Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

• list the various forms of verbal and nonverbal communication.
• describe how to avoid communication barriers.
• use techniques for improving communication skills.
• explain how communication skills can be used to help resolve conflicts.

Words to Know

communication
verbal communication
slang
nonverbal communication
body language
personal space
mixed messages
stereotype
prejudice
racism
assertive
nonassertive
active listening
feedback
conflict
compromise

When you watch a movie or see a play, you interpret the performers' roles by their words and actions. They send you information and you receive the message. This process of sending and receiving information is called communication. You communicate with the people around you every day. Research shows that people spend 70 percent of each day communicating in some way. Because communication involves the exchange of information, it includes listening as well as speaking. It also includes reading and writing. People spend about 42 percent of their communication time listening. They speak 32 percent of the time, read 15 percent, and write 11 percent. Since you spend so much time communicating, learning to do it well is important.
**Speaking**

You were not born with the ability to speak, but you learned to communicate very quickly. You used certain sounds to express your needs and wants to your family members. In time, you learned to use real words to communicate with others. Now you take speaking for granted. You may even speak without thinking sometimes!

The language you speak is likely to be the language most often spoken in your home. English is spoken in all parts of the United States. Some words, however, are pronounced differently in different parts of the country. For instance, a person in New York may say some words differently from someone in Texas.

The way you speak to people often depends on the situation. When you are with your friends you may use slang. **Slang** consists of words used by a certain group of people. The meanings of the words used by the group are different from the usual meanings. It is best to avoid the use of slang when speaking with people outside the group. The use of such words can lead to a lack of communication with people who don’t know the slang meanings. Your slang words may not be understood by adults with whom you communicate. Therefore, it may be wise to avoid the use of slang when speaking with adults.

Sometimes the emphasis you place on a word can change the meaning of what you are saying. Read each of the sentences in Chart 4-2, emphasizing the italicized word. Notice how each question conveys a different meaning.

**Chart 4-2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you want me to do?</td>
<td>What</td>
<td>I want you to do something!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want me to do?</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>I want you to do something for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want me to do?</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>What do you want me to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want me to do?</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I want you to do something for me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Communication**
  - **Emphasis can change the meaning of a message.** Read each of these sentences aloud, emphasizing the italicized word. Notice how the message varies.
  - **What do you want me to do?**
    - **What** | I want you to do something!
    - **Me** | I want you to do something for me.
    - **You** | What do you want me to do?
    - **I** | I want you to do something for me.

- **Writing**
  - A second form of verbal communication is writing. Words are again used to communicate, but they are written instead of spoken. Information is passed on to others through the written word.
  - Much of what you learn comes from written words in books and papers. You, in turn, can share much of what you learn by writing. You write assignments in school. You write answers to test questions. You prepare written papers and reports. You keep journals.
  - You also communicate personal information by writing. You may write letters to friends and relatives you don’t see very often.

- **Nonverbal Communication**
  - Sometimes people communicate without even speaking. You often know when a friend is worried or unhappy without a word being spoken. You may know by the way she sits or stands, or by her facial expressions. Likewise, if a friend has had a good experience, you may see it in the way he walks or smiles.
  - The type of communication that allows you to read a friend’s emotions in this way is called **nonverbal communication**. Nonverbal communication includes any means of sending a message that does not use words. Everything you give off some kind of nonverbal messages. Your clothes and your grooming say something about you. Your facial expressions, gestures, and posture say a lot. The way you react to other people also tells something about who you are and how you feel.
  - All these factors make an impression on other people without you saying a single word. Sometimes the nonverbal messages you send about yourself are not typical of you. Perhaps you’re walking slower, your shoulders are sloping, or you’re slumping in your seat. Maybe your eyes don’t have their usual sparkle, or you’re frowning. Your family members and friends may question the change in you. Their comments may surprise you if you’re not aware you are sending uncharacteristic messages.
Part One   Learning About Yourself

Taking a closer look at nonverbal forms of communication will help you become aware of the messages you send. You'll be able to decide if you are sending true messages about yourself.

