

# Essentials for Effective Communication



**NEW MEXICO**  
GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

*Sponsored by:*

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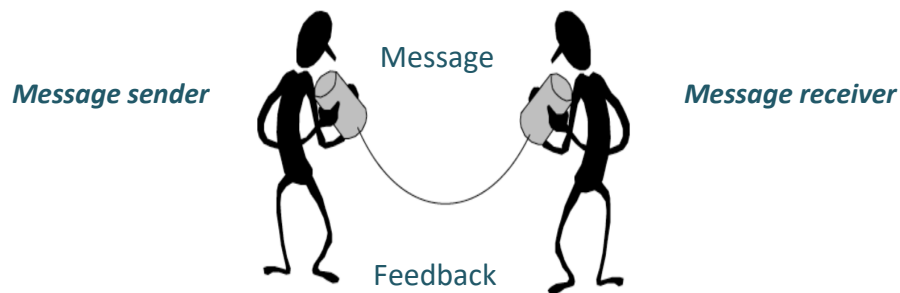
# ***Essentials for Effective Communication***

## ***Course Overview: Become a Better Communicator Create a Climate of Respectfulness***

- 1. Communication 101, It Looks Easy Enough**  
*How Communication Can Break Down, Courageous Communication Tips, What Happens in Conflict?*  
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### **Vocabulary List**

## How Good Communication Works



### **It Looks Easy Enough! How it's supposed to work:**

- I have a clear idea of what I want to communicate to you and send my message.
- You, the message receiver, listens and responds, asking a question if you're confused.

We know that sometimes a message is not as clear as we think, or is interpreted differently than intended, or that we may be distracted by internal or external “noise”—distractions that prevent us from listening. That's why we focus and pay attention.

We don't want the “noise” (distractions) either internal or external to interfere with our communication.

Because we respect each other, we listen, acknowledge what we've heard and be sure that our communication is clear, honest and that we're “on the same page.”

### ***Breakout Groups: The Courage to Communicate***

*In your small groups, introduce yourselves to one another and answer this question:*

***What makes it hard for you to talk through a conflict, express feelings or say what we mean?***

*Be prepared to share one insight with the whole group.*

### ***How Communication Can Break Down***

- ◆ *Speaker hears a response that doesn't make sense—and says nothing*
- ◆ *Listener doesn't understand what's sent and doesn't ask a question*
- ◆ *Both walk away from the conversation without clarity of shared meaning*
- ◆ *We don't pay attention, we don't listen*
- ◆ *Either or both make assumptions*
- ◆ *Emotions take over*
- ◆ *I'm unsure so I say nothing or wait too long*
- ◆ *I don't know how to handle their emotional outburst*
- ◆ *I'm afraid to say what I think—I don't want to hurt them or be vulnerable*

## Courageous Communication Tips

1. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
2. If you don't understand something, ask for clarification: "I don't think I understand, can you help me understand?"
3. If you hear yourself saying something in a way you don't like, be willing to start again: "That didn't sound right, let me try again."
4. Be aware of your own prejudices, stereotypes, judgements, expectations and assumptions and how they affect you.
5. Take a break if things become tense. Re-schedule a conversation if you need some time.

## What Happens in Conflict?

### Communication Often Suffers when there is Conflict

In conflict we instinctively react by either-



Our instinct, habit or knee-jerk reaction may be to argue with someone, discount them, shut down or be passive-aggressive and do something to get back at them.

These approaches don't create a productive conversation. In fact, arguing (fight) or avoiding (flight) keeps us stuck in place or makes things worse.

*Essentially, we think about conflict resolution as a win/lose, right/wrong endeavor. "If I'm right, you're wrong and that makes me the winner." We believe that being a winner is good and being a loser is bad. This makes it a contest and does little or nothing to resolve the problem. Sometimes it even makes it worse.*

## What Happens in Conflict?, continued

When people take the “I’m right” position instead of deciding to listen to one another and have a rational discussion to find workable solutions, then the battle for dominance (I’m right) ensues. We push each other’s buttons, tempers flare, we get more set in our ways.

If we want to get this:



One or both must break the pattern by listening, acknowledging and clarifying as they talk—conducting their conversation in a respectful manner.

