

# Using Effective Communication Strategies within Youth Programs

As youth enter adolescence, they experience a rapid increase in their competencies, skills, and abilities as the many systems (e.g., family, neighborhood, school, etc.) in which they belong offer numerous opportunities to learn and grow. Youth programs offer a unique context in which youth can learn a variety of skills and develop supportive relationships with non-parental adults.<sup>1</sup> Effective communication facilitates the development of positive and supportive relationships between youth program staff and youth, and, as such, is considered a core competency for program staff.<sup>2,3</sup> In addition, youth program staff's ability to effectively communicate allows them to relay program expectations and rules and maintain healthy boundaries with youth.<sup>4,5</sup> For example, youth programs that communicate expectations for positive behaviors by defining clear rules and consequences are more effective than programs that do not effectively communicate behavioral expectations.<sup>4</sup> Youth programs also offer opportunities for youth to further develop their own communication and interpersonal skills<sup>6,3</sup> by providing a model of effective communication within the context of a caring relationship between program staff and the youth they serve.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, competent use of communication strategies is foundational for youth program staff in order to promote positive youth development.<sup>8,9</sup>

Positive youth development is best understood within the context of ecological systems of theories of human development, generally<sup>10</sup>, and models of developmental or relational systems of youth development, specifically.<sup>11</sup> Positive youth development is a strengths-based approach that describes how youth's experiences and relationships promote internal and external assets that enable them to thrive in their environment.<sup>12,13</sup> By applying this approach, youth program staff can create activities that provide opportunities for youth to learn a variety of skills, ranging from math and science to leadership skills. Furthermore, regardless of the type of youth program, youth are learning interpersonal skills, of which effective communication is a key component. Youth program staff who communicate effectively with youth and their families will be able to strengthen adult-youth relationships, convey the rules and expectations clearly and concisely, and model healthy communication skills for peer interactions among youth. In order to provide context for how effective communication skills can improve experiences and relationships within youth programs, this review will focus on three main areas: definition and theories of effective interpersonal communication; importance of developmental, biological, social, and environmental factors that may influence communication with youth; and strategies for youth program staff to improve their interpersonal communication with youth.

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## What is Effective Interpersonal Communication?

Although it is generally understood, the concept of communication can be difficult to define and operationalize. Consequently, *effective* communication can be even more challenging to describe. Broadly defined, communication is "a process of people sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways".<sup>14</sup> More specifically, interpersonal communication has been defined as "a complex situated social process in which people who have established a communicative relationship exchange messages in an effort to generate shared meanings and accomplish goals".<sup>15</sup> For this review, the focus will be on interpersonal communication and *effective interpersonal communication* will be conceptualized as communication where shared meanings are understood and goals are accomplished. For many individuals, goals for communication include understanding others

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and being understood as well as influencing others' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.<sup>16, 17</sup> Effective communication often refers to verbal or written communication; however, nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, physical proximity, and eye contact contribute significantly to how a message is received. Moreover, nonverbal communication can reveal more information regarding individuals' thoughts and feelings than verbal messages.<sup>18</sup> In fact, research suggests that 60-65% of the meaning derived from an interaction is communicated nonverbally<sup>19</sup>; when there are inconsistencies between verbal and nonverbal messages, individuals are more likely to believe nonverbal messages.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, to be an effective communicator individuals must not only accurately relay messages verbally, but must also be aware of what nonverbal messages are conveyed. The ability to successfully communicate both verbal and nonverbal messages reflects a competence in interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication competence consists of communication that is both effective and socially appropriate. Specifically, knowledge and skill in interpersonal communication relates to effectively producing and processing messages as well as understanding the social and relational contexts in which the messages were communicated and their associated meaning(s).<sup>20</sup> Given this, interpersonal communication competence among youth program staff includes not only knowledge of effective communication strategies, but also awareness of the diverse social and relational contexts of youth and their families that may impact communication. To better understand the current perspectives of communication, the following section presents two theories related to interpersonal communication and application within youth program settings.

