



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 1.5 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:

- Instructional Aid: *Developing Youth Program Expectations*
- Printed copies of your youth program’s behavior expectations and youth program rules
- Copies of Handout: *Expectations and Rules Scenario* (one for small groups of three to four)
- Projector or video display to watch the video *Giving Clear Directions*
- Paper and writing utensils for each participant
- 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: Clear Expectations and Direction. 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:

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



Knowledge: Understanding Effective Communication and Expressive Skills – Clear Expectations and Directions

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.^{76, 77, 78, 79} Examples include decreased use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs and increased responsible sexual behaviors.^{80, 81, 82, 25} 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^{80, 82}
- Diminishes alcohol use⁸¹
- Diminishes tobacco use²⁵
- Diminishes illegal drug use²⁵
- Supports better interpersonal competence⁸³
- Diminishes mental health symptoms resulting from bullying⁸⁴

Youth-Youth Communication

- Increases feelings of inclusion⁶⁶
- Increases sense of having more friends⁶⁶
- May address some effects of online and electronic communication on self-esteem⁸⁹

Strategies to Communicate Effectively With Youth

Effective communication is the result of using a large set of skills 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 communication can 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.⁹⁰

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 and youth programs give youth an opportunity to practice and internalize the communication skills they learned at home and learn new skills that may be 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.^{94, 95} For youth program staff giving *Clear Directions and Expectations* is a useful expressive skill to use when working with youth in programs.

Strategy – Clear Expectations and Direction

Setting clear expectations and giving clear directions are important skills within the wide-range of skills that encompass effective communication. Youth program staff who can give clear directions and set clear expectations generally use three skills: highlighting important aspects of content, using relevant and easy to understand examples to explain content, and recognizing and responding to confusion and problems youth may have understanding content.

Youth program staff who are effective in these skills use concrete language and are able to adjust how they deliver messages. They recognize that delivering messages verbally may not be the most effective and that they may need to reinforce messages through alternative means. Examples of alternative means of communication include writing out directions (visual), discussing the plan as a group (social), showing a video (visual), physical activity (physical), or some combination of activities that tap into various learning styles.¹⁰³

Being able to adjust the message to the individual youth or groups of youth helps make sure the directions and expectations for the activity and larger program are understood and will make delivery of the program easier.¹⁰⁴ Additional benefits of using these skills include more opportunities for positive experiences, development of supportive adult-youth relationships,¹⁰⁶ and a common understanding of the consequences for misbehavior.^{105, 107}

As in all communication, it is important to understand how messages regarding direction and expectations from youth program staff may be received by youth. Acknowledging roles within the adult-youth relationship is one way to acknowledge the power individuals have in these relationships. Adults and youth can work together to find ways to balance this power and give youth an active voice in setting boundaries, rules, and consequences. How adults communicate in any form should be considered. Youth program staff should understand how to deliver feedback in a constructive, power-balancing manner. Specifically, language about incompetence or inferiority should be avoided. Consider this example: A pair of youth horsing around in one of the activity rooms knock over some other participant's artwork and damage it. A nonconstructive and power-emphasizing response would be to say, "I told you to knock it off. When will you start listening to me?" Instead, constructive and power-balancing feedback focuses on context and strengths. A more constructive response to the example might be, "We agreed there are places for wrestling. Do you remember what you both decided would be the consequences for this situation?"⁹⁷ Youth program staff have a challenge to both balance their power and give power to youth while still providing structure and support that meet the needs of the youth and promote positive youth development.

Objectives:

- Understand elements of clear expectations and direction
- Learn how to employ elements of clear expectations and direction to improve staff's ability to effectively communicate
- Learn how to employ elements of clear expectations and direction to support youth's positive development



Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe clear expectations and direction and how it relates to effective communication.
 - What to say: “Today we are going to talk about what clear expectations and direction are. Communicating clear expectations and direction involves three skills: highlighting important aspects of content, using examples to explain content, and assessing and responding to misunderstandings or difficulties with content comprehension. Utilizing these skills requires using clear and concrete language and considering alternative modes of delivery.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: “To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of clear expectations and direction.”

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

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

Activities:

Activity: *Understanding Clear Expectations and Direction* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Understanding Clear Expectations and Direction* activity:
 - What to say: “We’re going to learn about the elements of clear expectations and direction. First, you will discuss a time when you experienced a lack of clear expectations and direction so you can empathize with the youth when they face the same situation. For the remainder of the activity, you will dig deeper into what it means to give clear expectations and direction and how it applies to youth.”
- Lead the *Understanding Clear Expectations and Direction* activity:
 - Divide the participants into small groups (group size depends on the number of participants present), and allow 5 to 10 minutes to discuss a time when they weren’t given clear expectations or direction.
 - As a large group, ask for volunteers to share their experiences.
 - Next, provide each participant with a piece of paper and a writing utensil to brainstorm elements of clear expectations and direction.
 - Provide each small group with a marker and a large sheet of white paper.
 - Instruct the participants to share their lists in their small groups, and designate one person to write down the main points.
 - Instructor Note: If participants are stuck, suggest the following:
 - Clear expectations should be reasonable, understandable, consistent with instructional goals, consistent with program expectations, etc.