***Learn to see conflict as a normal, natural part of life. Learn to address differences in a respectful, effective way by being willing to improve your communication. Open, honest communication will help you through challenging conversations.***

## Listening to Hear, Listening to Understand

**Mastering the art of listening is the single most important thing one can do to improve communication. We think we know how to listen—most of us don’t do it as well as we could.**

### ***We listen to:***

- *Hear information; understand the speaker’s message*
- *Show the speaker we are interested in what they have to say*
- *Notice the emotional state of the speaker*
- *Be able to have a coherent conversation*

### ***At the heart of learning to listen is staying focused:***

- Learn to listen objectively, listen to understand, not defend
- Be attentive and open-minded
- Be aware of your prejudices, stereotypes or pre-conceived ideas
- Don’t make and then act on assumptions
- Turn off the chatter in your mind
- Be curious, not judgmental

## Listening to Hear, Listening to Understand, continued

*“Learning how to listen to and speak with each other are essential skills for creating relationships that lead to mutual respect, dialogue, understanding, and peace.”*

*~The Sacred Art of Listening by Kay Lindahl*

### Move from Passive to Active Listening

**Passive:** *“like water poured over a rock”*

- *Listening with little consciousness—disconnected, mind wanders, not hearing, can discourage the speaker for sharing ideas*

**Active:** *“like water poured into a river”*

- *Listen with purpose of making a connection, mind works to stay present, empathy, can encourage the speaker to share ideas*

### Avoid Listening Pitfalls

**“Nexting”:** *not listening while the speaker is talking in order to prepare in one’s mind what they want to say next once the speaker is done speaking*

**Daydreaming**

**Taking things personally and becoming defensive**

**Assuming you know what someone will say and tuning out**

### *If We Fail to Listen and Hear . . .*

- Conversation becomes a back-and-forth contest as we each simply react to one another
- This can lead to misunderstandings, hurt feelings, damaged relationships and other conflicts
- We may walk away from interactions with mistaken ideas, insufficient information and gaps in understanding that may worsen situations
- Both parties in a conversation may feel angry or misunderstood
- We may be overly self-critical for our part in the communication

## Acknowledging Emotion and Content

*“When you acknowledge, you demonstrate the difference between saying you understand and showing you understand.”*

*Robert Rambo, Mediator*

***In conversation, as a speaker we appreciate being heard. As a listener we can let the speaker know we are listening by acknowledging.***

*To acknowledge means to listen and hear the other then let them know you’ve heard them. You do this by “saying back” something that reflects the content and/or emotion of their message.*

### **Why do this?**

- Build trust, create rapport and learn from each other for better communication
- De-escalate or prevent challenging emotions
- Encourages conversation that avoids blame and arguing

### **Acknowledging is not agreeing or disagreeing:**

- **Acknowledging is about recognizing someone, not defending yourself**
- **Acknowledging is about letting someone know you’re listening**

When acknowledging, we act as a “mirror.” As we share what we’ve heard or observed we give the speaker the chance to say, “yes, that’s right” or “that’s not what I meant” and correct the message.

## **A. Acknowledge by Reflecting Emotion**

***Often people will not have a rational conversation if they have not vented emotions.***

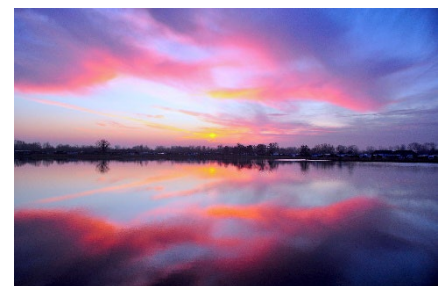
*Reflecting emotion as a technique feeds back our best sense of their emotional state posed as a question. We listen for tone of voice or notice non-verbal cues and test our perceptions.*

*EX: “It sounds like you’re pretty angry—is that so?”*

### **Reflecting Can Lead to Clarification**

**\*\*You:** “You seem angry about that . . .”

**\*\*Other:** “No, I’m not angry, I’m just frustrated”



## Acknowledging Emotion and Content, continued

### **B. Acknowledge by Paraphrasing Content**

*Paraphrasing means “saying back” what you heard someone say in your own words—keeping their meaning intact. This serves as a way to ‘check out’ if you got their meaning.*

#### **What this technique can do:**

- Assist the speaker in clarifying what’s truly important
- Provide a slightly different perspective for the speaker to consider
- Model new language
- Move the conversation along

#### **Sample Language for Paraphrasing:**

“So, you’re saying . . .?”

“Please correct me if I’m wrong, what I heard is that . . .”

“What I’m hearing from you is . . . am I getting this correctly?”



**If the speaker says: “no, I didn’t mean that,” let them explain what they did mean.**

***Acknowledging what someone says is a way to improve communication, de-escalate emotion, clarify what someone is trying to say and start a conversation on a more positive footing.***

### **Acknowledgment Exercise: Reflecting Emotion and Paraphrasing Content**

#### **You hear this angry statement:**

“How come you’re always focused on what we can’t do? Everything you say is negative. It’s bad for morale and disrupts the whole office.”

**Acknowledgements:** “Sounds like you’re unhappy with what’s happening at the office.”  
“I’m hearing you want things here to improve.”

1. **An unhappy colleague says this to you:**

“I’m just so disorganized, I’m making us late again. I’m so sorry. Really I am.”

