



Communicating Face-to-Face: Sending and Receiving Messages

When you are SENDING a message, remember the following:

Nonverbal Communication includes...

- **Facial expressions** (your face can convey a very wide range of emotions)
- **Gestures** (Guarded? Threatening? Open? Respectful? Congruent with words used? etc.)
- **Posture** (Slouched? Upright? Stiff? Confident? Closed? Open? etc.)
- **Eye contact** (Too intense? Flirtatious? Intimidating? Lacking? etc.)
- **Tone and volume of voice** (Too loud? Too soft? Sarcastic? Genuine? etc.)
- **Rate and flow of speech** (Too fast? Too slow? Erratic and halting?)
- **Punctuality and attention to time** (arriving and ending on time vs. showing up late or running too long)
- **Amount of attention devoted to hygiene, make-up, hairstyle, and grooming** (Too much? Not enough?)
- **Choices about clothing** (formal, informal, provocative, conservative, etc.)
- **Where or if you choose to sit down**
- **Where or if you offer another person a seat**
- **Level of attention or distraction you demonstrate in conversation**
- **How you behave while you are listening**
- **How long you wait to respond to the other person's comments before speaking**
- **Physical contact** (choosing to hug, kiss, shake hands, etc.)
- **Observing others' physical space** (Too close? Too far away?)

Nonverbal communication reflects the speaker's underlying attitude and beliefs. The "7-38-55 Rule" says that 7% of communication is the actual words spoken, 38% is the tone of voice, and 55% is the body language. If there is a mismatch between the nonverbal and the verbal parts of a speaker's message, most people will ignore the verbal and read the nonverbal message.

Verbal Communication includes...

- **Choice of words** (Too careful? Too bold? Disrespectful? etc.)
- **Vocabulary** (good vs. poor command of the language, accurate/appropriate terms, etc.)
- **Formality vs. informality** (use of slang, jargon, acronyms, etc.)
- **Grammar** (clarity of message, packing of ideas)
- **Amount of speech** (Too little? Too much?)

Verbal communication is more effective when feelings are expressed directly. It is best to avoid starting sentences with the word "you" as people tend to get defensive and feel attacked; instead, stick with "I messages" (e.g., "I thought you said..." or "I feel..." rather than, "You said" or "You need to"). Refrain from drama, sarcasm, and hurtful words. Stay aware from words like "always" and "never." Speak clearly.

When you are RECEIVING a message, remember the following:

These are some common mistakes made by listeners...

- Offering solutions to problems before the speaker has asked you to do so (sometimes it is enough just to listen and offer support and validation)
- Correcting the speaker or trying to convince them that they are wrong
- Judging or disapproving of the speaker's emotional experience by suggesting different, "better" ways to feel about a difficult circumstance
- Interrogating and asking too many fact-finding questions, derailing the speaker's momentum in telling the story
- Assuming the speaker would like to hear about your own experience with similar issues before the speaker has asked you to share anything other than your time and attention as a listener
- Teaching a skill or strategy when the other person has not asked you to play the role of expert

Empathic, reflective listening tends to be more effective...

- Give the speaker your undivided attention, noting both their verbal and nonverbal messages; your goal is to understand how the situation feels from their perspective.
- At natural pauses in the speaker's story, it can be helpful to summarize and paraphrase your understanding of the speaker's message so far. Do so in your own words to indicate that you are following along; then encourage them to continue. Avoid mind-reading - clarify and confirm their message.
- Respectfully note mismatches between the speaker's verbal and nonverbal communication. If you are confused about the message, ask for clarification.
- If you misunderstand as a listener, apologize and express your intention to follow along more closely. If you are still confused, respectfully encourage the speaker to try a different strategy to express their thoughts and feelings.
- If the speaker seems to lose their train of thought, help them regain it by recalling the previous points they have made most recently.
- If the speaker seems to struggle to put words to a feeling, describe the emotions you believe you are observing in their nonverbal communication.
- Be warm and peaceful - use respectful eye contact, smiles, and relaxed facial muscles.
- Stay in the moment, be fully present.
- During difficult conversations or arguments, practice positive self-talk if you find that it is difficult for you to listen to the other person's message without feeling defensive (e.g., "I love this person. We will get through this. Stay calm. It is just an argument.").
- Offer potential solutions or strategies and share from personal experience only when the speaker has asked you to do so. Present your ideas as options, not commands or expectations. Help them make decisions that feel right to them.



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