

Follow-up Discussion

1. Communication can be intentional or unintentional.

- Recall a time you said something without thinking and ended up regretting it later. How did you feel and what effect did your words have on the other person? Did you ever find an opportunity to apologize? (Don't ask people to share their answers unless they want to.)
- Ask for volunteers to demonstrate some common non-verbal messages. Have people guess what is being communicated.

2. It is impossible not to communicate.

- What are some examples of how we communicate by remaining silent?
- What is meant by the term “fashion statement”? What do clothes, hairstyles, etc. say about us?
- What kinds of intentional and non-intentional things do tattoos and body piercing communicate about a person?

3. Communication is irreversible.

- Recall a time you would have liked to have been able to take back something you said to another person. (There's no need to share these examples with the group.)
- Why is it difficult for some people to apologize for hurtful things they've said or done?
- Why is it difficult for some people to be forgiving when someone else apologizes for what has been said or done?

4. Meanings are not in the words themselves.

- Ask for examples of words and phrases that mean different things to different people.
- Why do words like “always” “never” and “every” often lead to misunderstandings and arguments?

5. Physical surroundings have an important impact on communication.

- Share examples of how we communicate differently based on our physical surroundings?
- If you wanted to have a serious conversation with someone, what kinds of places would you go to feel the most relaxed and comfortable?

6. More communication is not always better.

- How can you tell when it would be better to keep your mouth shut for a while?
- What are some ways to respond to someone who is starting to say things he or she might later regret?
- What can you do when a conversation is going nowhere or is about to lead to an argument?

7. Communication will not solve all problems.

- What kinds of problems can't be solved just by talking?
- Are there times when you should tell another person something even though you know it will hurt him or her deeply? If so, how should you go about it?

8. Communication is not a natural skill.

- Give some examples of what it's like to talk with someone who has developed good communication skills versus someone who isn't good at communicating.

9. Personal communication is essential for our well-being.

- Take a moment to think of someone who makes your life more enjoyable and worthwhile. (Ask if anyone would be comfortable sharing an example.)
- Why are good communication skills necessary for close personal relationships?

10. What happens during communication cannot be reconstructed.

- Recall a time you tried to describe a conversation you had with someone else. What kinds of things got left out as you tried to reconstruct the conversation?

Use these questions to help people review their answers to the communication I.Q. survey.

4-H I-Messages

Age

Any age

Teaching context

It can be adapted to fit in with any teaching presentation that focuses on interpersonal communication.

Time needed

15–20 minutes

Description

This activity presents a basic approach to teaching people a quick and easy way to use I-Messages when thinking about what they want to say to another person.

Advance preparation

1. Make copies of the message slips on page 19 and cut them into strips.
2. If you won't be using the I-Message overhead (page 20), copy the examples onto a sheet of flip chart paper.

Directions

1. Explain that when we have something important to tell someone it's a good idea to think about what we're going to say before we speak. If we want to tell another person what we're thinking or feeling, it's best if we do it without insulting or criticizing them.
2. Demonstrate how I-Messages work by using the overhead or the examples you've copied onto flip chart paper.
3. Explain that I-Messages work particularly well when we have a complaint or concern to express. Being honest and direct about what is bothering us without attacking the other person lessens the likelihood that he or she will get defensive about what we are trying to say.
4. Ask youth to help create a few examples of I-Messages.
5. Distribute one or two message strips to everyone and instruct them to complete the statements. Ask for volunteers who would be comfortable reading what they wrote.



“I”

Sum it up.

Remind youth that when they've got something important to say to another person, it's best to think about how to say it. Using an I-Message instead of blaming, insulting or criticizing another person is a good way to talk about what you're thinking or feeling without starting an argument.

Directions: copy this sheet and cut into strips.