Appearance and Grooming

When you meet new people, you would like their first impression of you to be a good one. It should be one that says, “You'll like knowing me.” If the first impression you give turns people off, you may never have a chance to know them. They will not get a chance to know the person you really are. If this happens at a job interview, you may not be given the job. You will not have a chance to prove you can handle the job and be a good employee.

People form their first impressions of you based on the way you look. Before you get a chance to say a word, your appearance sends an instant message. The way you look makes a lasting impression. Others may not even be aware of the judgment they are making. They'll notice if your clothes fit and are clean. They'll notice if you are neatly groomed. These observations are made quickly, often within a matter of seconds. For this reason, you need to think about your appearance and the message you want it to send.

Grooming is caring for your body. Being well groomed means you care about yourself and the way you look. You keep your hair, hands, and body as clean as possible. You comb your hair and have it trimmed regularly. You brush your teeth at least twice a day. You take good care of your clothes. If you're a young man, you shave your face when your beard appears. You don't have to be pretty or handsome to have an attractive appearance. If you are well groomed, you will appear attractive to others. On the other hand, you may have pretty or handsome features. If you are careless in your grooming, others will not notice your good looks. You may fail to communicate a positive message about yourself.

Body Language

Another form of nonverbal communication is body language. Body language is the sending of messages through body movements. These movements include gestures, facial expressions, and posture. A wave of the hand is an example of body language. This gesture communicates recognition and friendship.

Body language can communicate both positive and negative messages. For instance, suppose your mother meets you after school. She has her hands on her waist. She has a frown on her face. It would probably not take you long to figure out that she is upset. On the other hand, she may smile and nod her head to communicate approval of something you say or do.

Chapter 4   Communicating with Others

An important form of body language is eye contact. When talking to people, try to look them in the eye. This shows you are really interested in what they have to say. It also says that what you are saying is important to you. If you often look away, someone could interpret your action to mean you don't care about what he or she is saying.

Your posture is another part of body language. It can tell people how you feel about yourself. Having good posture sends a nonverbal message that you are self-confident and care about yourself. Your posture also tells people how you feel about situations. Leaning forward in a chair indicates interest in what's being said. On the other hand, slouching back in a chair with your arms crossed communicates a lack of interest.

Sometimes the messages people convey are not the messages they mean to send. A new student who does not talk to others may convey that she is aloof and stuck-up. Perhaps she is really just shy. A classmate who sits with his head on his desk may send a message that he is bored. Instead, he may be sick.

Be aware of the body signals people send. Be careful, however, not to make judgments only on the basis of body language. You may need to use verbal communication to really find out how someone feels.

Personal Space

Each person has a personal space. Your personal space is the area around you. When someone enters this space, you react in different ways. This reaction is a form of nonverbal communication.

The way you react to someone entering your personal space depends on how well you know the person. If you are crowded into an elevator with many strangers, you may feel uneasy. Often no words are spoken. On the other hand, suppose a group of your friends crowds into an elevator together. In this case, you would talk freely and enjoy the closeness. See 4-6.

The situation you are in may also affect how comfortable you feel when you're in close contact with others. For instance, if you are at home and a family member enters your personal space, you may welcome the closeness. You may even touch, hug, or kiss. If you were in a public place, however, this type of close contact might embarrass you.
You can convey nonverbal messages by entering a person’s personal space. A light touch on the hand or arm or even a hug lets someone know you care. A formal handshake shows a stranger that he or she is welcome.

Barriers to Good Communication

Communicating clearly with others is not always easy. A number of barriers can get in the way of the communication process. Understanding these hurdles can help you avoid them.

Mixed Messages

With so many messages being sent and received in so many different ways, it’s easy to get them mixed up. Sometimes people don’t say what they mean. Their actions will send one message and their words say something else. They are sending mixed messages.

It is difficult to know how they really feel.