Refer to the Instructional Aid: *Developing Youth Program Expectations* for more information.

- Clear direction should highlight important aspects of the participant’s steps during the activity, use examples to explain content, and assess and respond to misunderstandings or difficulties.
- As a large group, lead a discussion on some repeated elements of clear expectations and direction across small groups.
- Write down the repeated points for clear expectations and direction in two separate columns in a place where all participants can see. Ask the participants to share how youth would respond if the points were met in giving clear expectations and direction.

Activity: Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 1 (30 minutes)

- Describe the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 1* activity:
 - What to say: “In this activity, you’ll learn the difference between expectations and rules. You will also gain a better understanding of what expectations are and how they are distinct from rules.”
- Lead the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 1* activity:
 - In a large group, ask participants to define expectations and rules.

Instructor Note:

- Tips for the definition of expectations:
 - Broad goals for behavior or the general ways that youth program staff would like youth to act
 - Serve as guidelines for behavior and apply to both the adults and youth in the program
 - Should be developed in cooperation between program management, youth program staff, and youth in the program
 - Should be used as a framework for helping program staff and youth establish rules for participation
- Tips for the definition of rules:
 - Can and should be customized to specific activities and adjusted as needed through joint agreement between youth and program staff
 - Should remain within the broader definition of the expectations
 - Should be concrete, measurable, and consequential (i.e., targeted to make expectations observable)
- Hand out copies of your program’s behavior expectations and youth program rules to each participant.
- Lead a discussion on how youth program rules support specific behavior expectations.
- Divide the participants into three groups, provide each group a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Write some behavior expectations (i.e., be safe, be responsible, and be respectful) for the participants to use as guidelines.
- What to say: “Let’s practice writing out rules based on the expectations in three different settings: computer lab, gym, and common space in the youth center. Please



write at least two rules for each setting. Once you are finished, we will reconvene and guess which rules match which behavior expectation.”

- Instructor Note: Use your program’s rules to help participants if they’re stuck. If there are no copies, use the Instructional Aid: *Example Rules* to give the group some ideas.
- Let the groups work while you monitor their progress. Once all groups are finished writing rules for each setting, reconvene as a large group and ask for one volunteer from each small group to read one rule from each setting. Instruct the volunteer from each group to read and the rest of the participants to guess.
 - Instructor Note: If the behavior expectation was guessed incorrectly, address the discrepancy, and lead a discussion on how they can improve their rules.
 - Instructor Note: Remind the participants to remember the role that culture plays in behavior when they establish classroom expectations, and stress the importance of working with youth and checking in with them on their understanding and assessment of the expectations and rules.

Activity: Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 2 (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 2* activity:
 - What to say: “In this activity, we will dive deeper into setting clear expectations by practicing setting expectations from a given scenario.”
- Lead the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 2* activity:
 - In a place where all participants can see, write the following questions:
 - What should be the goal of developing expectations?
 - Instructor Note: If the participants struggle, the following are two good goals you might suggest:
 - To increase youth’s commitment to altering an unhealthy norm observed in the program
 - To involve the youth in the planning and implementation of the change process. Remind the participants to consider discussing with youth the rationale for the change and the process needed to achieve it
 - What happens when youth meet the expectations?
 - What happens when youth do not meet the expectations?
 - How do you offer feedback to youth who meet or miss the expectations?
 - Divide participants into small groups, give each group a copy of the Handout: *Expectations and Rules Scenario*. Instruct the participants to read the scenario and describe how Mr. Washington can change the established norms, set up new expectations, and support consistent enforcement of expectations. Instruct the group to keep in mind the questions posed earlier.
 - As a large group, ask for each group to share their expectations, and discuss which group had the clearest expectations.



Activity: *Understanding and Practicing Clear Direction* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Direction* activity:
 - What to say: “In this activity, we’ll watch a video on elements of giving clear direction and discuss how employing these elements can support positive youth development.”
- Lead the *Understanding and Practicing Clear Direction* activity:
 - As a large group, watch the “Giving Clear Directions” video:
<https://www.matchminis.org/videos/for-teachers/38/giving-clear-directions/>
 - Instruct the participants to pair up or form groups of three, and discuss how giving clear directions supported the students’ positive development in the video.
 - In particular, have the groups identify what was avoided and how “narrative compliance” (publicly state it when students are following directions) could encourage positive behaviors.
 - Divide participants into groups of three or four, and provide each group with a topic, such as “Giving directions for youth in the cafeteria,” “Explaining an activity,” etc. Depending on the number of participants, double up the scenarios. Instruct each group to write a script using the acronym “SO CAVEMAN.”
 - Instructor Note: SO CAVEMAN is an acronym described in the video to help remember effective ways to give directions.
 - S – Steps
 - O – Observable
 - C – Check understanding
 - A – Attention
 - V – Visuals
 - E – Economical
 - M – Magic word
 - A – Address misunderstandings
 - N – Narrate compliance
 - Come back to the larger group, ask for one volunteer from each group to narrate the script and encourage all participants to provide constructive criticism.