I feel **bad** when _____ because _____

I feel **frustrated** when _____ because _____

I feel **mad** when _____ because _____

I feel **sad** when _____ because _____

I feel **disappointed** when _____ because _____

I feel _____ when _____ because _____

I feel **good** when _____ because _____

I feel **glad** when _____ because _____

I feel **happy** when _____ because _____

4-H I-Message Examples



Start with the word "I".....I


Add what you're.....*feel bad when nobody pays attention*
thinking, feeling or.....*to the things I say*
believing

Explain WHY.....*because it seems like no one cares*
(without criticizing, blaming.....*what I think about things.*
or insulting someone else)

Start with the word "I".....I

Add what you're thinking,.....*don't like it when people*
feeling or believing.....*pick on me*

Explain WHY.....*because it really hurts my feelings.*
(without criticizing, blaming.....
or insulting someone else)



Reflective vs. Reactive Listening

Age

Adults and High School Aged Youth

Teaching context

These materials are intended to be used when training volunteers for roles where good listening skills are important. They will work well with chaperone training, volunteer orientation, and similar programs. The materials can also be used with parent education programs.

Time needed

20–30 minutes

Description

This activity is an effective way to demonstrate effective listening skills as well as to point out negative behaviors and responses that block listening. The materials can be used together when teaching workshops or programs intended to focus specifically on listening. Or, they can be used separately as supplemental resources when making presentations that deal with related issues.

Advance preparation

1. Select three people for the role-play to read the parts of the youth, adult and commentator. Be sure to give them a chance to practice in advance.
2. Make sufficient copies of any handouts being used.

Directions

1. Explain that although listening is as important to the communication process as talking, people often end up putting most of their energy into what it is they have to say.
2. Use the Overhead on page 23 to make the following points:

Reactive listeners value talk over listening. They tend to be “self” rather than “other” focussed, which is why they frequently interrupt what’s being said in order to discuss their own problems and opinions.

They listen with the intention of talking as soon as they possibly can!

Reflective listeners recognize the importance of paying attention to what the other person is saying. They are “other” rather than “self” focussed, which is why they concentrate on the needs and feelings of the other person rather than their own.

They listen with the intention of trying to understand.
3. Distribute copies of the handout, “11 Mistakes Reactive Listeners Make” (page 28) and allow a few moments for everyone to read it.
4. Introduce the individuals who will be reading the script. Explain that the first part of the role play illustrates each of the 11 mistakes reactive listeners make.
5. Listen to the first part of the role play, which deals with mistakes reactive listeners make.
6. Distribute copies of the “Tips for Reflective Listeners” (page 29) and allow a few moments for everyone to read it.
7. Listen to the second part of the role play, which deals with Reflective Listening skills.

Follow up Discussion

1. Ask for comments and observations about the role-play.
2. Suggest that people take a few moments to review the “11 Mistakes” Handout with an eye for noticing the kinds of things they personally may be in habit of doing.
3. Point out that “reflective listening” doesn’t come naturally for most people.

If time permits, follow up with an opportunity for people to practice reflective listening by participating in either of these activities:

Listening to Understand (page 31)

How Did it Feel (page 35)

Sum it up.

Quickly Review the difference between Reactive and Reflective Listeners: Reactive listeners are more interested in their reactions to what they are hearing than in trying to understand what the other person wants to say. Reflective listeners work hard to understand rather than interpret what the other person is telling them.

Reactive Listeners...

- ... allow their own thoughts, feelings or opinions about what is being said to take over the conversation.
- ... are more concerned with what they want to say than with what the other person is telling them.
- ... focus on their own reactions rather than on the feelings and needs of the speaker.

Reflective Listeners...

- ... concentrate on the feelings, opinions and concerns that are being expressed by the other person.
- ... avoid interrupting the other person to comment on what he or she is saying.
- ... focus on what the speaker is saying in order to understand it, instead of whether or not they agree with or like what they are hearing.

Reactive vs. Reflective Listening Role Play

Part One: Reactive Listening

Youth: At the last meeting you said if anybody had ideas about how to make our meetings more fun we should let you know.

Adult: Sure, do you have something to suggest?

Youth: Well, I'm a little worried because those of us who are officers don't get a chance to do much.

