

## Communication Strategies

Much of what we communicate to others is done without ever saying a word. Most of us learned these skills naturally as we grew up, by watching and “modelling” those around us, and through trial and error. Communication seems easy, and we all think we are experts. After all, we have been talking since we were young, and it comes naturally most of the time. You just open your mouth and the words come spilling out.

Most of us do have fantastic communication skills – until, that is, our emotions hijack the situation. This is normal. We cannot be thinking and feeling at the same time, and that is part of the challenge with communicating well in challenging situations with people who have become intimately acquainted with our “buttons” to be pushed.

### Some Non-Verbal Factors

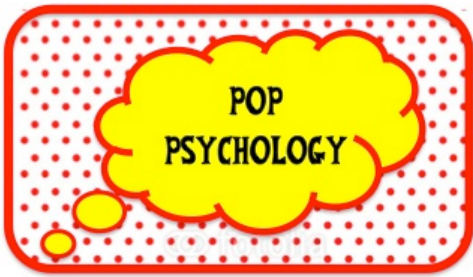
- **Eye Contact:** Keeping comfortable and frequent eye contact is a sign of approval, interest, or affection. Staring, or prolonged and intense eye contact, is viewed as a threatening nonverbal behaviour. Too little eye contact could send the message that you are disinterested in another person. Have you ever been accused of being “stuck up” or arrogant? It could be your lack of eye contact, which you do to protect yourself, but it may be viewed differently by others. People may think you look suspicious in some way, and may not trust you or take your opinion seriously.
- **Facial Expressions:** People show what they feel by the expression on their faces. Make sure you are expressing how you feel – a failure to show emotion may be perceived again as dislike. Let a big smile ease gently over your face, and see if you don’t notice a change in the way you feel. Try also to notice if your facial expressions are in fact appropriate to your feelings. This may take some practice. If you learn to *appear* more relaxed and comfortable in social situations, there’s a good change you may learn to *feel* more relaxed too.
- **Body Posture and Gestures:** The way you position your body in relation to the person with whom you’re talking is another subtle cue about your feelings. Try to hold your head up high. Also watch what you do with your arms and hands. Fidgeting can be a tip-off to others that you’re uncomfortable, and can make them feel edgy as well.

### Verbal Communication Skills

This refers to both the *things* that we say and the way that we say it. Do we ask too many questions, do we talk only about ourselves, do we change the topic often? Do we talk in short sentences or give one-word answers? Do we use labels and name-calling, do we become aggressive and demanding to get what we want?

Communication a two-way street –

In order to communicate effectively, both people must speak clearly and listen effectively

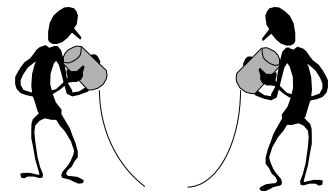


## Communication Strategies

Good communication has two properties: you express yourself openly and directly, and you encourage the other person to express themselves in return. You say how you are thinking and feeling, and you try to listen and understand what the other person is thinking and feeling. According to this definition, the ideas and feelings of *both* people are important.

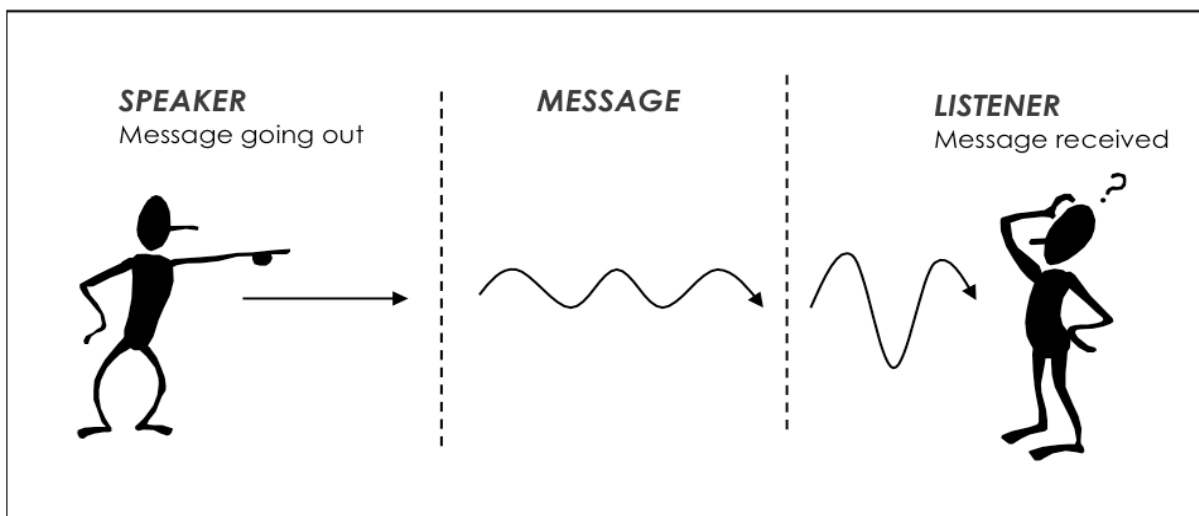
At its most basic level, communication means that you send a message and another person receives the message. That is, you send a message with a particular **INTENT** and the message has an **IMPACT** on another person.

