

Chapter 3:

How Well Do I Communicate with Others?

Objectives:

- ✓ To learn what communication consists of
- ✓ To understand how communication can affect feelings and relationships with family and friends and at school or work
- ✓ To identify bridges and barriers to good communication
- ✓ To practice good communication skills
- ✓ To define, give examples of, and practice assertive behavior

Activities

Page Number

Introduction to Communication (20-30 minutes)	57
Bridges and Barriers (Session 1: 20-30 minutes; Session 2: 20-30 minutes)	59
Choosing Words Carefully (40-50 minutes)	62
Giving Clear Directions (30-40 minutes)	65
Body Language (25-35 minutes)	66
Being a Good Listener (30-40 minutes)	68
Communicating Assertively (30-40 minutes)	71
Surveying Your Assertiveness (30-40 minutes)	74
Speaking Up for Yourself (Session 1: 45-55 minutes; Session 2: 45-55 minutes)	77
Refusing What You Don't Want (Session 1: 45-55 minutes; Session 2: 45-55 minutes)	81

Introduction to Communication

Materials: Newsprint and markers or board and chalk

Time: 20-30 minutes

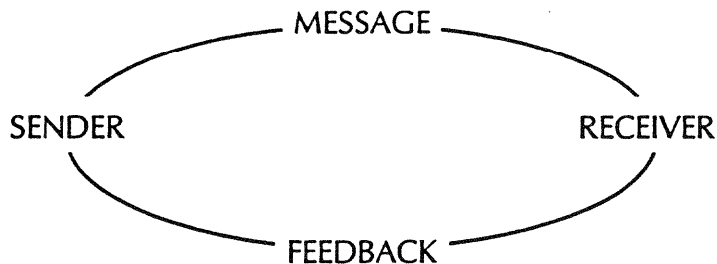
Planning Notes:

- ✓ Prepare a poster-size diagram for use in Step 3.

Purpose: To clarify what communication is and what makes it effective

Procedure:

1. Write the word "communication" on the board or newsprint and ask the group for examples of ways they communicate. List their responses, adding others from the list below if appropriate:
 - Talking on the phone
 - Writing a note or letter
 - Telling a story
 - Acting out a story or situation
 - Sending signals with body, clothing and so on
 - Making a face
 - Writing a poem or song
2. Ask someone to explain the point of communication. Help participants articulate that communicating is sending a message from one person to another.
3. Display your diagram illustrating this model of communication:



4. Explain the elements in the model: "The sender creates and transmits the messages. The receiver is the person (or group) who receives and responds to the message. The message contains both the sender's information and the receiver's interpretation of the message. Feedback is the way the receiver acknowledges the message."
5. Read the example of communication below:

Marcie and Tanya are talking. Marcie says, "I don't think I want to go to the party tonight. Paul is going to be there. I think I'll just get a movie and stay home."

Ask the group the following questions:

- Who is the **sender**? (Marcie)
- Who is the **receiver**? (Tanya)

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- What is the **message** Marcie is sending Tanya? (Several possible messages include: “I don’t want to go to the party because I’m mad at Paul and he’s going to be there,” and “I do want to go, but I want you to tell me that Paul likes me and wants me to be at the party.”)

Make the point that the **message** is not just what a person says, but the meaning in that message. Meaning takes two forms: the *meaning intended by the sender* and the *meaning interpreted by the receiver*.

Clarify that **feedback** is both the way the receiver lets the sender know she or he got the message and the way the sender finds out if the receiver correctly understood the message.

6. Review the scenario between Marcie and Tanya. Ask the group what Tanya could say to Marcie to clarify the communication and give her feedback. Several possibilities include:
 - Tanya can ask a question: “Marcie, are you saying you don’t like Paul anymore?”
 - Tanya can tell Marcie she doesn’t understand: “I guess I don’t really understand why you don’t want to go — I thought you liked Paul.”
 - Tanya can repeat the message she thinks she got from Marcie: “Marcie, it sounds like you are worried about seeing Paul at the party.”
7. Point out that any one of these responses opens the door for Marcie to communicate again with Tanya and give additional messages. Without the feedback, Tanya may never know what Marcie meant and Marcie may not tell her friend what she is really feeling.
8. Tell the group that poor communication can result from any breakdown in the communication model:
 - The sender fails to send a clear message.
 - The receiver does not listen and fails to get the message.
 - The receiver fails to clarify the message by giving feedback to the sender.
 - The sender does not acknowledge and/or respond to the feedback.
9. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Emphasize that poor communication causes problems in families, relationships, jobs and so on. Tell the group that the next few activities will help them learn and practice some of the basics of good communication.

Discussion Points:

1. What do you think about the communication model?
2. Have you ever had difficulty sending a message? What happened? Why is it sometimes difficult to say what we really mean?
3. Have you ever tried to communicate and been misunderstood? What happened? What could you have done differently?
4. What happens when communication between you and your friends breaks down? (Answers: “Senders” may get angry or frustrated because their message is not received or interpreted correctly; “receivers” may get hurt feelings if they think the sender has sent them a negative message; a job may not get done correctly because the receiver did not get the message from the sender; relationships may end because two people have not been able to communicate clearly.)

Bridges and Barriers

Materials: Newsprint and markers or board and chalk; copies of the handout, "Bridges and Barriers To Good Communication," for each participant; television viewing guide; pens/pencils

Time: 20-30 minutes (Session 1); 20-30 minutes (Session 2)

Planning Notes:

- ✓ Review the television viewing guide and choose several television shows. Suggestions include family shows, situation comedies or dramas that focus on relationships.

