoughts, opinions, feelings and needs. Equally important is the ability to listen carefully when others are doing the talking. The teaching activities and handouts in this section can help you teach people what's involved in doing both those things. There are several enjoyable games, which work well with a variety of youth as well as adult audiences. Included are handouts and surveys, which are intended primarily for older youth and adults.

## *Hint*

Be sure to pay particular attention to the advance preparation section on each teaching activity.

### **Looking for more teaching activities?**

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The following activities, which can be found in *Building Bridges: Communication Activities for 4-H Clubs and other Youth Groups*, are designed to teach youth some basic information about interpersonal communication:

- Extraterrestrial . . . . . p. 14
- Rainstorm . . . . . p. 22
- The Talking Circle . . . . . p. 23

# The Balloon Game

## Age

Elementary and older, including adults

## Teaching context

This activity can be used as an introductory icebreaker when presenting programs that deal with communication issues. It is especially effective when working with groups of adults and youth.

## Time needed

10–15 minutes

## Description

This is an enjoyable, non-threatening way to engage another person in one-on-one dialogue.

## Advance preparation

1. Purchase an adequate supply of balloons in assorted colors.
2. Make copies of the questions on page 8. Cut them into strips to be folded and inserted into the balloons before they are inflated. Use the following color code:
  - Green balloons—questions for children and youth
  - Blue balloons—questions for adults
  - Assorted other colors—questions suitable for any age

## Directions

1. Put all the balloons in a large box or on a table at the front of the room where they will be visible as people arrive.
2. Point out the following:
  - 4-H provides opportunities to build friendships with other people of all ages.
  - Friendships happen when people have a chance to learn about one another.
  - It's fun to share experiences, ideas and values with other people.
  - Playing the balloon game will encourage everyone to get to know each other a little better.
3. Review the following procedure and ask for questions. Explain the color scheme (above) so that each partner can choose an appropriate balloon. Each partner will get three minutes to tell the other person about what's written on the slip of paper found inside the balloon.
4. Have everyone find someone they don't already know real well to be their partner. (Or use whatever method you prefer to assign partners.) Once they've found a partner, people can choose their balloons.
5. Before beginning the exercise remind everyone to use the following tips when they are doing the listening:
  - Pay attention instead of letting your mind wander.
  - Don't interrupt to start talking about yourself.
  - Encourage the other person to keep talking.



6. Have the partners who will be talking first break their balloons and allow a few moments for them to retrieve their slips of paper. Then give the signal for the first round of talking/listening to begin. After three minutes, interrupt to repeat the process so the other partners can have a turn talking.
7. Assemble the entire group and ask for examples of interesting things people learned about their partners.

### **Follow-up Discussion**

Ask people for reactions to the following questions:

- Was it easier to be the talker or the listener? Why?
- What were some things your partner did to let you know he or she was interested in what you were saying?

*Playing the balloon game will encourage everyone to get to know each other a little better.*

### **Sum it up.**

Remind everyone that we get to know other people by looking for opportunities to communicate with them. It means being able to put our thoughts and feelings into words and to listen attentively when other people are trying to do the same.

## Questions for Adults

(for the blue balloons)

1. What is it like to be an adult and not have to do what you're told?
2. What is something you really enjoy about being an adult?
3. What is something you miss about being a child?
4. Describe a time you got really angry at your parents when you were a child.
5. What is something you did when you were a child that would make you furious at your own child for doing?
6. What is something you have learned about life that you think everybody needs to know?
7. What is one piece of advice you would like to give to kids?
8. If you could go back and re-live one day from your own childhood, which day would you choose?
9. If you could live your own teenage years over again, would you do anything differently?
10. What is something you don't like about being an adult?

## Questions for Children/Youth

(for the green balloons)

1. Why do you think some kids think it's okay to drink alcohol?
2. If you are ever a parent, what kind of parent would you want to be?
3. Describe the way the inside of your locker looks.
4. Explain why or why not you would like to have a son or daughter exactly like you.
5. What age would you like to be and why?
6. What is something you would like to change about your school?
7. If you could give adults serious advice about raising kids, what would you tell them?
8. Why do you think some kids are so mean to other kids?
9. What do you think it will be like when you are an adult?
10. What is something you think adults need to keep in mind about what it's like to be your age?

## Questions for Anybody

(other colored balloons)

1. What kinds of things do you worry about?
2. Describe something helpful or kind you did for someone else this past week.
3. Describe something other people do that upsets you or makes you angry.
4. Who is someone you really admire and why?
5. What is something you enjoy doing in your spare time?
6. If you could take a trip anywhere in the world, where would you choose and why?
7. If somebody gave you \$1,000 but told you to spend half of it on the other people in your family, what would you buy for them?
8. If you could spend an afternoon with a famous person, who would you pick and why?
9. If you had to move out of your house in a big hurry and could only take one grocery bag full of your things with you, what would you take along?
10. Tell about three things that make you feel thankful.
11. Do you think it is ever okay to tell a lie? Explain why.
12. What do you like best about 4-H?
13. If you could travel back in time to meet someone who lived in another century, who would you want to meet and why?
14. If you could choose a different first name, what would it be and why?
15. What is something you would really like to do before you are too old to do it?