Prejudices are often negative. They can lead to negative behaviors such as name-calling. Strong prejudices may cause people to avoid certain people or groups of people. Such actions prevent good communication from taking place. These actions may also hurt both the victims and the people displaying the prejudice.

Most prejudices come from a lack of knowledge about people or things that are different. For instance, if someone’s religion is different from yours, you may not understand that person’s beliefs. You can learn by asking questions and discussing the religion. Share opinions, but accept the fact that religious beliefs differ.

Racism is an extreme type of prejudice. It is the belief that one culture or race is superior to another. People who are racists are called bigots. Bigots refuse to accept any group but their own. Racism is a form of violence and can hurt many people.

Learning about beliefs and customs that are new to you can help you understand the people who follow them. Know these differences exist and welcome them. Don't let them block the lines of communication.

Mixed Messages

Many people you meet, however, will have a fixed belief that all members of a group are the same. Stereotypes may be based on a group's sex, age, race, work, locality, culture, religion, or looks.

Stereotypes develop over a long period of time. They are sometimes learned from family members and sometimes from people outside the home. The media can also reinforce stereotypes.

Stereotypes about members of a group, such as older people, block communication.

Stereotypes can arise from differences among people is stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed belief that all members of a group are the same. Stereotypes may be based on a group's sex, age, race, work, locality, culture, religion, or looks.

Stereotypes do not allow for individual differences. If people belong to certain groups, it is believed they will behave in certain ways. For instance, some people believe stereotypes such as “girls like to cook” and “boys like sports.”

As you can see, neither statement can be true for all people within these groups. Every person is different. Not all girls like to cook, nor do all boys like sports.

Stereotypes about members of a group, such as older people, block communication.

Stereotype attitudes can be hard to change. Stereotypes develop over a long period of time. They are sometimes learned from family members and sometimes from people outside the home. The media can also reinforce stereotypes.

Stereotypes are caused by a lack of understanding. They continue as long as people fail to see individual differences. Instead of forming opinions of people as members of a group, look at each person as an individual. Don’t let stereotypes get in the way of open communication.

Prejudices

Another type of communication barrier that forms as a result of differences is prejudices. Prejudices are opinions that are formed without complete knowledge. They are not based on facts. Like stereotypes, prejudices often exist about certain groups of people.

Prejudices are often negative. They can lead to negative behaviors such as name-calling. Strong prejudices may cause people to avoid certain people or groups of people. Such actions prevent good communication from taking place. These actions may also hurt both the victims and the people displaying the prejudice.

Most prejudices come from a lack of knowledge about people or things that are different. For instance, if someone’s religion is different from yours, you may not understand that person’s beliefs. You can learn by asking questions and discussing the religion. Share opinions, but accept the fact that religious beliefs differ.

Hand gestures do not have universal meaning. For people from some parts of the world, such as the Middle East, Nigeria, and Australia, the thumbs-up gesture is considered obscene. Pointing with the index finger is sometimes considered rude to people from outside the United States, especially people from Asian countries. The American “bye-bye” gesture means “come here” to people from Southeast Asia.
Learning to communicate well is a skill you will use throughout your life. You need communication skills in your personal life to express your feelings to friends and family members. You use these skills in school, too. Your reading and listening skills help you learn. Your writing and speaking skills allow your teachers to check your knowledge of subject matter.

As you get older, you will continue to use communication skills in order to know what’s going on in the world. You’ll read information in newspapers, in books, and on the Internet throughout your life. You’ll also listen to news reports on the radio and on television to keep up with local and world events.

Your future job success may depend on your ability to communicate. All jobs require some communication skills, but some careers require more than others. You may have a job as a salesperson where you must meet and talk with customers every day. You may have a job that requires good writing skills, such as that of a newspaper reporter. If you become a teacher, you will need to be able to explain information clearly to students, 4-8.

Using good communication skills can help you get along with others. Success at a job is more likely to occur if you get along well with your coworkers. Your relationships with your family members and friends are strengthened by good communication. Being able to communicate well with people is a key to a satisfying life.

