



**Workshop Description:** This workshop supports youth program staff in developing and practicing effective communication skills in youth program settings. Successful implementation of this workshop will ultimately help youth program staff to reflect on how they support youth's communication skills and how they use communication to further support the positive development of youth within the program.

This workshop guide will ask participants to examine and reflect on their communication strategies to better assist youth in their development. This workshop guide and all others within the Effective Communication series are intended to build skills in youth program staff that help address maladaptive behavior and better assist youth in their development.

**Preparation Time:** The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Effective Communication and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

**Instruction Time:** It will take approximately 2 hours to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, use only the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe, or split the workshop into multiple sessions. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

**Materials:**

- Printed copies of the Handout: *Core Principles of Active Listening*
- Printed copies of the Handout: *17 Body Language Examples and What They Show* (one for each small group)
- Small, blank pieces of paper to use in the Practice Active Listening activity
- Writing utensils for each participant
- Set of markers for each small group
- Flip chart paper, whiteboard, or laptop and projector

**Preparation Instructions:** You should read the content related to this topic on the Effective Communication and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to Effective Communication Strategy: Active Listening. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Effective Communication*
2. *Effective Communication and Youth Development Factors*
3. *Effective Communication Strategy: Active Listening*
4. *Effective Communication Strategy: Clear Expectations and Direction*
5. *Understanding Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing*
6. *Understanding Change Talk*
7. *Motivational Interviewing Strategies*
8. *Practicing Motivational Interviewing*



## **Knowledge: Understanding Effective Communication and Receptive Skills – Active Listening**

### **Why Effective Communication Skills Are Important**

Although most of the research related to the impact of effective communication has focused on addressing individuals with communication issues or impairments, in particular looking at the communication between parents and their children or peer to peer communication, there are some indications that effective communication between an adult and youth or between two youth can have a positive impact on individuals.<sup>76, 77, 78, 79</sup> Examples include decreased use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs and increased responsible sexual behaviors.<sup>80, 81, 82, 25</sup> It isn't hard to imagine that staff modeling and delivering programs that support effective communication within a youth program will reinforce these skills and further support these positive behaviors. Consider how teaching a young person effective communication can bear fruit when talking to their friends and parents.

### **Outcomes of Effective Communication**

#### **Parent-Youth Communication**

- Increases responsible sexual behaviors<sup>80, 82</sup>
- Diminishes alcohol use<sup>81</sup>
- Diminishes tobacco use<sup>25</sup>
- Diminishes illegal drug use<sup>25</sup>
- Supports better interpersonal competence<sup>83</sup>
- Diminishes mental health symptoms resulting from bullying<sup>84</sup>

#### **Youth-Youth Communication**

- Increases feelings of inclusion<sup>66</sup>
- Increases sense of having more friends<sup>66</sup>
- May address some effects of online and electronic communication on self-esteem<sup>89</sup>

### **Strategies to Communicate Effectively With Youth**

Effective communication is the result of using a large set of skills both to communicate (express) ideas and to understand (receive) ideas. These skills include the usual things we think of when we talk about communication. Spoken and written words, listening, body language, etc., but also include skills that are more complicated and lesser known and understood. Take for example painting or music as a skill to communicate or the ability to communicate empathy by using empathetic listening skills. Both are important tools for individuals to express and receive ideas.<sup>90</sup>

Being able to effectively communicate becomes more important as youth grow. Youth will need communication skills as they spend less time with parents and immediate family members and more time with peers and other nonfamily adults (i.e., youth program staff, teachers, etc.). The ability to effectively communicate is an important component of healthy relationships. Youth programs give youth an opportunity to practice and internalize the communication skills they learned at home and to learn new skills that may be more useful and productive in producing positive, healthy relationships.

Effective communication skills can be put into two categories: those that are expressive and those that are receptive. Expressive skills are those that can be used to send a message. Receptive skills are those that allow an individual to understand the communication. Within each of these categories, there are



many separate skills.<sup>94,95</sup> For youth program staff, *Active Listening* is a useful receptive skill to use when working with youth in programs.