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## Theoretical Underpinnings of Interpersonal Communication

Throughout adolescence, youth's communication skills grow as they develop cognitively<sup>21, 22</sup> and experience new and increasingly complex interpersonal relationships within their families, peer groups, and a variety of settings (e.g., school, employment, youth programs, etc.).<sup>23, 22</sup> Cognitive development, parenting practices, and social interactions and relationships are key factors in the development of youth's interpersonal communication competence<sup>24, 25, 26</sup> and these factors are at the core of many theories on interpersonal communication.<sup>27, 28</sup> There are numerous theories used to explain the nature of interpersonal communication, such as attribution theory<sup>29</sup> and uncertainty reduction theory.<sup>30</sup> Interpersonal communication theories can be placed into three general categories: individually centered, interaction centered, and relationship centered.<sup>31</sup> Theories and models which are individually centered focus on individuals' planning, production, and processing of interpersonal communication messages. As a result, these theories are based on the cognitive activity that underscores interpersonal communication. Interaction centered theories and models conceptualize interpersonal communication messages as a behavior-based, joint effort among individuals. While individually centered theories focus on the individuals' cognitive activity, interaction centered theories describe the content, forms, and functions of the messages as well as the accompanying behavioral interactions and the meanings the messages represent. Relationship centered theories are based on the study of how interpersonal communication helps to develop and sustain (and possibly terminate) relationships and the nature of the relationship is viewed as influencing ongoing communication.<sup>31, 32</sup> For youth program staff, relationship centered theories best embody their goals of building supportive relationships while simultaneously using their own communication skills to manage youth's behaviors. Given this, two relationship centered theories will be reviewed that provide background for how interpersonal communication develops in a relational context.

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## Attachment Theory

Communication plays a central role in attachment theory and is therefore useful for understanding differences in the way people communicate as well as their reactions to communicated messages.<sup>33</sup> Children first learn to develop attachments through communications with their caregiver.<sup>34</sup> Attachment bonds in infancy serve as a template for later relationships through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.<sup>35, 36</sup> Interpersonal communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is related to attachment in multiple ways; communication is a causal agent of attachment while also representing the nature of the attachment. For example, parents' communication that consists of anxiety-based messages contribute to their children's fearful attachment and parents with dismissive attachment styles likely use avoidant or passive communication.<sup>33</sup> Among romantic partners, the more qualities of secure attachment that are present in a relationship the more positive the interpersonal communication.<sup>37, 38</sup> Securely attached individuals tend to communicate in ways that promote healthy relationship development, while those with insecure attachments may withdraw and exhibit more aggressive and unhealthy communication styles that increase conflict.<sup>39, 40</sup> Furthermore, recent research suggests that individuals' choice of mode of communication (telephone calls, email, text messages) may be associated with their level of attachment to the recipient of the communication, such that within more attached relationships, more intimate (e.g., telephone calls) modes of communication may be used and less attached relationships use more detached (e.g., email) modes of communication.<sup>41</sup> Youth who demonstrate aggressive or avoidant communication styles with youth program staff may need more opportunities to learn healthier communication strategies. In addition, staff who have firm and warm communication styles may help to foster positive attachment and relationships with those youth who exhibit negative communication behaviors. Moreover, healthy attachment in relationships creates a positive context for effective communication to occur, which is the basis for relational communication theory.

## Relational Communication Theory

Human development theories based on influences among the interactions between people and their environment, such as ecological system theories<sup>42</sup>, proposed that an interlocking network of systems influences human development and growth. In addition, based on social learning theories<sup>43</sup>, individuals' interpersonal communication competence is believed to be greatly influenced by social interactions within their environment through modeling, instruction, rehearsal, and reinforcement.<sup>44</sup> From these theories a new theoretical perspective evolved, relational-developmental theories<sup>45</sup>, which emphasized bidirectional influential relations between developing individuals and their context; which help to govern the nature of individuals' development.<sup>46</sup> All of these perspectives helped to inform relational communication theory, which is a systemic approach to interpersonal communication. Within this theory, relationships (e.g., parent-child, romantic, etc.) and systems of relations (e.g., between families and schools) come into being through complex patterns of communication<sup>47</sup>, such that relationships are initiated and maintained through individuals' communication processes. Furthermore, relational communication messages indicate how people in the interaction regard each other, their relationship or themselves within the context of the relationship.<sup>48</sup>

A main focus of the relational communication theory is that individuals and systems relate to each other through their communication messages, behaviors, and patterns. Another component of this

