

Tips for Effective & Healthy Communication—For Adults



Provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Healthy communication is a balancing act in any relationship, whether personal or professional; it means feeling heard, understood, and respected while also being able to listen to, understand, and respect what the other person is saying.

How well you communicate has a major impact on your interactions with others, including teens. Communication skills affect your ability to prevent or resolve conflict, connect, and build or break trust in a relationship.

Practicing these nonverbal and verbal skills can help you have more productive conversations with others and provide a positive example for the teens you work with on a daily basis. Both types of skills should be utilized together for the most effective and healthy communication.

Nonverbal Skills

- **Stay in control of your feelings.** If you are visibly upset or angry, these emotions could make it difficult to express yourself in a way that won't be misunderstood or ignored by the other person.
- **Maintain good eye contact.** One of the best ways to show you are focused on the conversation is to really *focus* on the person who is speaking. It's not a staring contest but a way to let the speaker know that you value what he or she is saying.
- **Watch your facial expressions and body language.** These send as much of a message as the words that you say. Keep your body relaxed, open, and turned toward the speaker. Try not to cross your arms and legs; this could be interpreted as disapproval or disinterest. Make the other person feel welcome and safe through encouraging gestures like smiling, nodding your head, and leaning forward. Try to limit fidgeting with your hands or feet; this can be distracting or show impatience.

Verbal Skills

- **Stay calm; think about how you react.** Speak in a respectful, calm, and positive manner that encourages further conversation. If you raise your voice or sound sarcastic, the other person may be less likely to listen to you. Try to avoid criticizing or dismissing the other person's viewpoint. Instead, be constructive.

- **Listen actively.** Refining this skill requires patience, practice, and a few key steps:
 1. *Try to recap what the other person has just said.* Use statements such as “It sounds like you are saying...” or “I think what you are saying is...” to show that you have been listening and want an accurate understanding of the conversation.
 2. *Take turns talking.* Don’t let one person dominate the conversation. Make sure that both people have a chance to express their views and are able to do so without being interrupted.
 3. *Ask questions that promote conversation and understanding.* To avoid receiving one-word answers, use open-ended questions like “How do you feel about...?” and “What do you think about...?” When it’s appropriate and you need something clarified, ask for further explanation.
 4. *Don’t jump to conclusions.* Try not to assume that you know what the other person needs or how he/she feels before that person has the opportunity to express it. Additionally, by taking time to hear the other person’s perspective, you might learn that the disagreement (if there is one) was all a misunderstanding.
- **Express your feelings.** Use “I” statements to avoid blaming the other person or making him/her feel defensive. Be specific. Examples of what you could say include:
“I feel _____ when you _____ because _____.” and “I am _____ and need _____ to _____.”