### Strategy - Active Listening

Active listening is an important skill within the wide range of skills that encompass effective communication. It plays an important part in social and emotional learning and in the development of healthy relationships.<sup>96,97</sup> Defined as “the capacity to attend to others both verbally and non-verbally to demonstrate to them that they have been understood,”<sup>96</sup> active listening is a person’s ability to both receive the messages and ideas a speaker is communicating and at the same time reassure the speaker that they (the listener) understand the message.

You may have heard of some of these active listening techniques: good eye contact, open body language, paraphrasing, clarifying questions, affirming comments, etc.<sup>98,99,100</sup> These techniques help communicate respect, an important component of developing supportive adult-youth relationships.<sup>97,102</sup> Active listening can also support a sense of efficacy and mattering by promoting youth’s involvement and sense of having their input taken seriously.<sup>101</sup> Active listening is a necessary skill to practice and attempt to master in any youth program.

### Objectives:

- Understand elements of active listening
- Learn how to employ elements of active listening to improve staff’s ability to effectively communicate
- Learn how to employ elements of active listening to improve youth’s ability to effectively communicate

### Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe active listening and how it relates to effective communication.
  - What to say: “Today we are going to talk about active listening. Specifically, its role as an effective communication tool and how you can use it with youth to improve adult-youth relationships and youth’s sense of self-efficacy and mattering.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
  - What to say: “To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of active listening.”

### Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Give the participants a definition of active listening from the Knowledge portion of this workshop outline.
- Ask the participants if they have anything to add to the definition of active listening you have given. Refer to the background information provided for you to jumpstart the conversation. Record these responses where participants can see.
- Ask the participants if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to active listening or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.



**Activities:**

**Activity: *Understanding Active Listening* (15 minutes)**

- Describe the *Understanding Active Listening* activity:
  - What to say: “We’re going to learn about active listening and a helpful acronym to remember the specific skills of active listening.”
- Lead the *Understanding Active Listening* activity:
  - Watch the Ted Talk by Julian Treasure titled “5 ways to listen better”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSohjYQI2A>
  - On a flip chart, whiteboard, or laptop and projector, write out the acronym RASA.
    - Instructor Note: RASA stands for receive, appreciate, summarize, and ask.
  - Ask the participants to brainstorm examples of how they can demonstrate “receiving” and “appreciation.”
  - Provide several copies of the Handout: *Core Principles of Active Listening* to facilitate the brainstorming. For example, suggest that good eye contact indicates you are receiving and that paraphrasing might be an example of appreciation.
  - Discuss as a group what each of the techniques from the handout mean and how they demonstrate receiving and appreciation.
  - Instruct the participants to pair up and discuss a situation, either in the youth program or from personal experience, where receiving and appreciation techniques were demonstrated.
  - Ask the participants to select one skill from the handout to demonstrate for the rest of the group using the situation or scenario as the example. Have the other participants try to guess which of the techniques they used (i.e., Physical Attention, Paraphrasing, Reflecting, Clarifying, or Encouraging).

**Activity: *Elements of Active Listening (Focusing or Receiving)* (15 minutes)**

- Describe the *Focusing or Receiving* activity:
  - What to say: “In this activity we are going to brainstorm ways that we can be present, focus, and receive messages when we are practicing active listening. Being present and focusing allow us to listen with our ears, eyes, mouth, face, mind, heart, and whole body. The goal of this activity is to help us think about the different ways we can listen to what a person says.”
- Lead the *Focusing or Receiving* activity:
  - Divide the participants into small groups of three or four individuals and provide each group with a large piece of paper and a set of markers.
  - Ask the groups to draw an image of a person on the paper and then describe what they think it means to listen with their ears, eyes, face, mind, and body.
  - It is ok for groups to have more than one response for each aspect of listening.
  - Ask each group to share what they think it means to listen with their ears. Then ask each group to share what they think it means to listen with their eyes, etc., until all aspects of listening have been covered.
  - Cover these possible responses if one of the groups does not mention them:



- Face: Face the person fully, expression reflects the situation, expression reflects acceptance (no judgement)
- Mouth: Be silent, do not interrupt, acknowledge receipt response
- Eyes and Face: Demonstrate complete concentration
- Eyes: Watch for nonverbal cues
- Heart and Body: Listen to your own emotion and intuition (What does it feel like? What does your gut say?)
- Mind: Be inquisitive; watch, listen to, and wonder about what they are saying. Do not jump to conclusions or judge. Think about the message beyond the message (saying one thing but conveying something else; i.e., I'm important, I feel bad, etc.)
- Lead a discussion about strategies for focusing and receiving in a youth center. Ask questions to frame the discussion:
  - What makes it difficult to be focused and open and to really listen to youth during programs and activities?
  - What are some successful strategies you have used when you need to fully focus on youth and there are distractions or interruptions all around you?
- Cover these possible responses if one of the participants does not mention them:
  - Put aside distracting thoughts.
  - Practice focusing by repeating the speaker's words in your mind as they speak.
  - Ignore distractions.
  - If other youth or program staff try to engage during the conversation, excuse yourself and consider moving to another part of the room to continue.
  - Do not prepare a rebuttal or a solution. Engaging with youth doesn't mean solving their problems but rather that you help them find solutions for themselves. Further details about youth program staff verbal responses can be found in the workshop on Inquiry.
  - Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
  - Allow for silence.
  - Don't interrupt with counterarguments. Sometimes the message the speaker is trying to convey is emotionally charged, and sometimes they may bring up strong emotions in you. If you find yourself responding with a strong emotion, say so, but also ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I think you just said is.... Is that what you meant?"

**Activity: Elements of Active Listening (Body Language) (25-30 minutes)**

- Before leading the activity, generate a few scenarios that may happen at a youth program. Each scenario should have two roles and specify the general attitude or mood that each role should portray. Ideally, each of the body language examples from the Handout: *17 Body Language Examples and What They Show* should be included. Write them on small pieces of paper.
- Describe the *Body Language* activity:



- What to say: “In this activity, you’ll learn more about body language, which is the unspoken part of communication. Through this activity, you will get better at detecting others’ body language and understanding the true feelings and emotions behind them.”
- Lead the *Body Language* activity:
  - Give each participant a copy of the Handout: *17 Body Language Examples and What They Show* for participants to read on their own.
  - Instruct the participants to pair up and ask a representative from each pair to choose a slip of paper with the scenarios you generated before the activity.
  - What to say: “Given the scene that you have picked up, use the handout to help you act it out. When you are the guesser, take notes on the actor’s facial expressions, posture, etc., to help you guess what the scene was about.”
  - After everyone has finished practicing, invite each group to come to the front for their act. Then lead a short discussion on what body language examples are present in the scene and what the scene depicted.

**Activity: Practice Active Listening (20 minutes)**

- Describe the *Practice Active Listening* activity:
  - What to say: “Now, we are going to put the basics of active listening to practice and do an activity to demonstrate our knowledge.”
- Lead the *Practice Active Listening* activity:
  - Begin by asking the large group to list active listening skills (eye contact, affirmation, etc.) while you write each skill on a small piece of paper and tape each one to a whiteboard or flip chart paper.
    - Instructor Note: Brainstorm enough skills so every group can each have two skills.
  - Next, write the categories “Verbal” and “Nonverbal” where participants can see them. As a large group, categorize each skill into either the verbal active listening skill or nonverbal active listening skill category.
  - Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four, and ask each group to choose someone to come forward and choose two of the slips of paper with skills written on them. Each group should have one skill from the verbal category and one from the nonverbal category.
  - Instruct each group to make up a scenario that uses both the skills they selected. Let the groups know they will have 5 minutes to create the scenario before acting it out for another small group.
  - After 5 minutes, have the small groups pair up and watch each other’s skits. Groups should try to guess which skills are being acted out in the skits.
  - Once all groups have performed their skits, bring the larger group together and debrief.
    - Instructor Note: Use these questions to lead a brief discussion about the activity and what they learned.
      - Which skills were hard to perform?
      - Which skills were easy to act out?
      - Which skills do you (the participants) think you need to improve on?