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theory is the concept that interpersonal communication messages have two levels of meaning: content (what the message is about) and relational (how the message is interpreted). Moreover, the relational meaning always provides context for the content of the message.<sup>49</sup> Notably, the relational meaning of communication messages is most often communicated through non-verbal communication, such as body language, tone, and intensity.<sup>50</sup> For youth program staff, understanding both meanings is important for not only building supportive relationships with youth, but also understanding the impact their communication may have on youth with whom they have a close relationship compared to youth with whom they may not know as well. Within youth programs, effective interpersonal communication between program staff and youth is vital because communication can help facilitate healthy and supportive relationships and create an environment with clear expectations regarding acceptable behaviors; however, factors such as youth's age, gender, or culture are important to consider when using effective communication strategies to best manage relationships.

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### Factors that Influence Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is multilayered: it reflects not only the individuals' thoughts and feelings, but also can represent the norms and values associated with individuals' family and peer group, cognitive abilities and education level, culture, age, gender, and the broader society in which the communication occurs.<sup>51</sup> There are numerous factors that impact interpersonal communication that are not only related to the individuals and their relationship dynamic<sup>52</sup>, but also the goals and objectives of the interaction.<sup>53</sup> A description of the many factors and contexts that influence interpersonal communication is beyond the scope of this review; as such, the focus will be on biological and physical (e.g., age and gender) and cultural factors that may impact interpersonal communication skills.

#### Age

Beginning in infancy, nonverbal and verbal communication skills increase with age<sup>54</sup>, with a particular increase in the area of social and interpersonal communication competence and skills from middle childhood to young adulthood.<sup>55</sup> The impact of age on youth's development of interpersonal communication skills and abilities is closely linked to their cognitive and language development, both of which affect youth's ability to communicate effectively. For example, compared to children in preschool, kindergarten, and second grade, fourth graders were more likely to spontaneously ask follow-up questions in a task designed to elicit different communication messages (e.g., informative vs. uninformative messages).<sup>56</sup> This finding supports the notion that as children mature, they are more likely to use more complex and engaging interpersonal communication strategies. As children enter adolescence, peer relationships become increasingly important and, language is used as a tool to communicate information about identity and as a way to establish and maintain relationships with peers.<sup>23, 57</sup> Cognitive advances during adolescence improve youth's ability to take the perspective of someone else and engage in more prosocial behaviors with peers.<sup>58, 59</sup> Interestingly, age and gender may interact as they influence communication competence throughout development. Some differences in language development and communication that are present when comparing male and female children at younger ages (e.g., early childhood) may not be present when they are older (e.g., adolescence) while other differences persist or develop later in life. For example, female children scored higher than male children in verbal abilities at two years old, males scored higher in verbal abilities at ages 10 and 12 years, while there were no significant differences at the following ages: 7, 9, 14, and 16 years old.<sup>60</sup>

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## Gender

A variety of gender differences are important to consider when communicating with youth. For example, evidence suggests that, in general, females are better at identifying nonverbal cues than males, a skill that is apparent from an early age.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, female youth may be more likely to notice inconsistencies between verbal and nonverbal messages. In an international sample, women were found to exhibit more collaborative and participative communication patterns, while men used more directive and unilateral communication patterns.<sup>62</sup> Generally, females also tend to utilize more socially-oriented styles of communicating, whereas males tend to use more direct, results-oriented communication style.<sup>63</sup> As a result, females tend to interact at closer interpersonal distances, are more tolerant of spatial intrusions, use more eye contact and touch, smile more and are more expressive, and have deeper insight into relational goals.<sup>64</sup> In a study assessing gender differences on how much girls and boys communicate to peers about their problems (as a way to obtain social support), it was found that girls produced more problem statements (i.e., discussed their problems or their friends problems) than boys.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, children have rated same gender peers as having a more responsive communication (e.g., paying attention to the speaker, willing to comply with the speaker's requests, etc.) style than opposite gender peers; specifically, girls reported lower beliefs about communicative responsiveness among opposite gender peers than boys.<sup>66</sup> Findings from Xiao and colleagues suggest gender may influence perceptions of communication patterns. Furthermore, more research is needed on interpersonal communication among gender with sexual minority youth to better understand how their experiences of verbal and nonverbal messages might vary from heterosexual and cisgender youth. Considering how communication patterns may vary across various expressions of gender may also help youth program staff develop tailored communication strategies to use with youth.