Purpose: To identify positive and negative ways of communicating

Procedure:

Session 1

1. Tell teens that one way to learn about communication is to look for positive and negative elements in others' communication. Explain that they are going to view television shows and find examples of good and bad communication.
2. Ask the group to think of communication barriers, things that people say or do that prevent understanding. List their responses on newsprint under "Barriers" and add any of the following:
 - Not listening
 - Yelling or talking loudly
 - Getting angry
 - Not saying honestly how you feel
 - Sulking or pouting
 - Lying
 - Being sarcastic
 - Criticizing or putting people down
 - Name-calling
 - Negative nonverbal messages (for example, frowning, rolling eyes)
 - Interrupting
 - Threatening
 - Accusing or blaming
3. Now ask the group for a list of communication bridges, things that people say or do that help keep communication going. List their responses under "Bridges" and add any of the following:
 - Listening well
 - Letting the sender know you are listening through body language or making encouraging noises, like "uh huh"
 - Choosing a good time to talk
 - Making eye contact
 - Trying to understand how the other person feels
 - Saying how you feel, using "I" statements
 - Offering possible solutions
 - Repeating what the speaker is saying
 - Clarifying what has been said to make sure you understood correctly
4. Point out that most communication between people includes both bridges and barriers. Whether the communication goes well or badly often depends on the balance of bridges and barriers.

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5. Distribute the handout and go over instructions for the activity:
 - Choose a 30-minute television show that involves characters who have family, friends or romantic relationships.
 - Watch the show and, using the group's lists, note bridges and barriers to communication.
 - Record the communication **and** what happens. For example, if one person yells at another, record "yelling" under "Barriers," then record what the person does after being yelled at, in the "What Happened" column.
 - If you see a point in the show where a communication bridge could have been used, list it on your handout in the "Suggested Bridges" column.
 - Bring your handout to the next session and be prepared to tell the group about your show and the communication you observed.

Session 2

1. Ask for a volunteer to share one example of a communication bridge and barrier, and the results of the communication. Be sure the volunteer briefly explain the plot so others can understand the context of the communication.
2. Ask for examples of additional communication bridges that might have enhanced communication in the television shows.
3. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. How realistic was the communication in these shows compared to actual communication between people in similar relationships?
2. What surprised you the most about the communication you observed?
3. Can you name one communication barrier that consistently yielded negative results? How can you avoid using that barrier in your personal communication?
4. Is it difficult to express feelings honestly and directly? Can you give an example?

Handout

Bridges and Barriers to Good Communication

The television show's title: _____

Bridges	Barriers	What Happened?	Suggested Bridges
"I'm disappointed and hurt when you don't call."		"I'm sorry — I won't do it again."	
	Yelling and name calling	Threatening and fighting Knife wound	Leave the situation

Choosing Words Carefully

Materials: Copies of the handout, "Positive Communication: Say What You Feel," for each participant; lists of communication bridges and barriers from the previous activity

Time: 40-50 minutes

Planning Notes:

- ✓ If you did not conduct the previous activity, use the lists included in Steps 2 and 3 of the previous activity, "Bridges and Barriers."

Purpose: To practice expressing thoughts and feelings through "I statements"

- ✓ Write the following sentences on newsprint to use in Step 2:

Accusing: "Why do you always have to be late for everything?"

Sarcastic: "You could have been a little later — then we'd miss the whole movie!"

Insulting (name-calling): "You're such a stupid jerk for being late."

Threatening: "You're never reliable. I'm not making plans with you ever again."

Blaming: "You've ruined the movie for me — we'll never get good seats now."

Procedure:

1. Tell the group to listen to the following scenario and think about how they would communicate their feelings in a similar situation:

You've made plans to go to a movie with a friend. The lines have been long for this movie and you want to go early to be sure to get tickets and good seats. You ask your friend to come by at 7:00, which is early for an 8:00 movie. You are clear with your friend about the time, since she or he is often late. Seven o'clock comes and goes, and no friend arrives. At 7:25 your friend shows up with an excuse for being late. By this time you know you probably won't get tickets for the movie.

2. Ask for examples of what teens would say to their friend if they were in this situation. After you hear from them, display the responses you have prepared. Go over each, reading it according to the word that describes the sentence's tone, and ask how their friends would react to each one.
3. Refer the group to the lists of bridges and barriers from the previous activity. Remind them that "not saying how you really feel" is a barrier to good communication, too. None of these responses really tells a friend what feelings are being felt. Explain that each of these responses are negative — and other people are likely to react negatively to them.

4. Write the following response on the board or newsprint:

"I am really disappointed that you're late. I'm angry that we won't get to see the movie now."

Ask the group how friends would respond to that kind of communication.

5. Explain that "positive communication" means choosing words carefully and:

- expressing feelings honestly and clearly without threatening or putting down the other person
- beginning the communication with "I" rather than "you," as in "I wish" or "I feel," as opposed to "you always" or "you never."

People are more likely to respond in a positive way to such messages because **the sender is taking ownership of her or his feelings** and not trying to blame or put down the other person.