Adult: Oh, I think you've all done a really great job so far and I'm sure everybody else thinks so too!

Commentator: **Praising** or **flattering** the other person might seem like a sincere thing to do, but it doesn't let people explain their feelings.

Youth: Well, thank you, but it doesn't seem like we've gotten to do anything very important. I thought we were supposed to, you know, be the leaders of the club.

Adult: Absolutely. And that's just what you have been doing all this year by running the meetings, leading the pledges, taking minutes, and giving the treasurer's report.

Commentator: It's tempting to **reassure** the other person **or make it seem like everything will be just fine**, but meanwhile he/she hasn't had a chance to describe why it's a concern.

Youth: Yes, butwe don't get to do other stuff leaders are supposed to do that's really important.

Adult: Since when is it not important to run the business meeting? Whatever gave you an idea like that? Who have you been talking to?

Commentator: These kinds of **interrogating questions** can leave the person feeling like he/she is being **cross examined** instead of listened to.

Youth: Well some kids we met at camp told us they get to do a lot of things in their club that we don't get to do.

Adult: That's the trouble with you kids – you're never satisfied with the way things are. You think just because someone else does something differently you ought to do it too. One of these days you're going to have to stop complaining and learn that you can't always have your way about things.

Commentator: **Criticizing** or **disagreeing** with what the other person is saying sends a message that it's wrong for him/her to feel that way.

Youth: Sorry. I guess I shouldn't have said anything.

Adult: Oh there's no need to apologize. But you should have told those kids more about the way we run our meetings. If you ever see them again you should let them know our club has been around longer than most clubs and we've got years of experience behind us. In fact, you really ought to invite a few of them to come and see for themselves just how we run our business meetings.

Commentator: It's natural to want to help people **find solutions** to their problems. But coming up with **advice when it's not been asked** for isn't really helpful at all.

Youth: But....that's what I wanted to talk about with you. I was hoping we could talk about our business meetings...

Leader: (kidding around) Excuse me! I must have missed something. I thought that's what we have been doing for the last 15 minutes. But I guess we've been doing something else all this time.

Commentator: **Using sarcasm** or **wise cracks**, or trying to **kid around** with what the other person is trying to say gives the impression that what he or she is trying to tell you is silly or not worth paying any attention to.

Youth: I guess I shouldn't have brought it up in the first place.

Adult: Oh, don't worry about it. I'm glad you felt comfortable enough to say something. It's just that you're letting this get through to you when it's really not that big a deal. That's something I've noticed about you—you're a very conscientious person, but you've got to remember that things aren't always going to work out the way you want them to.

Commentator: Trying to **interpret** or **diagnose** what's wrong with someone often sets the stage for disagreements—especially if the other person feels you don't really understand him or her.

Youth: But that's not the point. I don't think you understand what I was trying to say...

Adult: I think you're forgetting something here. Keep in mind that I've been a 4-H club leader for 15 years and I think I've learned a thing or two during that time. I know things run a lot more smoothly when everyone pitches in and does what they're expected to do. You need to remember that being an officer isn't always a lot of fun. Instead of getting upset about what you've been asked to do, you should be happy you've been asked to do it in the first place.

Commentator: **Lecturing** or "**preaching**" to the other person can easily lead to an argument. When people disagree with what you are saying or feel they are being attacked, a natural reaction is to defend themselves.

Youth: But I'm not complaining. I've always been willing to cooperate. I haven't ever complained about any of it.

Adult: Oh, I wouldn't be too sure about that. After all, this whole conversation started because you weren't satisfied with the way we're doing things. That sure sounds like a complaint to me. The trouble with you is you're not willing to listen to someone who has your best interests at heart.

Commentator: Once you start **admonishing**, **moralizing** or **reprimanding** the other person, it's pretty clear you're more interested in pointing out his/her faults than you are in listening.

Youth: Okay, Okay. Let's just drop it. I should have known better than try to talk to someone like you about this.