Just as good communication involves self-expression and listening, bad communication involves a refusal to share your feelings openly or to listen to what the other person has to say.

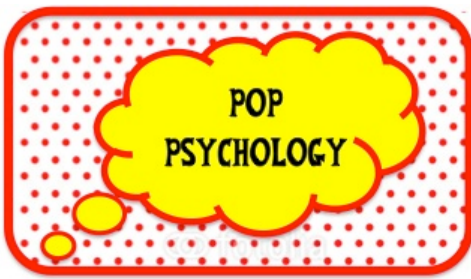


### The Communication Filter

When we speak, or attempt to communicate in any way, often times our message is not received the way we would wish it to be. This is because of the “Communication Filter”, which interrupts our clear message, distorts it, and means it is received differently from how we intended. Both the speaker and the listener have their own filters for the message to get through. Usually these filters take the form of thoughts and/or feelings that are overwhelming us in the moment.



The speaking and listening strategies over the page are designed to minimize this filter so that our message comes across undistorted, and we are receptive to hearing a clear message from our partner.



## Communication Strategies

### Speaking

The most plain and effective way to express yourself through speaking is to SAY WHAT YOU MEAN. Too often we try to speak in codes or just assume that someone will “get us” without us needing to explain. Good skills for speaking mean that the message we send out to others is clear – this means there is less potential for confusion.

#### Poor Speaking

- Insults
- Character assassination
- You always/never
- Make threats
- Sarcasm
- Storm out or withdraw
- Catastrophise
- Sulk
- Make excuses
- Using “You” statements

#### Good Speaking

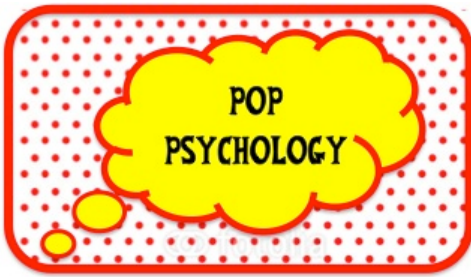
- Put requests in a positive way
- Be specific and clear
- Be brief
- Let other people talk as well
- Express your feelings
- Praise
- Give feedback in a positive way
- Using “I” statements

#### “I” Statements

An “I” statement is a sentence that begins with the word “I” and communicates directly what you are thinking or feeling. For example, “I’m happy that you asked me to dinner,” “I feel angry that you made fun of me in front of other people,” “I would like to go see a movie this weekend,” or “I know you have been stressed at work, but I need more time with you.”

I feel... \_\_\_\_\_ (use a feeling word)  
 When you... \_\_\_\_\_ (describe specific behaviour)  
 Because... \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the effect on you)  
 I would like/prefer... \_\_\_\_\_ (make a positive request)

Expressing your feelings using I-statements shows that you are taking some ownership of your feelings, rather than concentrating on what you perceive the other person has done. When a person makes “you” statements such as, “you are wrong” or “you are making me furious”, the other person is likely to become defensive and stop listening to what you are trying to say. Using “you” statements is a block to effective communication.

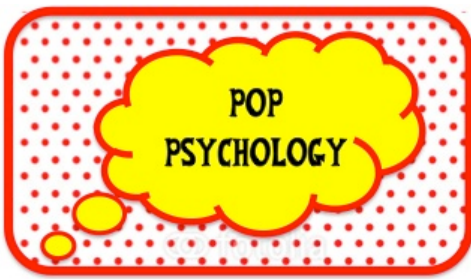


## Communication Strategies

### Expressing Feelings

This list of feeling words may help you identify exactly what you're going through. Use the list anytime you have a vague sense of some feeling but are unsure of exactly what it might be.

Positive Feelings		Negative Feelings	
Affectionate	Happy	Afraid	Hostile
Alive	Hopeful	Angry	Humiliated
Amused	Humorous	Anxious	Hurt
Accepted	Joyful	Apprehensive	Ignored
Beautiful	Lovable	Ashamed	Impatient
Brave	Loved	Awkward	Inadequate
Calm	Loving	Bitter	Incompetent
Capable	Loyal	Bored	Indecisive
Caring	Passionate	Confused	Inferior
Cheerful	Peaceful	Contempt	Inhibited
Cherished	Playful	Defeated	Insecure
Comfortable	Pleased	Dejected	Irritated
Competent	Proud	Dependent	Isolated
Concerned	Quiet	Depressed	Jealous
Confident	Relaxed	Despairing	Lonely
Content	Relieved	Desperate	Melancholy
Courageous	Respected	Devastated	Miserable
Curious	Safe	Disappointed	Misunderstood
Delighted	Satisfied	Discouraged	Muddled
Desirable	Secure	Disgusted	Needy
Eager	Self-reliant	Distrustful	Old
Excited	Sexy	Embarrassed	Outraged
Forgiving	Silly	Exasperated	Overwhelmed
Friendly	Special	Fearful	Panicky
Fulfilled	Strong	Foolish	Touchy
Generous	Supportive	Frantic	Trapped
Good	Sympathetic	Frustrated	Troubled
Grateful	Tender	Furious	Unappreciated
Great		Guilty	Unattractive
		Hateful	Uncertain
		Helpless	Uncomfortable
		Hopeless	Uneasy
		Horrorified	Unfulfilled



## Communication Strategies

### ***Listening***

As we've said, communication is a two-way street. In order for there to be good communication, we must learn to be good listeners, or receivers of the message. Here are some tips for good listening.