Sending Clear Messages

You send hundreds of messages to dozens of people every day. Good communication occurs when these messages are sent clearly. The people receiving the messages understand what is being communicated and interpret the messages correctly. Facts, feelings, and ideas are clearly understood. You can use a number of techniques to help you send clear messages.

Think before you speak. Think about how you feel and what you want to say. You must form your thoughts in your mind before you can express them to others. If you have trouble forming your thoughts, spend more time analyzing them. Spend some time reading and researching your facts. Then you’ll be ready to share your ideas.

After you have formed your ideas clearly in your mind, you are ready to speak. Be sure you provide all the needed facts. Make your points in a clear and concise manner. Include the who, what, when, where, and why information. Keep your comments brief and to the point.

Presenting your ideas clearly is often referred to as assertive communication. Assertive communication means expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in open, honest, and respectful ways, 4-9. A person who is nonassertive may have a hard time expressing himself or herself. Passive or nonassertive communication describes speaking that is unclear or easily misunderstood. This manner of speaking fails to clearly convey the speaker’s beliefs. A nonassertive speaker uses wordy sentences, apologizes often, and puts himself or herself down.

Sometimes people express themselves in negative or aggressive ways. Aggressive communication means expressing yourself in a forceful way that may step on the rights of others. People who speak in an aggressive manner are often loud, sarcastic, or use threats. Be considerate of others’ feelings. Choose your words carefully to avoid hurting others. If you are tactful in what you say, you will not offend people. You may need to practice making tactful remarks. This communication skill will help you relate to others.

Watch your tone of voice. People are more likely to respond well to a pleasant tone of voice. For instance, if you pleasantly ask a favor of your parents, they are more likely to agree to your request. If you use a tone that sounds demanding or whining, you may receive an abrupt “No.”

Life View

Lily was making lunch for Sondra. It was Lily’s first attempt at grilling a hamburger. When she finished, Sondra could see that the burger was charred on the edges and appeared to be overcooked. Sondra’s first thought was, “Oh, it’s burned! I’m not eating that.” She knew that would hurt Lily’s feelings. It might even discourage her from cooking again. Instead, she said, “I bet it’s difficult to know when it’s done.” Lily laughed and said, “It looks like I burned it! I’ll eat this burger and try another one for you.”
Maintain eye contact. Look directly at your listeners. They will be more likely to pay attention to what you have to say. You will also seem more self-confident. You’ll appear to really know what you’re talking about. If you look at the floor or stare past your listeners, they may lose their attention. They also may feel you are not being completely honest. They may wonder if you’re afraid to look them in the eye because you’re hiding something.

Develop your conversation skills. Encourage everyone to speak. Learn to ask the kinds of questions that draw quiet people into the conversation. Ask for the opinion of a member of the group who has not spoken. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Instead, ask questions that require an explanation.

Some people worry about what to talk about in a conversation. The best topics to discuss are things you and your friends have in common. This could include favorite TV shows, favorite singers, new video games, or news events. You might talk about an upcoming school event or something that happened at school. A concern, fear, or homework assignment might be a topic to discuss. The list is endless. Avoid getting too personal unless you are close friends. If there’s a lull in the conversation, or if someone seems embarrassed, change the subject. Good conversation skills will encourage all members of a group to express their views.

Manners

One way to send clear messages and improve communication is to use good manners. Manners are rules for proper conduct. Your manners are a form of nonverbal communication. You send a message about yourself in the way you behave around others. When you use good manners, you act in a way that makes people feel comfortable. Your manners reflect your attitude toward others. Using good manners sends a message that you care about others’ feelings. This clears the way for good communication.

People judge you by your actions. Your manners are reflected through everything you do and say. Are you caring and thoughtful, or are you thoughtless and rude?

It’s easy to have good manners if you try to think of others first. If someone new joins your group of friends, introduce yourself. Make him or her feel welcome. Help someone who needs a favor. Hold the door open for the person behind you. Show respect for the possessions and property of others. Remember to say “please” and “thank you.” These are only a few of the many ways you can show courtesy for others.