Adult: Now wait just a second. I don't particularly care for your tone of voice. I think you're forgetting just who it is you're talking to. You better be careful or you may end up regretting our little conversation.

Commentator: **Warning** or **threatening** someone is a way of trying to exert your power and control instead of paying attention to what the other person needs to tell you.

Youth: (obviously upset) You're right! I do regret it! I wish I would never have thought I could talk to you about something like this. It was a mistake to think you would understand.

Adult: Now just calm down and stop acting like nobody understands you. It's not worth it to get so upset over something like this. So pull yourself together and act your age.

Commentator: Issuing **orders** or **demands** is no way to listen. Instead of paying attention to what the other person is feeling, you're telling him or her to feel something else instead.

Youth: Look, this all started because you told us at our last meeting that if anybody had ideas for things we should just let you know and you would be glad to listen. I thought you meant it.

Adult: Well we'll discuss it another time. I don't have time to keep arguing with you over something like this.

Commentator: **Switching** attention to something else or **avoiding** the discussion altogether tells the other person you simply aren't interested in trying to listen to whatever it is he/she wants to say.

Part Two: Reflective Listening

Youth: At our last meeting you said if anybody had any ideas about making meetings more fun we should let you know.

Adult: Sure, do you have something to suggest?

Youth: Well, I'm a little worried because those of us who are officers don't get a chance to do much.

Adult: You've got some ideas for things the officers can do to make our meetings more fun and would like to talk about some possibilities, right?

Commentator: By **summarizing what was just said**, you let the other person know you're really paying attention to what he or she wants to talk about.

Youth: Yea. All we really get to do is run the business meeting. Some of us were talking to some kids we met at camp and they get to do a lot of things in their club that we don't get to do.

Adult: It sounds like you're a little frustrated with the way things have been going in our club – especially since that's not the way it is in other clubs. Right?

Commentator: By **acknowledging the other person's feelings** you're letting him or her know you're willing to take those feelings seriously.

Youth: Yea. I think it would be so cool if we could do some of the stuff the other kids get to do.

Adult: Can you tell me a little more about the kinds of things you'd like to be doing?

Commentator: Rather than agreeing or disagreeing, a good listener keeps **the focus on what the other person is trying to say** by giving him or her a chance to be more specific.

Youth: Well you know how we always start out with a business meeting?

Adult: (nodding head) Mmmhmmm...

Youth: And you know how hard it is for some kids to settle down and pay attention?

Adult: Yes....some kids are awfully fidgety...go on....

Commentator: Active listeners use **non-verbal cues and "encouraging words"** like these to encourage the other person to keep talking.

Youth: Well I don't mean to sound critical, but the truth is our business meetings really are pretty boring. And sometimes it seems like it's the adult leaders and parents who are the ones that keep things dragging on and on.

Adult: (nodding) Mmmhmmm...

Youth: ...and sometimes most of the kids don't even care about half the stuff that's being discussed. They probably don't even want to be there anyway. So no wonder they get fidgety.

Adult: Let me see if I've got this right. Are you saying most of the kids in our club don't want to come to our meetings?

Commentator: A good listener asks for **clarification** if he or she gets confused about what the other person said.

Youth: No, that's not what I meant. It's not the meetings that turn kids off. It's the business part of the meetings that can be a problem.

Adult: Okay...now I'm with you...keep talking...

Youth: Well, it's just that sometimes it's like adults think they're the most important people at the meeting. They act like nothing else matters except the things they want to talk about. And some of their ideas are so dumb. But they think they know what's best for everyone and so they end up making all the decisions. Kids just hate it when that happens.

Adult: What I hear you saying is that kids don't like it when adults take over and end up doing all the talking and making all the decisions, right?

Commentator: Active listeners work hard to put aside their own thoughts in order to continually **look at things from the other person's viewpoint.**

Youth: Exactly! And that's the reason so many kids get fidgety and stop paying attention during the business meeting.

Adult: Do you have any suggestions for what to do about it?