**Activity: *Putting It All Together* (15 minutes)**

- Describe the *Putting It All Together* activity:
  - What to say: “We’re going to do an exercise that will take what we have learned and help us improve our conversation and active listening skills.”
- Lead the *Putting It All Together* activity:
  - Divide the staff into small groups of four, and then have the groups split into pairs of two.
  - Ask the groups to choose one pair to have a conversation about a given topic, and ask the other pair in the group to videotape the discussion with their phones.
    - Limit the discussion time to 2 minutes, then switch.
  - Once both pairs have had their conversations recorded, provide the groups with another copy of the Handout: *Core Principles of Active Listening* to the participants and have them evaluate their active listening skills according to the video of their conversation.
  - Once everyone is done reviewing their videos, ask them to review each other’s videos and provide feedback.
    - Instructor Note: Use these questions to lead a brief discussion about the activity and what participants learned.
      - What did you learn about your communication skills?
      - What did you learn about your active listening skills?
      - What did the video tell you about how you could improve your communication skills?
      - What did you learn about your skills when your group members gave you feedback?
      - Were their observations the same as your observations?
      - How were they different?
      - Why do you think that is the case?

**Activity: *Using Active Listening With Youth* (20 minutes)**

- Describe the *Using Active Listening With Youth* activity:
  - What to say: “We’re going to practice observing how others use active listening, providing feedback, and applying this to helping youth effectively communicate.”
- Lead the *Using Active Listening With Youth* activity:
  - Divide the group into groups of three, and assign each person one of three roles: the subject, the active listener, and the observer.
  - To begin the activity, each group should set up the question or problem, and this question or problem will be what each subject will explore and reflect upon.
    - Instructor Note: If the participants are stuck on what problem to discuss, you can suggest they choose a decision they have to make or a challenge in their families.
  - Give participants the following instructions:



## Effective Communication Workshop

### Effective Communication Strategy: Active Listening

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- The subject's role is to explore the question or problem from their personal perspective. They should allow the focus to be on them and let their reflections flow naturally, being guided by the active listener.
  - The active listener's role is to listen with full presence and focus. Listeners should listen attentively to the subject with their whole body, keeping in mind their facial expressions and posture. They should ask open-ended questions, paraphrase, summarize, and show empathy, but not offer advice.
  - The observer's role is to observe the process without speaking. They should take notes on what they see and hear as well as which active listening skill would have been better in which situation. At the end, they should be prepared to share their observations with the others.
- Repeat this activity so that everyone gets to be the observer.
    - Instructor Note: Remind each group to spend enough time for the observer to share their observations.
  - Afterward, come back to the larger group and ask for volunteers to speak about the areas of active listening they can improve on. Encourage participants to think about how they can apply this activity, especially the role of the observer, to improving youth's ability to effectively communicate.

#### Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the participants' responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the participants what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as "What part of the activity made you realize that?" and "How could you use these strategies with youth?"

#### Resources:

Handout: *Core Principles of Active Listening*

Handout: *17 Body Language Examples and What They Show*

#### Sources:

Global Peacebuilding Center, United States Institute of Peace. (n.d.). *Handout: Core principles of active listening*. Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/public-education/educators/what-active-listening>

Guilbeault, L. (2020, May 11). *22 body language examples and what they show*. Retrieved from <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/body-language/22-body-language-examples-and-what-they-show/>

The University of Minnesota REACH Center. (n.d.). *Emotion regulation workshop: Understanding and practicing active listening*. Retrieved from [https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/ext/emotion\\_regulation/pdf/04bWorkshop\\_ActiveListening.pdf](https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/ext/emotion_regulation/pdf/04bWorkshop_ActiveListening.pdf)



## Effective Communication Handout

### Core Principles of Active Listening

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**Directions:** Use this handout to help you brainstorm ways you can demonstrate “receiving” or “appreciation.”