Good manners are appropriate at every age. You do not have to wait until you are an adult to start practicing good manners. In fact, the sooner you learn to practice good manners, the sooner you will start sending clearer messages.

Being an Active Listener

Communication is a two-way process. Sometimes you are the sender and sometimes you are the receiver. To receive messages clearly, it helps to be an active listener. Active listening is a practice that involves the listener in the communication process. You can do this in several ways.

Restate what the speaker says. To be certain you understand the message, repeat what you thought was said. You may begin by saying, “I understood you to say . . .” or you may say, “You mean . . .” This is called feedback. It lets the speaker know whether the message was received correctly.

Let the speaker know you are listening by sending signals. This is another form of feedback. Nod your head when you agree with the speaker or shake your head if you disagree. Lean toward the speaker and maintain eye contact. If the message you receive is not clear, ask questions. Don’t be afraid to ask questions when you don’t understand. Ask the speaker to explain more fully or to clear up certain points.

If you are learning a new job, it is especially important to ask questions. You’ll be expected to perform the job as instructed. It is normal to ask questions when you’re being trained. You can then avoid mistakes later on.

Listen before answering. You may think of questions or comments while the speaker is talking. Allow the speaker to complete his or her remarks before you respond. If you’re not listening closely, you might ask a question that the speaker has just answered! That can be embarrassing.

Don’t interrupt. Allow the speaker to finish what he or she has to say. Your turn will come. It’s impolite to begin talking before the speaker has finished, 4-11. It shows you aren’t really listening.

An active listener does not interrupt the speaker before they have finished their remarks.
Resolving Conflicts

Being able to communicate well will help you get along with others. Poor communication is often the reason family members or friends get into disagreements. During an argument, one person may say, “You don’t understand!” Both people may not have communicated their thoughts and feelings clearly. Even though your family members and friends love and care about you, they are not able to read your mind. You need to convey your thoughts and feelings clearly to prevent conflicts from occurring.

Conflicts are disagreements or problems in a relationship. In spite of your best attempts at clear communication, conflicts are bound to happen. Family members and close friends will likely have conflicts because they are together so much of the time.

People think differently. They have different personalities, needs, and wants. Because of these differences, people will sometimes disagree with each other. When conflicts occur, it is how they are handled that is most important.

Use a method of resolving conflicts that will result in positive feelings. Some people may have a mediator help them solve the problem. A mediator is a person not involved in the conflict. He or she leads the parties through the steps of conflict resolution. The mediator uses negotiation to get both sides to come to an agreement.

Sometimes people involved in a conflict may be disappointed by the outcome. Even so, they find a way to solve their problem that is fair to all. In a compromise, both sides give up some of what they want in order to settle the conflict. For instance, you and a brother may be responsible for preparing the evening meal three nights a week. Neither of you likes to set the table. You could compromise by deciding that you will set the table one night and he sets it the next. You might also decide to set it together.

Compromise is a very effective way to resolve conflicts. There are often several ways to reach a compromise. Finding the one that is most agreeable requires good communication skills.

To keep hurt feelings to a minimum, avoid angry yelling and physical violence. Choose methods for resolving conflicts that allow you to maintain positive self-concepts. The following steps may help you:

- Voice your concerns. The other person needs to know what’s bothering you. Keeping silent doesn’t resolve a conflict. Angry glares and slammed doors only cause ill will. Once a problem is recognized, all concerned can discuss the issue calmly.
- Decide what the problem is. When the problem is brought out into the open, the facts become clear. Everyone can see where the disagreements lie. Stick to the problem at hand. State only the facts that relate to the current problem. Don’t bring up past mistakes.
- Listen to the other side. You need to listen to what the others involved in the conflict have to say. When resolving conflicts, it’s important to try to view things from someone else’s point of view. Respecting another point of view will go a long way toward resolving the conflict. After everyone has a chance to speak, you can move on to finding a solution.
- Suggest all possible solutions. Evaluate the suggestions and choose the best one. The details for making the solution work must be agreed to by everyone. Then the solution can be put into action.