Commentator: Instead of giving advice and trying to solve the problem, active listeners concentrate on finding out **what the other person has to suggest.**

Youth: Well, that's why I wanted to talk to you. Because I was thinking that maybe the officers could ask for volunteers to get together and think of ways to make the business part of the meeting shorter. We could try some of the things other clubs do. Then maybe everyone would pay attention and we could get done sooner and be able to do other stuff that's more fun.

Adult: Sounds like a good idea. Have you talked to the other officers about it?

Youth: As a matter of fact, some of us have been talking about it already because we were so upset after what happened at the last meeting. We just didn't know what to do about it.

Adult: Well it sure sounds to me like you're on the right track. I think it's a great idea to get everyone's input about this and then come up with a plan. Let me know what you need from me because I want to do what I can to help.

Commentator: Rather than trying to tell the other person what to do, active listeners **support their ability to reach their own conclusions.**

11 Mistakes Reactive Listeners Make

1. Using **praise** or **flattery** as a way of persuading the other person to feel good rather than listening to the reason he or she might not.
2. Trying to **reassure** the other person or **make it seem like everything will be just fine**, instead of listening to find out why he or she is feeling badly.
3. Asking judgmental **questions** that leave the other person feeling like he/she is being **cross-examined**.
4. **Criticizing** or **disagreeing** with what the other person is saying instead of allowing him or her to fully express him/herself.
5. Trying to immediately **find solutions** and give **advice when it's not been asked for**.
6. Using **sarcasm** or **wise cracks**, or trying to **kid around** when the other person is trying to say something that's important to him or her.
7. Attempting to **interpret** or **diagnose** what's wrong with someone instead of making an effort to better understand what he or she is saying.
8. Interrupting what the other person is saying to lecture or "**preach**" about his or her behavior.
9. **Admonishing, moralizing** or **reprimanding** the other person for what he or she has just said.
10. Issuing **warnings** or **threats** so the other person will feel badly about whatever he or she has said or done.
11. Issuing **orders** or **demands** in order to coerce the other person into doing what the listener thinks needs to be done.
12. **Switching** attention to something else or **avoiding** the discussion altogether.

Tips for Reflective Listeners

- 1. Pay attention to physical surroundings.**
 - Eliminate noisy distractions from a loud TV, radio or stereo.
 - Find a place where other people won't interrupt.

- 2. Use a listening "posture."**
 - Face the speaker so you can make eye contact.
 - Lean forward but don't get so close to make the other person uncomfortable.
 - Smile and look friendly!

- 3. Prompt the speaker to keep talking.**
 - Use a warm and pleasant tone of voice.
 - Nod to let the person know you're listening.
 - Say encouraging things like "Mm-hmmm," "Uh huh," "Right," "I see," etc.

- 4. Remember that you're not a judge.**
 - Resist the urge to criticize or object to what you're hearing.
 - Avoid arguing with the other person if you disagree with him or her.
 - Resist the temptation to give advice.

- 5. Focus on what you're hearing.**
 - Try to understand the other person's point of view.
 - Concentrate on the key ideas.
 - Pay attention to feelings that are being expressed.

- 6. Use restatement to be sure you heard what was intended.**
 - Wait for a natural break in the conversation.
 - Repeat what you think you heard and ask if that's what the speaker intended.

Note: You can say things like:

"As I understand it, you are saying that Is that what you intended?"

"What I think you said was Is that right?"

"Let me see if I have this right Is that what you said?"

How do you rate as a listener?

There are some times when the best thing a friend can do for the other person is listen to what he or she is trying to say. But that's not easy. There's more to it than just keeping your mouth shut. Take this little quiz and see how you rate.