6. Distribute the handout and go over instructions for the activity:
 - Find a partner to work in pairs.
 - Read the negative message on the left and think of a positive alternative. Try not to offend the sender.
 - Choose your words carefully and write your response as an “I message.” Begin with “I” and communicate your feelings honestly.
7. Allow about 15 minutes for pairs to work, then ask for one or two examples of positive alternatives for each negative message.
8. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. In general, how are “I statements” different from negative messages?
2. How do you think the receivers of your positive messages will react? Give examples.
3. How easy or difficult is it to use positive “I messages” when you’re talking with someone? Why? (Answers include: There is emotion involved and communicating clearly is more difficult when we are emotional; most people are in the *habit* of using negative, rather than positive, communication.)
4. Is there a situation in your life right now where using an “I statement” might help make the communication more positive? Please describe it.
5. Using “I statements” does not guarantee that the communication between you and the other person will go well. Can you think of a situation in which using an “I statement” might backfire or make no difference at all?

Handout

Positive Communication: Say What You Feel

<i>Negative Messages</i>	<i>Positive Alternatives</i>
1. To an old friend who moved away "You never call me."	I wish you'd call me more often - I miss talking to you.
2. To stepparent "You're always rude to my friends."	
3. To a friend who wants to do something dangerous "That's a stupid idea."	
4. To family at dinner time "Nobody cares how hard I work."	
5. To romantic partner "You always ignore me when we're with your friends."	
6. To older sister "Don't yell at me!"	
7. To friend telling a racist joke "You're a jerk for telling jokes like that."	
8. To an adult you want to talk to "You're probably too busy to talk to me."	
9. To friend who really isn't listening "You don't really care about me."	
10. To a romantic partner who was talking to a former girlfriend "I guess you're going back to her, right?"	

Giving Clear Directions

Materials: Several slices of bread; small jar of jelly or jam; small jar of peanut butter; table knife; tray; water or wipes for cleaning hands; index card; pens/pencils

Time: 30-40 minutes

Planning Notes:

Purpose:	To understand the importance of sending clear, accurate messages
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- ✓ If peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are not commonly eaten by teens in the group, choose another simple food for the activity.
- ✓ Do not waste the food. Wash your hands before handling food, then use small portions of peanut butter and jelly as you follow the directions. Allow teens to eat the finished sandwiches at break time.
- ✓ This activity will demonstrate how difficult it can be to communicate *clearly* what you want another person to do. When you begin to make the peanut butter sandwich by following directions (Step 5), do *exactly* what the directions say. For example, if they say "put the peanut butter on the bread," pick up the jar of peanut butter and set it on top of the bread slice. Do not add missing steps yourself, such as "open the jar."
- ✓ If writing is a problem, ask for step-by-step verbal directions.

Procedure:

1. Begin without any introduction. Give each participant an index card and have them write directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Collect the cards, fold them and place them in a container.
2. Choose one card from the container and explain that you will follow the directions to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Ask for a volunteer to read the directions from the card while you follow them.
3. **Do exactly what the directions say** until you cannot follow them any further. Then ask another volunteer to choose a second card and repeat the process. Continue with several cards until it is clear the directions are incomplete.
4. Explain that communicating is an everyday behavior that many people take for granted. Often, we do not choose our words well enough to get our message across accurately. In this case, the directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich were not detailed enough to follow successfully.
5. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. How easy or difficult is it to give clear directions? Why?
2. Give examples of when giving clear directions is (or was) really important in your family, with friends, with a romantic partner or on a job.
3. What can the sender say or do to make communication clearer? (Answers: Take time; give step-by-step directions; use visual cues [show and tell]; be descriptive; ask for feedback to see if the message is getting across.)
4. What can the **receiver** say or do if someone else is not communicating clearly? (Answer: Use feedback; repeat what was heard; ask questions for more.)

Body Language

Materials: Index cards or slips of paper; container

Time: 25-35 minutes

Planning Notes:

- ✓ Write the adjectives below on index cards. Add any you would like to include:

angry	sad
disappointed	happy
shy	nervous
afraid	embarrassed
attractive	enthusiastic
exhausted	bored

Purpose:

To learn what body language is (nonverbal communication) and how to use it

- ✓ On the board or newsprint, draw a large chart like the one below for use in Step 5:

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Feeling

Behavior

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Procedure:

1. Remind teens that one of the problems that occurs in communicating is that a sender's actions in some way contradict what she or he says.
2. Ask if anyone knows what "body language" means. Clarify that body language refers to how one expresses feelings through body movement. Then ask the group for several examples or give a couple of your own: smiling, shrugging shoulders, rolling eyes and so on.
3. Explain that this activity will give the group a chance to practice communicating through body language. Review the instructions:
 - I will need 12 volunteers to play a game like "charades." Who can explain how charades is played? (If no one can, explain how the game works: a person acts out something and the audience tries to guess what it is.)
 - The first volunteer will draw a card with a feeling written on it, then act it out without using words.
 - The rest of the group will guess what feeling is being communicated. Once the feeling is correctly guessed, the next person in line will draw a card and act it out.
 - The game will continue until there are no more cards or time is up.

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4. Have 12 volunteers form a line in the front of the room. Give assistance if someone seems to be having trouble. As each feeling is correctly identified, write it in the left column of the chart and ask the group to list the behaviors that helped them identify the feeling. Write those in the right column. (For example, if the feeling is “disappointed,” behaviors might include shrugging of shoulders, sighing or hanging the head.)
 5. When all feelings have been acted out, conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. Can you give examples of someone’s body language communicating a different message from what was said with words?
2. When you are trying to send a message, which is more effective: body language or verbal communication? Why?
3. Sometimes one person is offended by another’s body language. How can you keep that from happening? (Answer: be honest and direct if you want to communicate something to someone — match your nonverbal messages to your verbal ones so the receiver can clearly understand what message you are sending.)
4. What are some nonverbal body language messages that are particularly positive? Negative?