# Drawing with X's and O's

**Age**

elementary age and older,  
including adults

**Teaching context**

This activity works well with any  
program or training session  
where communication skills are  
being taught

**Time needed**

20 to 40 minutes

**Description**

This activity is about two-way communication. It illustrates the importance of speaking clearly and concisely, and helps people understand the value of being able to ask for feedback and clarification when confused.

**Advance Preparation**

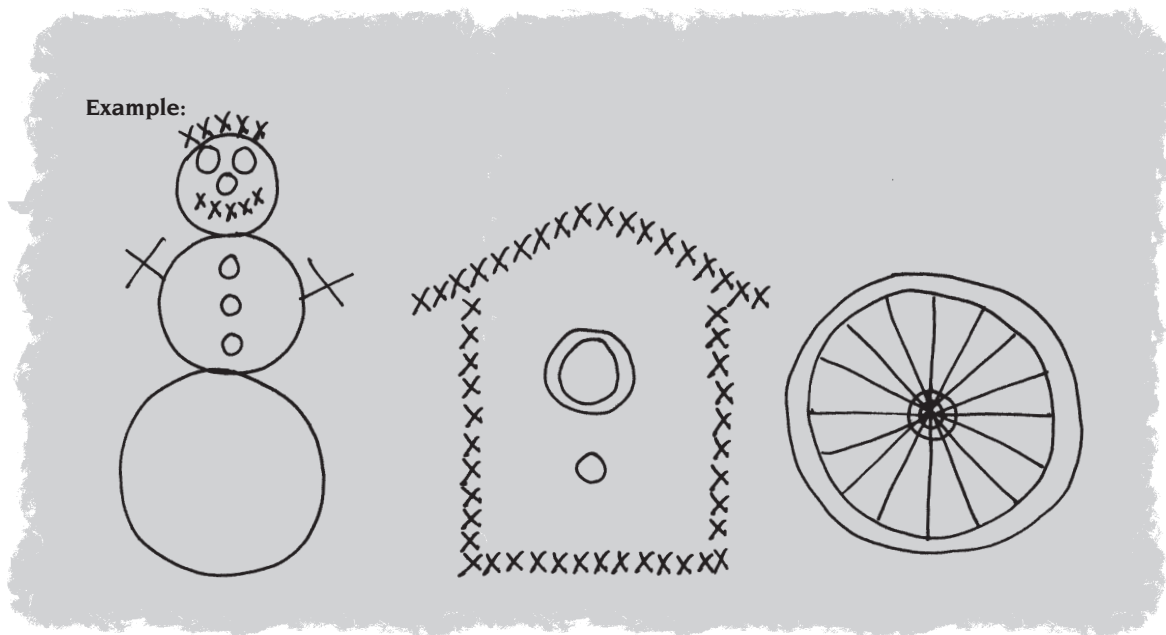
1. Be sure to have a sufficient supply of paper and pencils available.
2. Read over the directions carefully so you can explain how to do the activity and be prepared to lead the follow-up discussion.
3. Use a large sheet of paper to prepare a few illustrations of the kinds of drawings that can be done with X's and O's (see example).

**Directions:**

1. Explain that this activity is a fun way to learn why talking and listening both take concentration. Tell everyone they'll need a partner so they can take turns giving each other directions for how to make drawings using only X's and O's. Use the examples you've prepared in advance to illustrate the kinds of drawings partners will be making.
2. Go over the following instructions:
  - Partners will sit back to back and there is to be no peeking at one another's drawings.
  - The talking partner is to describe what he/she is drawing so the listening partner can try to copy it—without seeing it or asking any questions. This means the talker must give very specific directions while working on the drawing.
  - Pairs will have two minutes to make their drawings without any peeking. Then they can turn around to see if their drawings match.
  - They'll get another chance to try it again but first they'll have to switch roles: the person who was listening gets to be the one that gives directions about what to draw. This time both partners will have an extra minute to work on their drawings and they may talk to each other and ask questions while they're working.
3. Once everyone understands how to do the activity, distribute the paper and pencils. Break into pairs and have the shorter partner be the "talker" for the first round of the activity.
4. Make sure partners are sitting back to back so they can't peek at each other's drawings. Then proceed with the activity as previously described.
5. After going through the activity twice to give partners a chance to switch roles, have everyone return to the large group.