#### **Poor Listening**

- Over talking
- Interrupting
- Withdrawing
- Ignoring
- Bringing up past issues
- Using yes, buts
- Mind reading
- Complaining

#### **Good Listening**

- Concentrate on what the speaker says
- Paraphrase
- Validate
- Eye contact
- Look for non-verbals
- Open ended questions
- Ask for clarification

### Closed and Open Questions

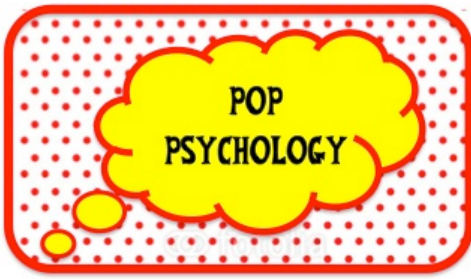
*Closed questions* are when we ask something that only requires a one- or two-word response. Some examples might be "Where do you work?" or "How long have you lived in this area?" *Open-ended questions* are the opposite of these, and require a person to deliver a lengthy answer, such as "What plans do you have this weekend?" or "What do your brothers and sisters do?". Early on in a conversation, it is best to ask a lot of open-ended questions to get the ball rolling, and then to ask closed questions when you are interested in specific details.

### Paraphrasing and Reflecting

The use of paraphrasing and reflection can help to frame the conversation and indicate to the other person that you are listening to them. *Paraphrasing* is when you sum up what the person has said using different words. So if your friend has been saying, "I'm a bit undecided, I like my current job but this new position has a lot to offer as well, there'll be more money and its closer to home, I'm just not sure if making the change is worth that risk", you could paraphrase that by saying, "So there are good points about each and you're just trying to weigh it up". *Reflection* is when you take out a piece of information from what the person has said and state it back to them. For example, if your friend says something like, "I was so nervous going into the job interview because I thought I might not be able to think of anything to say", you might reflect back, "You were pretty nervous?" and even follow up with "how did you deal with that?"

### Encouragers

Encouragers are small indications to a person that you are listening to them. These can be nonverbal, such as nodding your head and using facial expressions or laughing in response to what they have said. Verbal encouragers might be saying "hmm", "aha" or "yeah".



## Communication Strategies

### Self-Reflection Exercise

When my partner and I are not getting along, when we are struggling to understand one another and come to an agreement or compromise, and I'm feeling unheard...

<b>I feel...</b>	Abandoned	Controlled	Guarded
	Afraid	Disappointed	Guilty
	Alone or lonely	Disconnected	Hopeless
	Analysed	Discounted	Hurt
	Angry	Dismissed	Like I don't matter
	Attacked	Down or depressed	Like I'm wrong
	Blamed or criticised	Empty	Like I've failed
	Blank	Flooded with emotion	Ignored
	Confused	Frustrated	Intimidated
<b>What I do...</b>	I act immaturely	I become child-like	I give in
	I attack or defend myself	I cry	I leave
	I avoid conflict	I fall apart	I mock
	I become cold or aloof	I get quiet	I withdraw

### Toxic Communication Methods:

- **Truth** – you insist that you are all “right” and the other person is all “wrong”
- **Absolutes** – you state that things are always / never done by the other person
- **Blame** – you say that the problem (or your feelings) is the other person's fault
- **Martyrdom** – you claim that you are the innocent victim with only pure intentions at all times
- **Put-down** – you imply that the other person is a deficient, a failure, a loser, use name calling
- **Hopelessness** – you give up and insist there is no point in trying
- **Demandingness** – you act entitled but you refuse to ask for what you want in a direct, straightforward way
- **Denial** – you insist that you don't feel angry, hurt, or sad when you really do
- **Passive-Aggressive** – you pout or withdraw or say nothing, you may storm out of the room or slam doors
- **Self-blame** – instead of dealing with the problem, you act as if you are an awful, terrible person
- **Helping** – instead of acknowledging feelings, you try to “solve the problem” or “help” him or her
- **Sarcasm** – your words or tone of voice convey tension or hostility which you aren't openly acknowledging
- **Scapegoating** – you suggest the problem is all the other persons, and that you are sane, happy and uninvolved in the conflict
- **Defensiveness** – you refuse to admit any wrong-doing or imperfection
- **Counter-Attack** – you respond to the other person's criticism by criticising them
- **Diversion** – you list grievances about past issues and injustices, diverting from the issue at hand
- **Gas-lighting** – you aim to make your partner second-guess the validity of their own feelings, senses, opinions, and might even insist that they are “abusive”, “crazy”, or “attention-seeking” for having feelings