Being a Good Listener

Materials: Leader's Resources, "Instructions for Listeners" and "Positive Listening Skills;" index cards; container for cards

Time: 30-40 minutes

Planning Notes:

- ✓ For use in Step 2, copy the instructions from the Leader's Resource, "Instruction for Listener," onto index cards. Make enough for two out of three participants. Use instructions more than once if necessary. Fold the cards and place them in a container.

Purpose: To demonstrate the importance of being a good listener and to learn the skills needed to listen well

Procedure:

1. Remind participants that they have been exploring how people send clear messages. Now we'll look at the other half of communicating positively: the skills to be a *good listener*.
2. Form groups of three and each group to count off "1," "2" and "3." Then review the activity:
 - All "ones" will be speakers, while "twos" and "threes" will listen.
 - Speakers are to talk for three minutes about a recent problem, one that is not too personal. You might talk about a conflict in your family, a fight with a friend or romantic partner or a disagreement with a teacher or supervisor.
 - Listeners will select an index card with instructions. Start listening to the speaker and after a little bit, begin to do what it says on the card.
3. Be sure the "1s" understand they are expected to speak for three minutes. Then have the "2s" and "3s" draw an index card with a listening behavior. Be sure they understand what they are to do.
4. Have groups begin with "speakers" speaking and "listeners" listening. After a few minutes, bring the group together and ask the speakers how they felt about their friends' listening skills.
5. Ask speakers which listeners made them feel most "listened to." Have those listeners read the instructions on their index cards. List the positive listening behaviors on newsprint or the board and add listening skills from the Leader's Resource, "Positive Listening Skills."
6. Next, ask speakers which listeners made them feel the least "listened to." Be clear that the "bad" listeners were simply following directions, not responding to what the speakers had to say. List the negative listening behaviors on newsprint or the board.
7. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. How do you feel when you tell someone something and they don't listen well?
2. Have you ever used negative listening skills? Describe the situation and what happened.
3. Which of the positive listening skills do you think you can actually use on a regular basis?
4. If someone talks to you about something serious when you are feeling sleepy, distracted or worried, what can you do? (Answer: be honest and tell them how you are feel. Ask when the two of you can arrange a better time to talk.)

Adapted with permission from *Young Fathers' Curriculum*, Public/Private Ventures, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, 1991.

Instructions for Listeners

1. Give advice even if you aren't asked for it — say something like "You should..." or "If I were you...."
2. Interrupt the speaker while she or he is talking.
3. Try to top the speaker's story with a better one of your own.
4. Ask questions to clarify what the speaker is saying. For example, "Are you saying...?" or "I'm not sure I understand, could you tell me more about that?"
5. Put the speaker down by criticizing her or his behavior, saying things like "That's dumb" or "Why would you do that?"
6. Compliment the speaker with statements like "I really like the way you handled that" or "It sounds like you are really trying to deal with this."
7. Change the subject to something unrelated to what the speaker is talking about.
8. Lean over and start whispering to someone else while the speaker is talking.
9. Listen carefully at first, then begin to look bored: gaze around the room, sigh, look at your watch, roll your eyes.
10. Look right at the speaker, make eye contact and every now and then nod as if in agreement or verbalize agreement (for example, "yeah" or "uh huh").
11. Disagree with the speaker: each time she/he says something, challenge it and say what you think she/he should be doing.
12. Reflect the speaker's message back — say something like "I think you are saying..." or "It sounds like...."

Positive Listening Skills

- ✓ Give the speaker your full attention. Stop doing other things, remove distractions such as television and turn to face her or him.
- ✓ Lean towards the speaker.
- ✓ Make eye contact with the speaker, unless that would be rude in your culture.
- ✓ Nod or shake your head in response to the speaker's comments.
- ✓ Make verbal responses that let the speaker know you are listening, such as "uh huh," "yes" or "go on."
- ✓ Change your facial expression to reflect the appropriate emotion, such as concern, excitement, fear and so on.
- ✓ Check out the meaning of the speaker's message — say what you think she/he is saying and ask if that is correct.
- ✓ Try to figure out what the speaker is feeling and check to see if you are correct.
- ✓ Do not interrupt unless time is an issue and you have to be somewhere else or do something. In that case, apologize and ask to finish the conversation at another time.

Communicating Assertively

Materials: Newsprint and markers or board and chalk; scrap paper; pens/pencils

Time: 30-40 minutes

Planning Notes:

- ✓ When we teach teens to be assertive, we need to also teach them to assess situations and to consider their personal safety. In some situations, speaking up and communicating assertively can be dangerous (if someone has a weapon, has been drinking or taking drugs, is extremely angry and so on).

Purpose:

To learn the difference between assertive, aggressive and passive behavior

- ✓ When you introduce the topic of assertiveness, keep in mind that communicating assertively, especially for women, is not considered the norm in some cultures. Individual cultural teachings regarding assertiveness will vary among your participants. Some will come from families in which speaking up for oneself or refusing a request, especially from an adult or a male, is considered inappropriate.