## Socioeconomic Status

In the United States, the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on cognitive and language acquisition, and subsequent interpersonal communication, is often hard to distinguish as SES tends to be interrelated with factors such as race, ethnicity, and parental education level.<sup>67</sup> In fact, parental education level (e.g., high school diploma, college degree, etc.) is often used to approximate a family's SES in research studies.<sup>68</sup> As a result, studies have shown that both mothers' years of education and family income were positively associated with language and literacy scores of preschool children.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, children from high SES families had a larger growth rate of expressive language from 18 to 36 months than children from low SES families.<sup>70</sup> It is unclear exactly how SES impacts children's communication skills. Other studies suggest that children from low SES families have higher rates of impaired memory and lower rates of cognitive functioning, which can negatively impact language development and communication abilities<sup>71</sup>, and children who live in poverty have fewer supports for school-based language and pre-school literacy development than those in working-class neighborhoods.<sup>72</sup> Based on these findings, SES may play a role in language and communication skills although more research is needed to tease apart the ways in which it is an influence.

## Culture, Race, and Ethnicity

Communication and culture have a mutually influential relationship, and this relationship is impacted by numerous factors such as race and ethnicity.<sup>73</sup> Cultural values, including qualities such as individualism, self-promotion, indirectness, and personal space impact communication patterns.

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Specifically, direct communication has been found to be more valued in individualistic-based cultures while indirect communication tends to be more valued in collectivistic-based cultures, and cultures that highly value individualism and masculine traits tend to use more direct communication patterns.<sup>73</sup> In addition, examples of cultural variations of communication include how much adults engage preverbal children in verbal communication (i.e., the extent to which conversation is directed at children before they can engage verbally) and how much objects (e.g., concrete nouns) are the focus of conversation with children.<sup>51</sup> Specifically, children from some cultural groups may be expected to talk less in certain social situations, such as with adults compared to when they are spending time with their peers.<sup>74</sup> However, it should be noted that some research has found that individual differences (e.g., personality) were more impactful on communication patterns than cultural differences.<sup>75</sup> Because the particular impact of a given factor (e.g., age, gender, race, etc.) on interpersonal communication varies widely and inconsistently, numerous factors must be taken into account as youth program staff develop communication strategies to manage youth's behaviors and outcomes.

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### Interpersonal Communication and Youth Outcomes

Much of the research on interpersonal communication and outcomes in middle childhood and adolescence centers on individuals who have developmental disabilities and physical impairments<sup>76</sup>, or are being evaluated for functional communication skills in the context of impaired social functioning.<sup>77, 78</sup> Among research that focuses on youth without specified disabilities or impairments, much of the studies exploring interpersonal communication between youth and their parents or youth and their peers.<sup>79</sup> A general pattern among these studies is that parent-adolescent communication can positively impact a variety of adolescents' outcomes such as increased responsible sexual behaviors<sup>80</sup>, less alcohol use<sup>81</sup> and less cigarette and illegal drug use.<sup>25</sup> For example, youth who described their family communication as open and supportive reported fewer at-risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse) than youth who reported family communication that wasn't open and supportive.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, parents' use of more teaching and reciprocity (i.e., mutually sharing information) communication styles was associated with decreased likelihood of youth engaging in sexual intercourse compared to parents' use of lecturing communication styles.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, having open communication with mothers was found to be positively associated with interpersonal competence among adolescents<sup>83</sup>, and youth who have high parent-adolescent communication quality (e.g., more open and supportive) are less likely to experience mental health symptoms as a result of bullying compared to youth who have poor parent-adolescent communication quality.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, there is research to suggest that interventions aimed at teaching parents skills to improve parent-adolescent communication quality are successful.<sup>85</sup>

Peers also have an important role in the relationship between interpersonal communication and outcomes among adolescents. For example, among early adolescents, beliefs that peers would exhibit responsive communication was positively associated with feeling included by and comfortable with peers as well as having more friends.<sup>66</sup> Online (e.g., social media) and electronic (e.g., text messages) methods have become routine ways to communicate among youth; given this, research has begun to explore how communication via technology impacts youth's outcomes.<sup>86</sup> For example, electronic and online communication use among adolescent peers has been associated with higher levels of substance abuse<sup>87</sup> and distress and anxiety.<sup>88</sup> Different types of communication among parents and peers need to be explored as there are data to suggest relationships among these factors. For example, among an international sample of youth, positive parent-adolescent communication buffered the negative effects

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of electronic peer communication on self-esteem.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, additional exploration of how non-parental adult and peer communication impacts youth's outcomes may help better understand the role of interpersonal communication in youth's lives.