## Follow-up Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to hold up their drawings. Find out which way was easiest—the first time or the second time. Ask:
  - How did it feel to try following directions when you couldn't ask questions about them?
  - How did it feel to give directions to people and not know whether they were understood?
  - What difference did it make to be able to talk to each other while the drawings were being made?
  - What difference did it make to have a little more time to work on the drawings?
  - What are some examples from real life of why it's impossible to communicate if one person is doing all the talking and the other person can't say anything?



### *Sum it up.*

Remind everyone that this activity illustrated how important it is for talkers and listeners to work together to understand each other. A person who is talking must be clear and concise about what's being said. At the same time, a listener needs to concentrate on what the other person is saying and respond to what is being heard.

# The Building Block Game

## Age

10 and older

## Teaching context

This activity can be used at camp counselor training or other programs where youth are learning about teamwork and communication.

## Time needed

45–60 minutes

*Communication  
is worth the effort  
it takes.*

## Description

This exercise requires that individuals work together in teams to build a Tinker Toy structure that will be “judged” according to criteria developed by members of the group. The purpose of the activity is to help people recognize that the sender and the receiver of a message are both equally responsible for the success of the communication process.

## Advance preparation

1. Obtain the following materials:
  - Two complete sets of Tinker Toys, Lego blocks or similar construction toys
  - Pencils, pens and paper
  - Stopwatch
2. Carefully review the directions for this activity in order to be thoroughly familiar with the process and prepared to teach it effectively. In particular you will need to determine the following in advance:
  - How to divide youth into small groups
  - How to determine which groups will be the “builders” and which one group will be the “judges.”

## Directions

1. Introduce the activity by explaining that everyone will be participating in a fun activity that illustrates important things that need to happen during the communication process.
2. Divide into groups of four to six people. One group will be the “judges” and the other groups will be “builders.” (You may want to assign groups ahead of time, or have them draw slips of paper marked “builders” and “judges” from a hat.)
3. Explain that the activity will take place in two parts. The following directions are for Part One:
  - The builder groups will have five minutes to build a structure using the materials you’ve provided. They can build whatever they want; however, there can be no talking while they work.
  - After five minutes, there is to be no further work on the structure. Groups will have three more minutes to select a spokesperson and help him/her prepare a short presentation for the judges. For example the presentation may want to describe the structure, its uses, or special points of interest.
  - While the “builders” are constructing their structures and preparing their presentations, the “judges” will use that time to quickly decide what to look for when it’s time to judge the structures. They will need to create several categories in order to select winners in separate areas. For example, they may want to consider the structure’s balance, height, use of color, originality, etc. They will need to write down what they’ll be looking for under each category.

- After the groups have built their structures and planned their presentations, they will each have a chance to make a short presentation to the “judges.” After all the presentations have been made, the judges will be given two minutes to arrive at their decision and announce the winners.
  - Make sure the above instructions are clear before giving the signal for participants to begin Part One of the activity.
4. At the completion of Part One, remind everyone that there’s more to this activity. Tell everyone to stay in their original groups and instruct the builders to take their structures apart while listening carefully as you explain the following directions for Part Two:
- The builders are to construct a new structure but this time they will be able to talk to each other while they’re working. They will be given three extra minutes that can be used to make some plans and get organized. When the building time is up they’ll be given the same amount of time as before to plan their presentations for the judges.
  - Meanwhile the “judges” can review their system for evaluating the structures. They may want to change their ideas about the winning categories or keep them the same. Once again, they will need to write down their ideas.
  - Make sure the above instructions are clear before proceeding with the activity.

## Follow-up Discussion

At the conclusion of Part Two of the activity, follow up with a short discussion about the following:

- What were the differences between Parts One and Two? Which was easier? Why?
- What difference did it make to be able to plan the structures ahead of time?
- What difference did it make to be able to talk?
- What was it like knowing the structures were being judged?
- What was it like to be in charge of judging the structures?
- What did you learn about communication from doing this activity? Who is responsible for communicating successfully?
- How does this activity relate to other things that go on in your life— at home, at school, in 4-H, and other places?

### *Sum it up.*

**Remind everyone that communication is a two-way, ongoing process. People understand each other better when they can talk and respond to one another. It helps to understand what’s expected before beginning a project. Working and planning together as a team can result in accomplishing exciting things!**

# Test your Communication I.Q.

## Age

Older youth and adult

## Teaching context

This discussion activity is an effective way to focus on the need for strengthening communication skills. It can be used with groups of volunteer leaders at leader training events, or at committee meetings.

## Time needed

5–10 minutes to complete the survey and read over the answers

10–15 minutes for follow-up discussion

## Description

This “quiz style” tool is intended to encourage people to examine some of the dynamics of interpersonal communication that are often overlooked.