You do not want to encourage teens to behave in a way that could have unpleasant consequences for them in their cultural or family circles. It is important, however, that all participants understand there are certain situations in which assertive behavior will often yield positive results. (Examples include resisting pressure, from romantic partners or peers, to have sex, use alcohol or other drugs, join a gang or fail in school.)

Be aware that assertive, aggressive and passive forms of communication are defined culturally and regionally. (For example, African-American assertiveness is often perceived as aggressive communication from outside the African-American culture.)

- ✓ Write three questions on a newsprint poster for use in Step 4:
 1. How will Geneva feel?
 2. How will the two girls feel?
 3. What is the worst possible outcome?

Procedure:

1. Tell teens that one way to make communication more effective is to choose the appropriate kind of communication in difficult situations. Read the following scenario aloud:

*Geneva has been standing in line for over two hours to buy a concert ticket. The rule is, one person, one ticket. Her feet are killing her and she knows she is in trouble with her mom, who expected her home by now. But there are only five people left in front of her and she is **sure** she will get a ticket.*

*Out of nowhere, two girls from school walk up, make a big deal about meeting up with their friend who just **happens** to be standing in front of Geneva, and take places in line in front of her.*

What do you think Geneva should do?

2. Have participants write one sentence describing what Geneva should do in this situation.

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3. Allow about three minutes, then ask participants to form three groups based on the following criteria:

Group 1: All who wrote that they would stand there and get angry but not say anything, move to this area of the room.

Group 2: All who wrote that they would call the girls names **and** threaten to hurt them if they did not go to the end of the line, move to the other end of the room.

Group 3: All who wrote that they would speak up and tell them to go to the back of the line, form a group in the middle.

4. Once the three groups have formed, display the three questions you have prepared and go over instructions for the remainder of the activity.

■ Stay in your groups and discuss the answers to the following questions.

1. How will Geneva feel after making the response you chose?
2. How do you think the two girls who butted in line will feel if Geneva responds like you?
3. What is the worst thing that could happen if Geneva makes your response?

(Note: If there is only one person standing in either position, join that person to form a group and discuss the questions with her or him.)

5. Allow five minutes for discussion, then ask everyone to be seated.
6. Ask one participant from each group to share group responses to the questions. Record the major points in three separate columns on the board or newsprint.
7. Write the terms “assertive,” “aggressive” and “passive” on the board or newsprint. Ask participants to match each term to the list of outcomes for the responses.
8. Review Geneva’s choices for action one more time and illustrate why assertiveness is usually the best choice in a situation like this.

■ **Passive response:** Behaving passively means not expressing your own needs and feelings, or expressing them so weakly that they will not be addressed.

If Geneva behaves passively, by standing in line and not saying anything, she will probably feel angry with the girls and herself. If the ticket office runs out of tickets before she gets to the head of the line, she will be furious and might blow up at the girls after it’s too late to change the situation.

■ *A passive response is not usually in your best interest*, because it allows other people to violate your rights. Yet there **are** times when being passive is the most appropriate response. It is important to assess whether a situation is dangerous and choose the response most likely to keep you safe.

■ **Aggressive response:** Behaving aggressively is asking for what you want or saying how you feel in a threatening, sarcastic or humiliating way that may offend the other person(s).

If Geneva calls the girls names or threatens them, she may feel strong for a moment, but there is no guarantee she will get the girls to leave. More importantly, the girls and their friend may also respond aggressively, through a verbal or physical attack on Geneva.

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- An aggressive response is never in your best interest, because it almost always leads to increased conflict.
 - **Assertive response:** Behaving assertively means asking for what you want or saying how you feel in an honest and respectful way that does not infringe on another person's rights or put the individual down.

If Geneva tells the girls they need to go to the end of the line because other people have been waiting, she will not put the girls down, but merely state the facts of the situation. She can feel proud for standing up for her rights. At the same time, she will probably be supported in her statement by other people in the line. While there is a good chance the girls will feel embarrassed and move, there is also the chance that they will ignore Geneva and her needs will not be met.

An assertive response is almost always in your best interest, since it is your best chance of getting what you want without offending the other person(s). At times, however, being assertive can be inappropriate. If tempers are high, if people have been using alcohol or other drugs, if people have weapons or if you are in an unsafe place, being assertive may not be the safest choice.

9. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. What are some ways Geneva could have let the girls know how she felt without being directly aggressive or assertive? (Answer: by mumbling sarcastically under her breath; using body language that communicated her disgust and frustration; telling the person behind her how stupid the girls were, but loudly enough so they could overhear and so on. Behaviors like these are called "passive-aggressive" behaviors. They are negative but not direct. They do not necessarily get you what you want and they often make the other person(s) angry.)
2. Can you think of circumstances where passive communication may be in your best interest, even though your needs may not be met?
3. Have you behaved aggressively in a situation? How did it work out? How would things have been different if you had chosen an assertive response?
4. Have you behaved assertively in a situation? How did it work out? What would a passive response have been in that situation? An aggressive response?
5. When is it easier, and when is it more difficult, to be assertive? Give examples.
6. Is there a current situation where you need to act assertively and have not yet done so? What will you do?
7. Does acting assertively always guarantee you will get your needs and/or wants met? (Answer: No! But it does guarantee you will feel proud of standing up for yourself.)
8. Have you heard of people getting a negative reaction for speaking assertively? Explain.