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:

Instructional Aid: *Developing Youth Program Expectations*

Instructional Aid: *Example Rules*

Handout: *Expectations and Rules Scenario*



Sources:

Matchminis. (n.d.). *Giving clear directions* [Online video file]. Available from

<https://www.matchminis.org/videos/for-teachers/38/giving-clear-directions/>

Evertson, C., Poole, I., & the IRIS Center. (2003). *Establishing classroom norms and expectations*.

Retrieved from http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_case_studies/ics_norms.pdf

The IRIS Center. (n.d.). *How can teachers help young children learn expected behaviors: Page 2:*

Understanding behavior expectations and rules.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ecbm/cresource/q1/p02/>

ProjectIDEAL. (n.d.). *Developing classroom expectations: What are the expectations for how the students and teacher treat each other?* <http://www.projectidealonline.org/v/developing-classroom-expectations/>



Directions: Use this Instructional Aid to facilitate a discussion about setting clear expectations.

Research indicates that expectations should be developed with youth rather than forced on them, since this develops a sense of ownership and encourages youth to meet their own expectations. Consider asking the following questions when developing expectations:

- What are some reasons for setting expectations?
- How might expectations at a youth program differ between an indoor and outdoor activity?
- How should youth be involved in the process of setting expectations?
Think of interesting and creative ways to include them.
- Think of a time when the youth program seemed well-managed.
What characteristics did you observe?
- Too many or not enough expectations can take the focus away from a program dedicated to positive youth development.
How can you create balance?
- What are some ways to help youth remember the expectations besides posting them?
- What expectations are appropriate for the youth being served in the program?

There are five principles for planning expectations:

1. Expectations are reasonable and necessary.
2. Expectations are clear and understandable.
3. Expectations are consistent with program and activity goals
4. Expectations are consistent with what is known about how people learn.
5. Expectations in each activity are consistent with program expectations.

When you establish reasonable expectations in cooperation with youth, provide an understandable rationale, and enforce the expectations consistently, you will find that youth are willing to follow them.

Adapted from ProjectIDEAL. (n.d.). *Developing classroom expectations: What are the expectations for how the students and teacher treat each other?* <http://www.projectidealonline.org/v/developing-classroom-expectations/>



Effective Communication Instructional Aid
Example Rules

Directions: Use this Instructional Aid to help lead the activity *Understanding and Practicing Clear Expectations – Part 1*.

Behavior Expectation	Computer Lab Rules	Gym Rules	Youth Center Rules
Be safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never share personal, identifying information • Don't share your password • Don't follow clickbait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear the right clothes for the activity • Gym equipment is not allowed in the snack bar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign in and sign out • No fighting • No bullying
Be responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow directions • Use quiet voices in the lab • Don't install software in the lab without staff help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take care of the equipment and facility • Report damaged equipment to staff • Put equipment away clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside food is not allowed • Check out and check in equipment
Be respectful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign in and sign out • No food or drink in the lab 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be courteous and respectful to others in the gym • Take turns with the equipment and space • No food or drink (other than water) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up after yourself • No swearing • Take care of the youth center equipment and space

Source: Developed by the University of Minnesota REACH Lab



Directions: Read the following scenario and be prepared to describe how Mr. Washington can change the established norms, set up new expectations, and support consistent enforcement of expectations. Keep these questions in mind:

- What should the goal of developing expectations be?
- What happens when youth meet the expectations?
- What happens when youth do not meet the expectations?
- How do you offer feedback to youth who meet or miss the expectations?

Scenario:

Mr. Washington leads gym activities in the youth center. He has heard complaints from other youth program staff about a few of the youth who are in his gym class. The staff say the youth have been disruptive and loud in other activities and aggressive towards some of the other youth. When the youth program staff talk to them about their behavior, the youth compare the staff to Mr. Washington and say things like, “Why can’t you be more fun and understanding like Mr. Washington?” Mr. Washington thinks about the rules in the gym. They include rules like treat each other with respect and take care of the equipment, among others. He often ignores some of the more aggressive behavior because he wants the youth to have a good time and let off a little steam. He doesn’t always follow up with youth who get out of hand as long as no one gets seriously hurt. Mr. Washington wants the youth to succeed in other activities, so he plans to remind the youth about the expectations and rules he set at the beginning of the year and discuss with other youth program staff how he can make his expectations consistent with the program expectations.

Source: Developed by the University of Minnesota REACH Lab