## Advance preparation

- Duplicate sufficient copies of the following survey and answer sheet.
- Be sure to read through the directions carefully so you’ll be ready to answer any questions.

## Directions

1. Introduce the survey by pointing out that most of us take communication for granted. We’ve gotten so accustomed to doing it that we rarely pause to consider what we’re actually doing during the process—and why it can sometimes backfire.
2. Distribute the survey. Instruct people to respond to the 10 true or false questions and then read over the following answer sheet.
3. As soon as everyone has completed the questionnaires, use the follow-up discussion items on page 17 to emphasize major points.

## *Sum it up.*

Remind people that since communication is necessary for interpersonal interaction, it’s worth taking the time to review what the process is really all about and what we need to do to strengthen it.

# Test Your Communication I.Q.

Indicate whether you think the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Communication can be intentional or unintentional.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. It's impossible not to communicate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Like any other process, communication is reversible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Meanings are in the words themselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Physical surroundings have little impact on communication
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. More communication is better than no communication.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Communication will not solve all problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Communication is a natural skill.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Personal communication is essential for our well-being.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What happens during communication can be reconstructed.



# Answer Sheet

- True** 1. Communication can be intentional or unintentional. Ideally, we think about what we want to say—especially if we want to offer advice or provide constructive criticism. But sometimes we say things without thinking and often end up regretting it. The same is true of non-verbal communication. For example, a bored look on our face, or fidgeting and glancing at the clock on the wall lets the other person know we're anxious to be doing something else.
- True** 2. It is impossible not to communicate. Speaking or remaining silent, confronting or avoiding another person, smiling or showing no emotion at all—it all provides information about our thoughts and feelings. Whenever we're with another person, we are communicating one way or another. Sometimes our bodies—and the things we do to them—communicate even louder than words. Our clothes, jewelry, hairstyles and even the cologne or after-shave we've splashed onto ourselves send messages to other people. This explains why even the most bizarre of fashion trends becomes important to teenagers who want to express things about themselves that can't always be put into words.
- False** 3. Communication is final. Once something has been expressed it cannot be erased. Even though we may regret what has been said or done, we cannot go back and undo it. Of course we can always apologize and can even try to explain our way out of a misunderstanding. But no amount of explaining or apologizing can erase what was said or done in the first place.
- False** 4. Meanings are not in the words themselves. It's a mistake to assume the words we choose are conveying exactly what we're trying to say. That's because the same word can mean so many different things. Much depends on how the speaker uses the word—and the way it's interpreted by the person who hears it.
- False** 5. Physical surroundings have a big impact on communication. We talk and behave differently based on where we happen to be at the time. For example, we might not talk about things while standing in the checkout line of a grocery store that we talk about while in a church or synagogue. Other things about our surroundings influence the way we communicate. Cozy furniture and soft lighting might help us relax and feel comfortable talking to another person. On the other hand, a crowded auditorium full of the sounds and excitement of a sports event probably isn't the best place to be if you have something important to talk over with another person.
- False** 6. More communication is not always better. While it's important to keep the lines of communication open, too much talking can make a situation worse—especially if a person mistakes nagging for communication. Sometimes it's best not to say anything at all. For instance, when we are angry or hurt there's always a chance we'll say something we'll regret. It's better to take some time to cool off and wait until we've had a chance to think about the things we need to say and do, before trying to talk to the other person.

- True** 7. Communication won't solve all problems. Being careful and attentive about what you're saying is no guarantee that talking about a problem will automatically solve it—especially if it involves making difficult and emotional decisions. But talking can help identify feelings and concerns. Often the first step to solving these kinds of problems is recognizing how serious they are and knowing when it's time to ask for help dealing with them. It's also important to consider the consequences of being “brutally honest” about what you tell another person. Imagine that a friend asks for your honest opinion about a new hair cut. You don't have to point out that it makes her ears stick out and her nose look bigger. Instead you can honestly tell her that you liked it better when it was longer.
- False** 8. Communication is not a natural skill. Even though just about everyone is capable of communicating, that does not mean they are skilled at doing it. People often assume that communication “comes naturally” and so there's no need to work at it. But like any other skill, communication can be strengthened through training and practice.
- True** 9. Personal communication is essential for our well being because we need to communicate with people in order to form friendships and get close to the people we care about. Without those kinds of relationships, our physical as well as our emotional health will suffer. Medical research reveals that the lack of close, personal relationships can actually result in a wide range of health problems including high blood pressure. Satisfying relationships are important aspects of a healthy lifestyle, and personal communication is what makes those kinds of relationships possible.
- False** 10. What happens during communication cannot be reconstructed. While it's possible to remember some of what has been said, you can't possibly remember everything. For example, how can you duplicate another person's tone of voice or how nervous you might have felt while you were talking? Telling someone about a conversation you had earlier will not be the same as experiencing it firsthand.