Surveying Your Assertiveness

Materials: Three pieces of construction paper; markers; masking tape; newsprint and marker or board and chalk; Leader's Resource, "Surveying Your Assertiveness;" paper; pens/pencils; a handout made from Leader's Resource (optional)

Time: 30-40 minutes

Planning Notes:

Purpose: To assess assertiveness

- ✓ In this activity, participants stand up and move about to demonstrate their levels of assertiveness. An alternate plan is to have teens complete their assertiveness survey individually. In that case, make a handout from the Leader's Resource.
- ✓ Make three signs, reading "Most of the time," "Some of the time" and "Almost never." Place these on the wall prior to conducting the activity.
- ✓ Create a poster with the following scores to tally survey results:
 - 0-5 You need to practice.
 - 6-10 You are doing okay, but could use some practice.
 - 11-15 You are doing very well. Keep it up!

Procedure:

1. Tell the group that since assertiveness is the best way of communicating in many situations, it is important that everyone find out just how assertive they already are. Give each participant some paper and make sure each has a pen or pencil.
2. Go over instructions for the activity:
 - I will read 15 statements. As I read each one, think about how often you do what the statement says.
 - There are three signs along the wall marked with "Most of the time," "Some of the time" and "Almost never."
 - When I read a statement, move to the sign that indicates how often that statement is true for you. Take your pen and paper with you. (Give an example using Statement 1.)
 - For each statement, note on paper where you are standing. Write "M" for most of the time, "S" for some of the time and "N" for almost never.
3. Read the first statement again and ask participants to stand, taking paper and pencil with them, and move to the appropriate place along the wall. When all are in place, remind them to record where they are standing.
4. Repeat this procedure for all 15 statements, then ask participants to be seated.
5. Ask teens to write down the number of "M's" on their papers.
6. Display the assertiveness scorecard you have made. Go over the numbers on the scorecard and explain what they mean. Make the following points:
 - Many teens and adults score fairly low on this survey.

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- Participants with scores higher than seven or eight should be glad they have learned how to speak up for what they want and to say “no” to things they do not want.
 - In our society, boys and men generally score higher than girls and women on assertiveness surveys such as this one.
 - People are more likely to treat others with respect when they have self-respect and can stand up for themselves.
 - Participants with scores below six have an excellent opportunity to bring up their scores by practicing assertive behaviors.
7. Discuss the fact that being assertive is not always an easy thing to do. Explain that in many families and cultures, children are taught **not** to be assertive. Asking for what you want or refusing a request is considered impolite. People in such families may feel badly about themselves, or angry, because they let others take advantage of them.
 8. Ask for examples of being taught to behave unassertively. Give two historical examples:
 - (1) As recently as the 1950’s and early 1960’s, African- Americans in the U.S. were taught **not** to speak up and **not** to refuse the request of a white person in certain parts of the country. The Civil Rights movement made it clear that the basic rights of African-Americans to dignity and self-worth were being violated when they were forced to endure the whims and desires of white people.
 - (2) Girls and women in many cultures are taught **not** to speak up for themselves and **not** to refuse any request made by a male family member, even a younger brother. In the United States, that attitude is changing in some families who believe in the equality of males and females, but in some other families, the attitude is not changing.
 9. For many of us, behaving assertively is something we would like to do, but may not know how to do. Tell participants they will have an opportunity to practice being assertive in the next activity.
 10. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. What makes it so difficult to be assertive?
2. Can you think of a situation in life in which you would like to be more assertive? Please describe the situation.
3. Do you know someone who is particularly good at being assertive and standing up for her or his rights? How about a figure on a popular television show? Describe that person and her or his assertive behavior.
4. Can you remember a time when you were assertive? How did it turn out?
5. How can you be assertive and avoid sounding like you are being aggressive? (Answer: Be firm but not demanding or threatening; be insistent about standing up for yourself; use a normal tone of voice and keep your body language relaxed, not menacing.)
6. Do you have a friend who needs to learn to be more assertive? Explain. How can you help?

Surveying Your Assertiveness

1. If I disagree with a friend, I say so, even if it means she or he might not like me.
2. I ask for help when I am hurt or confused.
3. I tell my friends what I honestly think about alcohol and other drugs, even if I know my ideas are not popular.
4. I let people know when they disappoint me.
5. If a friend borrows money and is late paying it back, I remind her or him.
6. I say no when classmates want to copy my homework or test answers.
7. If a friend is talking or making noise in a movie, I ask her or him to be quiet.
8. If I have a friend who is always late, I tell him or her how I feel about it.
9. I ask my friends for a favor when I need one.
10. When someone asks me to do something unreasonable, I refuse.
11. I express my views on important things, even if others disagree.
12. I don't do dangerous things with my friends.
13. When I don't understand what someone is telling me, I ask questions.
14. When I disagree with someone, I try not to hurt that person's feelings.
15. When people hurt my feelings, I let them know how I feel.

Speaking Up for Yourself

Materials: Leader's Resource, "Assertiveness Role-Play;" index cards; newsprint and markers or board and chalk

Time: 45-55 minutes (Session 1); 45-55 minutes (Session 2)

Planning Notes:

Purpose: To role-play assertive ways that teens can ask for what they want or need

- ✓ Remember that behaving assertively may be new for some participants. Do not allow anyone to tease participants who find this activity difficult. Encourage everyone to participate, but respect the preferences of people too embarrassed to role-play.
- ✓ Prepare three posters to use for Step 9 in Session 1 and Step 1 in Session 2.
- ✓ For Session 2, select scenarios from the Leader's Resource or substitute some scenarios that group members have actually had to deal with. Write the scenarios on index cards.