1. Do you make an effort to concentrate and pay attention to the other person while he or she is talking to you?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
2. Do you avoid interrupting the other person when he or she is talking to you?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
3. Do you use encouraging words (like "Mmm-hmmmm," "Yes, go on," etc.) to help the person feel comfortable talking?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
4. Do you try to let the person know you really care about the way he or she is feeling?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
5. Do you avoid criticizing the other person for what he/she has told you?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
6. Do you avoid giving unwanted advice or telling the other person what he or she should have done differently?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
7. Do you resist the urge to argue with the person even if you disagree with the things he or she is telling you?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no
8. Do you ask questions when you don't understand what the other person said so that he or she can try to explain it better?
_____ yes _____ most of the time _____ no

Scoring

If you answered most of the questions with a "yes," chances are your friends are already grateful to you for what a wonderful listener you are.

If you answered "most of the time" to the majority of questions, you're on your way to being a great listener. Keep practicing and your friends will thank you for it.

If you answered "no" most of the time, you're probably just beginning to think about what it means to be a good listener. That's the first step to learning and improving. With a little practice, your friends will be telling you what a great listener you are.

Listening to Understand

Age

Adults and older youth

Teaching context

This exercise works well with workshops and training programs that need a communication focus.

Time needed

50–60 minutes

Description

This exercise focuses on a specific technique for strengthening listening skills by helping participants pay closer attention to what they're hearing.

Advance preparation

1. Review the entire procedure carefully in order to teach it accurately.
2. Use separate colors for duplicating the handouts on pages 29, 33, and 34 (Tips for Reflective Listeners, Observer's Checklist, and Talking Topics).
3. Be sure to have a stopwatch or clock available.
4. Copy the following onto a chalkboard or piece of flip chart paper:
 - "As I understand it, you are saying that . . . Is that what you intended?"
 - "What I think you said was . . . Is that right?"
 - "Let me see if I have this right . . . Is that what you said?"

Directions

1. Explain the use of "restatement," which helps listeners pay attention to what they're hearing. By repeating what you think you've heard, you can check to find out if it's what the speaker was actually trying to say.
2. Distribute the Listening Tip Sheet. Briefly review each of the tips by asking people why those things are important. (For example, "Why is it important to eliminate distractions?")
3. Carefully review the restatement process beginning with No. 6 on the tip sheet. Refer to the statements you've copied onto the flip chart or chalkboard. Explain that participants will be working in groups of three to practice this process as follows:
 - One person will be speaker. His or her role is to talk about one of the topics on the Talking Topics list.
 - Another person will be the listener. He or she is to listen attentively to the speaker, using the tips from the Listening Tip Sheet.
 - The third person will be the observer and will watch the process closely to keep track of what's happening by referring to the Observer's Checklist.
4. Explain that each round will last seven minutes and will be repeated several times so that everyone will have a turn at each role. Before breaking into small groups let participants know how much time they'll have for the exercise as follows:
 - The speaker will have three minutes to say whatever he or she wants to say about any of the topics on the list. At the end of that time you'll give a signal to stop talking.

- The listeners will have two minutes to use the statements copied onto the flip chart in the front of the room to restate what they've heard and find out if it's what the speakers were trying to say. You'll let them know when to stop.
 - The observers will get two minutes to complete their checklists and provide some feedback to both the talker and listener.
5. Ask if anyone needs you to repeat the directions. Distribute handouts and use whatever method you prefer to split into groups of three. Allow a few moments for people to look over the handouts and prepare for the exercise.
 6. Signal the groups to begin the first round. Keep track of the time in order to know when to signal the listeners to restate what they've heard and get feedback from the speakers. Signal again when it's time for the observers to complete their checklists and go over what they've observed.
 7. Repeat the process twice so that everyone gets a chance at each role.

*Listening is
hard work!*

Follow-up Discussion

- What was it like to be the speaker, knowing you were being listened to carefully?
- What was it like as a listener knowing you were being observed, and that you were going to have to restate what you heard?
- What was it like being the observer?
- What was the hardest part of this exercise?

Sum it up.

End the exercise by reminding the group that it's not easy being a good listener. It takes concentration and practice to try understanding what the other person is really saying—especially when you might not agree with him or her. But it's worth the effort because when all is said and done, listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give to another person.