## Strategies to Communicate Effectively with Youth

There are numerous components of effective communication in interpersonal relationships, such as clear expression and reception of meaning; appropriate and congruent emotion and affect; and active and reflective listening.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, youth's ability to engage in open, honest, and supportive communication with parents and peers has been positively linked to outcomes such as mental health<sup>91</sup>, prosocial behaviors<sup>92</sup>, and reduced at-risk behaviors.<sup>93</sup> As youth enter adolescence and spend increasing amounts of time with non-parental adults (e.g., coaches, youth program staff, etc.), their ability to apply skills that enhance effective communication become increasingly important for current and future healthy relationships. Effective interpersonal communication for youth and youth program staff is vital to ensure supportive youth-adult relationships within safe and productive youth programs. To better understand how youth and youth program staff can improve their interpersonal communication, these skills can be placed into two categories: receptive and expressive skills. Receptive language skills refer to individuals' ability to understand what is said, written, sign language while expressive skills are individuals' ability to effectively communicate thoughts and feelings via spoken, written, signed, or body language.<sup>94, 95</sup> For this review an important skill within each category will be highlighted: active listening as an example of receptive communication skills and clear directions and expectations as an example of expressive communication skills.

### **Active listening**

Active listening is considered a key skill for social and emotional learning, which is a significant part of effective communication and ultimately having 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 allows program staff to acknowledge and better understand youth's thoughts and feelings, and this understanding can help to better manage youth's behaviors. Specifically, active listening entails applying skills such as good eye contact, open body language, paraphrasing, clarifying or mirroring questions, and reflection via positive or empathic comments while resisting distractions or interruptions.<sup>98, 99, 100</sup> In doing so, actively listening conveys respect, helps maintain positive relationships, and encourages continued communication between youth program staff and the youth within their programs.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, active listening can help youth program staff support youth's voice and increase belonging in and connectedness to the program<sup>101</sup>, improve adult-youth relationships<sup>102</sup>, and possibly diffuse arguments among peers as well as between staff and youth. As such, active listening is a necessary component of effective communication.

### **Clear Expectations and Directions**

Youth program staff who effectively communicate are able to provide clear and consistent expectations and directions to youth in a developmentally appropriate manner. Generally, communicating clear and effective directions involves three skills: highlight important aspects of content, use examples to explain content, and assess and respond to misunderstandings or difficulties with content comprehension. These skills also involve using clear and concrete language and considering

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alternative modes of delivery, such as visual (as opposed to verbal) methods of communication.<sup>103</sup> Youth program staff that ensure directions and expectations are clear can implement activities easier<sup>104</sup> and better communicate appropriate consequences to misbehavior.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, giving clear directions appears to facilitate more opportunities for positive experiences, such as the development of supportive adult-youth relationships.<sup>106</sup> In addition, research in the schools suggest that clear rules and directions are important for managing youth's maladaptive behavior.<sup>107</sup> It is important that directions and expectations are not only clear and concrete, but that youth program staff are aware of how they communicate messages they send about power and inequality. For example, if they use phrases such as "I would have never completed the activity that way," although they are being clear, they are also sending messages about suggesting they are superior and that the other person is incompetent or inferior.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, for effective communication to be used to manage behavior and build relationships, the verbal and nonverbal messages must not only be clear, but also encouraging and respectful.

