

# Core Concepts

## Effective Communication

Being able to communicate effectively is one of the most important life skills a person can have. Think about how many times we communicate each day and in how many different ways—in both our work and personal life. Communication is the act of exchanging information and can be done vocally, written, visually and non-verbally. Good communication is when something is transmitted and received well, but effective communication allows the receiver to understand the emotion behind the information. Effective communication helps to improve your connections with others, resulting in better teamwork, decision-making and problem solving. It even allows you to communicate difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust.

Effective communication is a learned skill. It takes time and effort to learn and develop these skills so you can become an effective communicator. There are four very important skills that makes someone an effective communicator.

**Listening:** Listening is one of the most important aspects of effective communication. We spend about 45% of our time listening. To be a successful listener, you look beyond just understanding the words or information being communicated, but try to understand how the speaker feels about the message being communicated. You listen to hear the information, not to reply.

**Nonverbal Communication:** We use nonverbal signals like body language to communicate things we care about. How we look, listen, move and react to another person tells that person more about how we are feeling than any words we could use. Using open body language, like arms uncrossed or sitting on the edge of your seat, shows effective communications skills. Face-to-face communication can be more effective than email or the phone.

**Managing Stress:** When we become stressed, it can hinder effective communication by clouding our thoughts and dramatically change our response to a situation or message. Often it results in us misreading other people and we tend to send confusing nonverbal signals and have knee-jerk reactions. Acknowledging and reducing or eliminating stress can allows you to remain emotionally involved and engaged.

**Emotional Awareness:** Emotional awareness provides us with the ability to understand ourselves and others, and the real messages being communicated. Our ability to effectively communicate depends on being connected to these feelings.

### Listening

- Make the speaker feel heard and understood
- Create a safe environment
- Save time—clarify
- Relieve negative emotions

### Nonverbal Communication

- Practice observing people
- Be aware of individual differences
- Match your nonverbal signals to your words and context
- Use body language to convey positive feelings

### Managing Stress

- Recognize when you're becoming stressed
- Calm down
- Look for humor in the situation
- Be willing to compromise
- Agree to disagree

### Emotional Awareness

- Understand and empathize
- Understand yourself
- Stay motivated to understand and empathize
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Build strong, trusting relationships

*"If you just communicate, you can get by. But if you communicate skillfully, you can work miracles." — Jim Rohn*

## Barriers to Effective Communication

Sometimes no matter how hard we try to communicate something effectively it fails because the message is misunderstood or not received how it was intended. For the youth we work with, this could affect building rapport with that youth or their family or causing an unintentional delay in meeting their treatment needs. It is important to be clear and concise in our messages, and to follow-up to make sure our intended message was received. Here are common barriers to effective communication:

- Using over-complicated or unfamiliar terms
- Trying to express emotions in email or over the phone rather than face-to-face
- The receiver's lack of interest, attention or distractions
- Difference in viewpoints
- Physical disabilities (hearing or speech)
- Physical barriers (when not face-to-face)
- Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping
- Cultural differences



It is important to be aware of these barriers and try to reduce their impact when possible. This also applies to communication with your coworkers as well. Many messages are communicated amongst staff each day, most via email or phone. Make sure the receiver is getting your intended message; follow-up to be sure. We cannot be effective with the youth we serve if we cannot be effective with each other.

## The 7 C's of Communication

Instead of saying the first thing that comes to your mind, focus on the meaning of what you want to communicate. You want to make sure the receiver understand your intended message. The Management Study Guide, 2013, provides us with The Seven C's of communication to achieve effective communication:

1. Completeness— the communication must be complete, include all relevant facts
2. Conciseness— communicate your message in the least possible words, don't be repetitive
3. Consideration— take your audience in consideration when creating your communication (view-point, mind-set)
4. Clarity—be clear about your goal or message and reason for communicating
5. Concreteness— be specific, not general in your message, harder to misinterpret
6. Courtesy— the message should be sincere, polite, reflective and enthusiastic, show respect for the receiver
7. Correctness— check for precision and accurateness (in both grammar and facts)



## Did you know...?

The WI DOC offers several online courses on communication through the Training Center, including *Interpersonal Communication: Communicating with Confidence* and *Listening Essentials: The Basics of Listening*.

### More resources:

Skills You Need. <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/communication-skills.html>

Lawrence Robinson, Jeanne Segal, Ph. D., and Robert Segal, M.A. Helpguide.org. Last updated: December 2014. <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/effective-communication.htm>

Management Study Guide, 2013. <http://www.managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm>

## For more information...

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