Procedure:

Session 1

1. Ask for a volunteer to define "assertiveness." Help the group understand what constitutes assertive behavior:
 - Stating clearly what you want or need, and defending your right to have what you want or need
 - Asking for what you want
 - Saying what you feel or think
 - Refusing to do what is not in your own best interest
 - Respecting other people and never threatening, punishing or humiliating another
2. Point out that while assertiveness is getting what you want, it can be done through two basic ways of communicating:
 - Asking for what you want
 - Refusing what you do not want
3. Tell participants to focus first on: asking for what you want.
4. Ask the group to think about the following situation:

Dwayne's uncle won two tickets to a professional baseball game in a neighboring city. He gave them to Dwayne as a reward for bringing his grades up. Dwayne has asked his best friend, Chuck, to go with him and they have made plans to meet at 10:45 a.m. to catch the bus to the ballpark. Dwayne knows Chuck never gets anywhere on time. If they miss the 11:00 bus, there isn't another one that will get them to the park for the first inning. How can Dwayne tell Chuck it is important to be on time and that he will go without Chuck if Chuck isn't there when the bus leaves?

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5. Listen while participants brainstorm about how Dwayne can communicate assertively. Record their ideas on newsprint or the board and add any of the following, if they are omitted.

Dwayne can:

- Use “I” statements to say what he feels and wants, whether the feelings are positive or negative.
 - Firmly and clearly say what he wants or needs, without avoiding the subject or apologizing for his requests.
 - Use assertive body language: stand tall, look Chuck in the eye and keep a serious expression on his face.
 - Do not threaten, pressure or put Chuck down.
 - Be respectful of Chuck’s feelings, needs or explanations, but be clear about his own feelings and desires.
6. Ask three volunteers to role-play Dwayne talking to Chuck about being on time. Explain that you will play Chuck, and you want one volunteer to communicate passively, another to communicate aggressively and the third to communicate assertively. Tell the rest of the group to coach each volunteer by giving advice to the players about how to act.
7. Begin with passive role-play:
- Have the first “Dwayne” stand next to you and ask passively to get what she or he wants.
 - Act out Chuck’s role. Repeatedly reassure Dwayne that you will be on time and not to lose faith in you. Reassure him of your friendship and tell him you are really excited about going to this game.
 - Remind the group to give the volunteer tips on how to communicate passively.
 - At the end of the role-play, ask the volunteers and the group tell you what behaviors they used. List them on newsprint or the board under the title “passive.”
8. Repeat the procedure with the second and third volunteers.
9. Display the posters that summarize the major differences in the three types of communication:
- *passive*: you communicate what you need or want so tentatively, quietly or submissively that other people may not take your wishes and needs seriously.
 - *aggressive*: you communicate what you need or want in a negative way that is intended to offend another person.
 - *assertive*: you communicate what you need or want honestly, calmly and directly, without trying to offend someone else.

Session 2

1. Display the three posters of assertive, passive and aggressive behaviors. Tell the group they will practice, in pairs, asking for what they want.
2. Review the instructions (which you can also display on newsprint):
 - Each pair will receive an index card with a written scenario in which one person needs to communicate assertively with another.
 - In your pairs, write a script for the person to speak assertively. Use as many assertive behaviors as you can.
 - Find another pair to team up with. Each pair should coach the other pair's role-playing, by suggesting additional or different words or behaviors to strengthen assertiveness.
 - After the role-play, switch positions and continue.
3. Distribute the index cards and tell participants they have 10 minutes to work on their role-play. After 10 minutes, announce that pairs should join together and role-play for each other. Remind the group that coaching is important.
4. After another 15 minutes, ask for volunteers to perform their role-play for the entire group. Allow two or three pairs to perform if there is time.
5. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. What happens if you speak up for yourself and still do not get what you want?
2. Can you think of a situation in which it might be better to be passive than assertive? Give examples.
3. What should you do if your assertive communication gets a negative response, such as anger or even a direct threat? (Answer: Back off and get out of the situation; do not continue or escalate the conflict.)

Assertiveness Role-Play

1. A salesperson ignores you and waits on an adult, even though you have been waiting at the counter longer.
2. You have been on the phone with Veronica for over an hour and aren't interested in hearing more about her boyfriend. You want to watch a television show that is starting.
3. You are attending a meeting to plan a city-wide recycling event to raise money for athletic equipment. Every time you start to say something, an older teenager interrupts you.
4. You cannot study and are getting a headache because of the loud music coming from the apartment downstairs.
5. You have seen your school counselor three times about the same problem with your social science teacher, but nothing has changed. You are annoyed and want her to help you more.
6. A friend borrowed your library book and lost it. You want your friend to pay for the book.
7. You are watching a movie while someone behind you is talking and laughing too loudly.
8. A friend promised to come to your house and help with an English paper on Sunday afternoon, but she didn't show up. She calls you two days later.
9. You have been dating Maggie for a while but now you want to date other girls. Maggie calls to ask what the two of you are doing Friday night.
10. You are having lunch in the food court and someone at the next table lights a cigarette. Smoking is not allowed in the food court or anywhere else in the mall, and the smoke is making you feel sick.
11. You have been waiting 45 minutes for Ashley to meet you for lunch. She shows up and is apologetic, but you are angry.
12. You overhear a friend make a rude comment about the guy in your class who has epilepsy. You want the friend to know how you feel about the comment.