**Acknowledge the Emotion and the Content:**

2. **A new person in your department says:**

“Just because I’m new and young doesn’t mean I don’t know anything. Get off my back! I could really help you out around here.”

**Acknowledge the Emotion and the Content:**

## Acknowledging Emotion and Content, continued

3. Jane, a friend you work with, is complaining and says:  
“This team is falling apart—no one does their share of the work, they sit and gossip all day, take super long lunches and leave me here to do everything.”

Acknowledge the Emotion and the Content:

4. A co-worker says:  
“Every time we talk we don’t get anywhere. You aren’t listening”

Acknowledge the Emotion and the Content:

“Most people are NOT used to being acknowledged.” –Cynthia Olson

## Stay Grounded and Manage Your Emotions

### **Consider the following:**

1. *Are you able to stay calm, take a breath, pause, observe and choose what you want to say? It is a choice.*
2. *If you get triggered, if your “buttons” get pushed, can you refrain from pushing back and take a pause instead? Can you choose to respond instead of reacting?*
3. *Can you be open-minded, objective and non-judgmental when communicating with others, especially if the other person is emotional?*
4. *Do you listen first to understand what someone is trying to say before needing to share your point-of-view?*

How you show up matters: Fully present, thoughtful and responsive

Non-judgmental

Professional

Respectful

Honest

### **What is grounding?**

Grounding is a technique that helps you stay focused, be present, offers clarity to thoughts, calms fight/flight/freeze, lowers blood pressure; keeps you from being dragged into drama; helps to communicate more effectively

### **Manage yourself by remembering to breath**

When a person becomes stressed out one of the first things they’ll forget to do is breath. Bring yourself back to your breath.

## Grounding Exercises to Help You Be Fully Present

Thoughts of past memories and guilt or future worries can lead to the inability to communicate effectively and focus on the present moment. Grounding exercises can help by relieving stress, providing a distraction from “being in your head” and helping to calm the body.

There are several ways to ground yourself when you become distracted or emotionally upset. Here are a few:

### Take a break

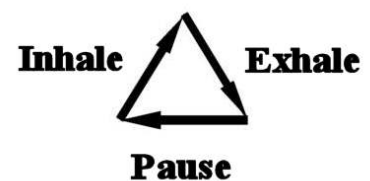
- Stretch (neck rolls, shoulder rolls, grasp the hands together, release and then stretch the wrists)
- Go for a walk
- Wash your hands with cold water
- PBS (Pause, Breathe and Smile)

### Using your feet—from a standing or sitting position

- Press your feet into the ground
- Press into the heels and big toes lifting the pinky toes
- Press into the heels and the pinky toes lifting the big toes
- Press into the big toes and pinky toes lifting the heels

### Using your breath—Triangular Breathing

- **Inhale** for a count of three
- **Exhale** for a count of three
- **Pause** for a count of three
- Repeat pattern for about one minute
- Length of count can be gradually increased to five or seven



## Closing

### 1. Remember to Ask Questions

- a. After an acknowledgement: “You sound confused. What questions do you have?” –or- “You sound angry. What about this makes you feel that way?”
- b. If you don’t understand something: “I’m not clear, could you say that again?”
- c. If something sounds unrealistic, ask for details—test the idea against reality

**Tip:** Ask open-ended questions that encourage the speaker to say more than just yes or no. **Avoid acting on an ASSUMPTIONS**—they’re usually wrong

### 2. Listen First to Understand

Set reactions and judgments aside while you listen. Clarify if you are confused then give your opinion

### 3. Be Honest: Find a way to tell your truth without judging or blaming

- a. Avoid saying what you think someone wants to hear
- b. Be reliable-do what you say you’ll do
- c. Stay in your integrity—be true to yourself

### 4. What If the Other Person Won’t Listen?

Recognize that you can’t change a person’s behavior. You can, however, change your own. If you are willing to adjust the way you react and/or respond to the situation it may make your life easier.

***And remember . . . if you demonstrate respectful communication it is more likely the person(s) you are talking with will do the same.***