1. Physical Attention
  - a. Face the speaker and give him or her your undivided attention
  - b. Notice the speaker’s body language: Does it match his or her words?
  - c. Watch your own body language: feet pointing towards the speaker, open posture, facial expressions, etc.
2. Paraphrasing
  - a. Restate basic ideas and facts in your own words to show you are listening and understanding what’s being said
  - b. Use this to make sure your understanding is accurate
  - c. Start with “It sounds like you’re saying.... Is that correct?” or “I’m hearing that...”
3. Reflecting
  - a. Reflect the speaker’s feelings to show empathy
  - b. Help the speaker evaluate his or her feelings after hearing them expressed by another person
  - c. Start with “It sounds like you feel...” or “It must be [insert feeling]”
4. Clarifying
  - a. Help the speaker to see other perspectives
  - b. Elicit more information about the situation or event by asking open-ended questions with a tone of voice that conveys interest
5. Encouraging
  - a. Demonstrate interest by asking “Can you tell me more?” or “Is that so?”

Source: the Global Peacebuilding Center, United States Institute of Peace



Body language is a form of nonverbal communication that can add emphasis or alter the meaning of our verbal language. Body language is powerful and reliable, so it is important to understand it to ensure you are sending the right message to youth when you speak to them. Understanding body language will also help program staff understand the nonverbal cues youth may send them during conversations.

### **Body Language Examples**

1. Arms crossed across the chest

Whether sitting or standing, arms crossed across the chest is seen as defensive. The person might be closed off, angry, stubborn, disengaged, or tired (supporting the shoulders in an armless chair).

2. Smile

There are different types of smiles: happy, shy, warm, and ironic. A genuine smile should consist of pulling up the corners of your mouth while squeezing your eyes to make crow's-feet. Displaying a genuine smile can signal to others that you are approachable and friendly.

3. Tapping fingers

This can signal impatience and possibly nervousness about waiting.

4. Tilting head to one side

This shows that someone is listening intently and deeply interested in what you are saying and that they are concentrating very hard.

5. The hand steeple

Steepling your fingers conveys authority and control. Bosses and politicians use this gesture often to demonstrate they are in charge.

6. Crossing legs

Where the legs are crossed can convey different messages. Crossing at the ankle might imply that a person feels something is withheld from them. Crossed at the knee might imply the person is uncomfortable with you.

7. Pulling ear

Ear tugging can make a person seem indecisive or noncommittal when making a decision.

8. Putting head in hands

This could signal boredom or feeling weary of life. It could also indicate that someone is upset or feeling too ashamed to show their face.

9. Standing up straight

A good posture indicates confidence.

10. Rubbing hands together

When someone rubs their hands together vigorously, it shows how excited they are about the topic.



11. Twisting hair

When a person twists their hair, it could be a signal they are flirting, but it also may show nervousness and discomfort.

12. Microexpressions

Microexpressions are brief facial expressions that happen when someone is trying to hold back their emotions. It usually means that they are trying to conceal something from you.

13. Placing hand on cheek

Indicates the person is thinking and carefully evaluating the information they are hearing or reading.

14. Rubbing eye

When you see someone rub their eye as you speak, it might indicate that they doubt what you are saying. You might want to consider asking for their feedback to address their doubts.

15. Rubbing or touching nose

When a person rubs or touches their nose, it may indicate that they are being dishonest.

16. Pinching the bridge of the nose

This gesture can indicate a negative evaluation of what's happening in the conversation.

17. Standing with hands on hips

This pose could mean the person is angry and might behave aggressively, or it could simply indicate how enthusiastic they are to get things done.

Learning examples of body language is the first step to sending the right body language messages and understanding unspoken messages from others. However, each person's body language could have a slightly different meanings. These examples can only guide you so far.

Source: Guilbeault, L. (2020, May 11). *22 body language examples and what they show*. Retrieved from <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/body-language/22-body-language-examples-and-what-they-show/>