Refusing What You Don't Want

Materials: Newsprint and markers or board and chalk; index cards; pens/pencils

Time: 45-55 minute sessions (Session 1); 45-55 minutes (Session 2)

Planning Notes:

- ✓ Make posters of the rights listed in Step 4 and of the role-play assignment in Step 10.

Purpose:	To role-play assertive behaviors to refuse requests
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- ✓ After Session 1, review the scenarios the teens have written and choose enough so that each pair of teens will have one scenario to work with. Eliminate any that are inappropriate for the group or are so explicit they give away the identity of the writer. Feel free to add your own scenarios.

Procedure:

Session 1

1. Remind participants that there are two ways to get what you want or need: (1) by asking for what you want and (2) by refusing what you do not want. Explain that in this session, participants will practice refusal skills.
2. Ask teens to think about the following scenario:

Rachel and Demetra have been at the mall all day when Demetra says, "Hey, there's a sweater in that store that I really want and I think it's on sale today." She tugs Rachel along until they get into the store, then finds the stack of sweaters. She whispers to Rachel, "Ask that sales clerk a question, and I'll put the sweater in my backpack." Rachel whispers back that she doesn't want to, but Demetra pleads with her. She says the sale merchandise won't cost the store hardly anything, and promises she'll even swipe an extra sweater for Rachel.

3. Ask if anyone can describe what Rachel is probably **feeling** in this situation. Write the feelings on the newsprint or board. They should include emotions like "pressured," "confused," "frustrated," "nervous" and "scared." Point out it is also normal to feel angry if a friend puts you on the spot by asking you to do something the friend knows is not in your best interest.
4. Point out that Rachel has rights in this situation, like anyone does when asked to do something. Go over the list of rights you have prepared:

Rachel's Rights

The right to say how she feels about this situation.

The right to say no without feeling guilty.

The right to behave in her own best interest.

The right to change her mind (even if she had agreed to do what was asked).

5. Ask for questions or comments about Rachel's rights. Then mention that sometimes parents, teachers, employers or other adults in authority make requests of teenagers. The request may not please the teenager and may not feel like it is in her or his best interest. Ask how a teenager's rights are similar or different with a parent than a friend.

Clarify that some adults, such as teachers, parents and family members, do have the right to make requests of teens. Unless the adult is asking for something that is illegal, harmful or seriously disrespectful of the teen, it is usually not appropriate for a teenager to refuse the request. Teens do, however, have the right to say how they feel.

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6. Now ask the group to brainstorm the behaviors Rachel needs to use to be assertive. Write their responses on the board or newsprint and be sure the list includes the following behaviors:
 - Say no with her words.
 - Say no with her body. Use strong body language, make eye contact, stand back from Demetra, who is pressuring her.
 - Keep repeating no without giving any excuses or reasons.
 - Turn the conversation around and tell Demetra how she feels about being pressured into doing something not in her best interest.
 - Offer a compromise. Try to find a solution that does not require Rachel to do something she does not want to do.
 - Leave the situation: refuse to discuss the matter anymore and walk away if necessary.
 7. Ask for a volunteer to role-play Rachel, while you play Demetra. Tell the rest of the group to coach the volunteer so she can remain assertive in the face of your pressure.
 8. Reread the scenario. Then role-play with your volunteer using lines like the following to pressure her or him:
 - "Come on, you're supposed to be my best friend. I **really** want this sweater and I don't have any money."
 - "This store is so overpriced, ripping them off is fair."
 - "What's the matter, are you a chicken? Sydney would do it if she were here."Keep it up for a minute or two, encouraging the audience to coach Rachel.
 9. After the role-play, ask the teens to identify the behaviors "Rachel" used to be assertive. Check them off on the poster. If there is time, have another volunteer try the role-play.
 10. Tell the teens to write a similar scenario with someone pressuring a teenager to do something not in that teen's best interest. Explain that in the next session they will practice role-playing some of their scenarios, so encourage them to be realistic. Distribute index cards and have participants write their scenarios. Collect the cards.

Session 2

1. Divide participants into small groups of four or five and give each group one of the scenarios from the previous session. Explain that if someone recognizes their own role-play they should not say anything about it and no one will know.
2. Go over instructions, which you can display on newsprint, for preparing the role-play:
 - Read over your scenario and decide who will play the characters. All other group members will be coaches now, but eventually everyone will get to role-play.
 - Review refusal skills and decide which ones work best for your situation.
 - Write a script and rehearse the lines. Each actor should have the help of a coach.
 - Present the role-play to the large group.

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3. Have small groups begin working and allow 10 minutes to prepare. Then ask for volunteers to role-play. Give feedback to all groups, noting when additional refusal skills could be used, when an actor is especially assertive and so on.
 4. Conclude the activity using the Discussion Points.

Discussion Points:

1. When could you use a “coach” when faced with real pressure from a friend or a romantic partner?
2. Which is most difficult, speaking up for your wants or refusing what you do not want? Why?
3. Think of a recent situation in which you wanted to refuse a request but were not able to. Which refusal skills could you have used?
4. Do you have a situation now where someone is pressuring you to do something that is not in your best interest? What could you do to be more assertive in that situation?