### Implications for Youth Programs

Interpersonal communication, through verbal, nonverbal, or written messages, constantly occurs between individuals and/or among groups of people; however, communication is not always effective. Effective communication is key when working with youth to establish and maintain positive relationships<sup>108</sup>, in that effective communication encompasses reflective and active listening as well as clear directions and expectations. There are many components of effective communication; yet, active listening and clear expectations and directions are vital to youth program staff to ensure that they understand youth's concerns and can clearly express their own expectations and directives to manage youth's behaviors. When youth are exhibiting maladaptive behavior, one strategy staff can use that combines multiple aspects of effective communication is motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a person-centered approach to engaging individuals in conversations about changing at-risk behaviors and engaging in more prosocial behaviors.<sup>109</sup> For youth who are disruptive, disrespectful, or resistant to participating, this can be an approach that staff apply to improve youth's engagement and prosocial behaviors.

At its core, motivational interviewing is a communication strategy that combines active listening through reflective statements that convey empathy and support while also using statements that promote shared decision-making to elicit positive change.<sup>110</sup> This strategy is designed to help individuals who engage in behaviors that are counterproductive to their well-being or personal goals make better choices. Motivational interviewing is directional and goal-driven in that there is a desired behavioral outcome (e.g., reduce disruptive behavior, stop verbal insults among youth) that is trying to be achieved. For example, within a youth program, these goals would be met by discussing contradictions in youth's behaviors (e.g., not participating in activities) or statements (e.g., talking negatively about other youth) and their goals (e.g., make new friends). Once the contradictions have been identified, youth program staff use empathic and supportive statements to highlight this discrepancy and begin a conversation to assess youth's motivation to change. The objective of motivational interviewing is not to persuade or convince individuals, but rather to have them view their behaviors as either supporting or hindering their goals and partner with them to think of ways that affirm and meet their goals. Motivational interviewing is most successful when there is already a working alliance that can foster a

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trusting, supportive relationship. Notably, motivational interviewing fits within a strengths-based paradigm, where individuals' strengths and goals are used to help them feel motivated to engage in positive change.<sup>111</sup> Although a review of the literature did not yield any empirical studies of motivational interviewing within positive development youth programs, there are numerous studies that have demonstrated efficacy and effectiveness of motivational interviewing with youth.<sup>112, 113, 114</sup> Motivational interviewing demonstrates promise as a tool for youth program staff who are tasked with applying communication strategies that help to manage youth's behavior and overall experience within a youth program.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Interpersonal communication is a complex process among individuals and groups that includes verbal and nonverbal (e.g., body language, sign language, written, etc.) messages and is influenced by a variety of cognitive, developmental, and socio-cultural factors.<sup>115, 64, 51</sup> Furthermore, supportive interpersonal communication among youth and adults or peers has been associated with positive outcomes.<sup>82, 85</sup> Given this, it is important for youth program staff to incorporate interpersonal communication strategies to not only teach these vital skills, but also to help manage youth's behaviors. There are numerous strategies that have been proposed to increase healthy interpersonal communication among youth, such as active and reflective listening and clear and concrete directions and expectations.<sup>97</sup> Youth program staff are well-positioned to model healthy interpersonal communication as well as help youth develop strategies to regulate their behaviors by talking through what they're experiencing. A communication strategy that combines effective communication components with behavior change is motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing can be a useful tool to support youth as they reconcile their current behaviors with their desired goals or outcomes. In addition, motivational interviewing reinforces key elements of positive youth development, such as autonomy, youth voice, and accountability.

Because of the importance of effective interpersonal communication strategies, more research is needed to explore the myriad of factors and circumstances in which communication strategies enhance positive youth development. Within youth programs, qualitative and quantitative research would help to better understand the professional development needs of staff around interpersonal communication strategies. There is evidence that supportive adult-youth relationships are vital for successful youth programs<sup>116</sup> and effective interpersonal communication strategies are an important component of those relationships. Therefore, more data on the types of professional development that can increase effective communication are essential. Moreover, additional training and evaluation of the training with youth program staff on effective communication strategies with youth are also warranted. In addition, research that explores youth's perspectives on staff's communication strategies (especially motivational interviewing) that are most effective across different youth program settings, ages, cultural groups, and concerns will also help to move the field of positive youth development forward. Also, creation and evaluation of activities and programming that emphasize effective communication and are specifically tailored for youth programs will help to understand what communication strategies complement the structure and goals of those programs. These findings can provide knowledge that not only shape how staff develop activities, but also manage youth's behaviors and ensure a pleasant experience for all youth in their program.

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