Life View

Tyler and Elliot shared a room. Although Tyler liked keeping the room in order, Elliot wasn’t as concerned about keeping things in order. Tyler often cleaned his side of the room, but Elliot said he didn’t have time to pick up his clothes and books. Finally, Tyler became angry and called Elliot a slob. An argument began.

The boys decided they were too angry to discuss the problem, so they called their mom in to mediate. After each presented his side of the story, their mom stated the real problem. Tyler wanted the room to look neat. She asked the boys to suggest possible solutions to the problem. In the end, all three agreed that a screen might keep Elliot’s clutter out of sight.

Find the right time to resolve conflicts. Discussing a problem when other people are around is not a good idea. Suppose you see your sister and her friends walking home from school. You notice she is wearing your sweater and this upsets you. If you confront her in front of her friends, she may be embarrassed and become defensive. It would be better to wait until you get home to discuss the matter with her.

Avoid bringing up a conflict when people are busy with other activities. If your parents are getting dressed to go out, it’s not a good time to discuss your curfew. You probably will not have much success. Wait until they have time to listen and can discuss the issue with you.

Deal with issues—not personalities. Name-calling is destructive. It causes hurt feelings and resentment. It doesn’t resolve the conflict. In fact, it may make matters worse.

Don’t allow a conflict to go on without being resolved. Constant arguing without solutions can hurt relationships. Identify the particular problem. Then find a solution that everyone can agree to before the issue is pushed aside.
Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages. Having good communication skills will help you in all areas of your life.

All forms of communication can be grouped as either verbal or nonverbal. Verbal communication involves the use of words. Speaking and writing are verbal forms of communication. Nonverbal communication involves sending messages without the use of words. Your appearance, body language, and use of personal space are examples of nonverbal communication.

A number of barriers can get in the way of the communication process. Sometimes people send mixed messages or allow others' differences to interfere with the lines of communication. Learning to improve your communication skills can help you avoid these barriers. You can use a number of methods to help you send clearer messages and become an active listener. The speaker's manner of communication—assertive, nonassertive, or aggressive—will impact how well the message is conveyed.

Many conflicts arise as a result of poor communication. Improving your communication skills can help you resolve conflicts. Through communication you can learn to handle conflict in a positive way. You can reach a compromise that is agreeable to all involved in the conflict.

Communication is the key to all relationships. Knowing how to talk and listen to others is essential in establishing friendships. Paying attention to the skills you have learned in this chapter will help you in all aspects of your life.

**Review It**

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The process of sending and receiving information is called __________.
2. List four ways you send clearer messages when speaking.
3. Give three guidelines for writing clear messages.

4. Which of the following is not a form of nonverbal communication?
   A. Writing.
   B. Gestures.
   C. Eye contact.
   D. Posture.
5. Name two factors that might affect the way you react when someone enters your personal space.
6. Describe the two types of mixed messages.
7. Explain the difference between stereotypes and prejudices.
8. True or false. Communication skills can affect job success.
9. Explain the role feedback plays in active listening.
10. Explain how compromise can be used to resolve conflicts.

**Apply It**

1. Try to communicate a message to a classmate using only verbal communication. Then try to communicate a message using only nonverbal communication. Switch roles, having your partner send a verbal and a nonverbal message for you to receive. After completing this exercise, write a one-page report about your experience. Describe how easy or difficult it was to send and receive messages using only one type of communication.
2. Role-play a situation in which a person sends mixed messages. Then discuss with the class how this situation created a barrier to communication. Discuss ways to improve communication in this situation.

**Think More About It**

1. Give examples of how communication can have a positive or negative effect on people's lives.
2. If you could receive a message from one person in history, whom would it be from and what would it say?

**Get Involved**

Discuss a problem that concerns the student body of your school. Using clear communication, write a letter to the school paper addressing the issue. Apply the steps of conflict resolution to the problem to offer a possible solution.