*If you’re busy, say it and negotiate another time to talk.*

*If you’re upset, express it and own the ‘why.’*

*If you’re running late, let people know with an ETA.*

*If you’re not sure or are making assumptions, ask.*

*If you disagree, talk about it.*

*Be in your integrity.*



## Question 3: How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?

ANGRY	DEPRESSED	CONFUSED	HELPLESS	INDIFFERENT	AFRAID	HURT	SAD	JUDGMENTAL
enraged	suicidal	lost	paralyzed	cold	terrified	tormented	anguished	stony
malicious	directionless	disoriented	distraught	lifeless	petrified	pained	desolate	hurtful
infuriated	empty	off-kilter	doomed	uncaring	panicked	tortured	devastated	brutal
violent	desperate	frenzied	distressed	uninterested	frozen	agonized	grieved	combative
vindictive	despairing	indecisive	pathetic	unresponsive	threatened	crushed	tearful	attacked
furious	in hell	doubtful	overwhelmed	insensitive	hateful	deprived	sorrowful	tactless
repulsed	alienated	uncertain	shut down	numb	agoraphobic	rejected	unhappy	glaring
seething	miserable	distrustful	incompetent	dull	fearful	humiliated	lonely	disgusted
scornful	masochistic	misgiving	incapable	reserved	suspicious	insulted	mournful	ranting
hitting	despicable	unsure	alone	wary	rigid	injured	dismayed	scolding
yelling	self-hating	uneasy	fatigued	bored	phobic	offended	downhearted	obsessive
revengeful	self-critical	tense	useless	preoccupied	disturbed	afflicted	oversensitive	serious
hostile	self-	stressed	inferior	robotic	disrupted	aching	remorseful	stern
insulting	deprecating	argumentative	vulnerable	slow	anxious	victimized	sullen	frowning
swearing	stuck	authoritative	inept	sluggish	alarmed	heartbroken	sour	recoiling
condemning	ashamed	condescending	incapacitated	blasé	dreading	appalled	self-	unfair
offensive	exhausted	embarrassed	cut off	blank	attacking	wronged	castigating	bossy
aggressive	lousy	hesitant	trapped		intimidated	withdrawn	unworthy	stilted
bitter	tired	shy	weak		nervous	miffed	fragile	stiff
loud	dispondent	disillusioned	sick		scared	indignant	disconnected	pushy
sarcastic	disheartened	uncomfortable	nauseated		worried	suffering	blindsided	neglectful
frustrated	down	comparing	fidgety		frightened	distant	discontented	stonewalling
resentful	disappointed	dishonest	trembling		timid	invaded	crying	rude
critical	discouraged	demanding	craving		shaky	bulldozed	groaning	shrill
mean	powerless	distracted	squirming		restless	bullied	moaning	hard
sadistic	hopeless	blushing	jittery		cowardly	secretive	forlorn	fake
spiteful	grouchy	awkward	woozy			slighted	phony	phony
jealous	guilty	conflicted	compulsive			smothered	shallow	shallow
short-	dissatisfied					belittled	territorial	territorial
tempered	sulky						complaining	complaining
	low						blunt	blunt
	bad						arrogant	arrogant
	bummed out						superior	superior
							faultfinding	faultfinding

## Question 4: Who would you be without the thought?

OPEN	LOVING	HAPPY	INTERESTED	ALIVE	POSITIVE	PEACEFUL	STRONG	RELAXED
free	devoted	blissful	fascinated	playful	inspired	calm	hardy	glowing
interested	passionate	joyous	intrigued	courageous	enthusiastic	content	secure	radiant
receptive	considerate	delighted	absorbed	energetic	bold	quiet	stable	beaming
accepting	affectionate	overjoyed	amazed	liberated	brave	certain	honest	reflective
kind	sensitive	gleeful	engrossed	exhilarated	daring	relaxed	reliable	smiling
harmonious	tender	elated	inquisitive	optimistic	hopeful	serene	sure	grounded
empathetic	attracted	joyful	curious	frisky	exuberant	good	certain	unhurried
tolerant	admiring	euphoric	involved	animated	in the zone	at ease	dynamic	open-minded
understanding	warm	thankful	attentive	spirited	eager	comfortable	tenacious	efficient
easy	touched	festive	observant	thrilled	keen	pleased	composed	non-controlling
connected	close	ecstatic	amused	wonderful	earnest	encouraged	self-affirming	unassuming
sympathetic	loved	satisfied	thoughtful	funny	upbeat	surprised	truthful	trusting
friendly	sweet	glad	courteous	great	creative	bright	supportive	supported
approachable	gentle	cheerful	intent	giving	constructive	blessed	excellent	light
outgoing	compassionate	sunny	focused	sharing	helpful	assured	perseverant	spontaneous
flowing	caring	joyful		intelligent	resourceful	clear	responsible	aware
flexible	allowing	fun-loving		equal	motivated	balanced	energized	healthy
present	nonjudgmental	lighthearted		excited	cooperative	fine	sane	meditative
listening	appreciative	easygoing		enjoying	productive	okay	complete	still
welcoming	respectful	mellow		communicative	responsive	carefree	mature	rested
embracing	humble	happy-go-lucky		active	conscientious	adequate	solid	waiting
	gracious	glorious		spunky	approving	fulfilled	confident	laughing
	patient	innocent		youthful	honored	genuine	graceful	graceful
	honoring	child-like		vigorous	privileged	authentic	natural	natural
	expansive	gratified		tickled	adaptable	beautiful	steady	steady
	kindly	rapturous		engaged		forgiving	centered	centered
	grateful	in good humor				sincere	placid	placid
		in heaven				uplifted		
		on top of the world				unburdened		
						self-sufficient		

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