LET'S TALK

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORDS THAT ARE COMING OUT OF MY MOUTH?

WHAT CHEW TALKIN' BOUT!

BLAH. BLAH.
PEOPLE start communicating as soon as they’re born. As newborns, we cry when we’re hungry, uncomfortable or just upset, and smile or giggle when we’re feeling good. As we grow we learn to use our bodies to communicate by pointing or nodding our heads toward something we want. Around age 2 years we start to add our first words to our communication system. Those words quickly expand into sentences we can use to ask questions, give answers, discuss, and disagree.

Communication is a great thing. It lets us ask for more ice cream or tell someone we like them or that we’re scared. Unfortunately, we can also use communication to fight, insult, and gossip. Working on your communication skills will help you get what you want or need more easily, and can keep you from unintentionally hurting someone else’s feelings or being misunderstood.

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Communication has two parts:

1) verbal communication – words
2) nonverbal communication – the tone of voice someone uses when speaking; how someone is standing or moving while speaking; the kind of gestures they use or their facial expression.

Nonverbal and verbal communication work together to help us understand a situation.

For example, the word “hey” can be used as a greeting, a warning, or a way to get someone’s attention. How do we know the difference? By the nonverbal “cues” we pick up from the speaker. Can you tell the differences in the following scenarios?

Waving and smiling, your friend calls out, “Hey!”
(Is your friend greeting you? Warning you? Feeling threatened?)

Hands up in front of his chest, eyebrows furrowed, a classmate firmly says, “Hey!” when you accidentally brush by him.
(Is your classmate greeting you? Warning you? Feeling threatened?)

A construction worker is waving both his hands, running toward you. In an urgent-sounding voice, he calls out, “Hey!”
(Is the construction worker greeting you? Warning you? Feeling threatened?)

In each of these situations, the verbal communication of “hey” combined with nonverbal cues helps you fully understand the situation.

Does your mom seem to always know whether you’re being truthful or not? She’s not psychic. Despite what you might be saying, you’re giving her all the information she needs through your body language.

Body language is what your body is telling people about you. Experts say 65 percent to 90 percent of every conversation is interpreted through body language. If you’re saying one thing, but your body is saying another, people are going to “listen” to your body language more than your words.

For example, if you shift your eyes and look away while speaking, people will think you’re not being truthful. If you stand with your legs apart and your hands on your hips, even if you’re trying to say something nice, your body is communicating aggression or anger.

How can you be seen as a leader? Stand up straight, make eye contact, and smile. Those signals say you’re confident and energetic.

Body language is so powerful that there are countless books and seminars available to help people master the art of body language. Controlling your body language can help you get through a nerve-wracking situation, such as a speech or a job interview.

**ACTIVITIES**

- When you read a news story in the newspaper, you rely on the reporter to tell you the whole story. Part of that story is going to be the subject’s nonverbal communication. Read through a few stories and circle any instances where a reporter includes a person’s nonverbal cues. Write your own story and describe your character’s non-verbal cues.

- Look through the photos in your newspaper and, without reading the captions, see if you can figure out what is happening in the photos or how the person is feeling just from the person’s body language. Now read the captions. Tell what made you right or not.

- Even a comic strip character can have body language. Go through the comic strip section of the paper or look at the political cartoons and write down the parts of the drawing that tell you how the character is feeling. For example, are their eyebrows raised? Are they smiling? What are they doing with their hands? Are they standing or sitting? Leaning forward or sitting back?
You just found out your best friend doesn’t agree with you on the best movie of all time. What’s your reaction? Shock? Anger? Hurt feelings? All of the above?

Guess what! You’re normal. Disagreeing with someone can be uncomfortable. People feel they belong when they’re with others who agree with them.

But different views are important. Without disagreement, we could still be living in caves! One of those cave people had to say, “I disagree that this cave is good enough. I want a house and cable TV.”

How do you get around the discomfort, though? Talk about it. Ask why your friend likes his movie more than yours. Then tell him why you like your movie. There’s no right or wrong here. You don’t have to change your mind or his. The important thing is to listen.

You’ll come away from the discussion knowing a little bit more about your friend and about yourself.
Arguments, mean words or disrespectful behavior keep people from communicating well. When someone’s feelings are hurt, it’s hard for them to listen to someone else’s side. Unfortunately, people hurt each other’s feelings a lot. But there is something you can do about it – apologize.

Admitting you were wrong or may have hurt someone’s feelings is difficult, so it takes some practice. Here are some suggestions for saying “I’m sorry”:

- “I didn’t treat you like a friend. I’m sorry.”
- “Please forgive me.”
- “I don’t think I was listening very well. Can we talk about it again?”
- “I think I hurt your feelings. Is there something I can do to make up for it?”
- “I feel really bad about our fight. Can we just make up?”
- “I said some mean things. Can I take them back?”

Apologizing may seem hard at first, but practice makes it easier.

Want to know how to be a better communicator? Learn to listen! Believe it or not, we spend 50 percent more time listening than we do talking! Just like good writing or effective speaking, listening is a skill that you can learn, practice, and improve on.

How can you be a better listener?

Use more than your ears! Good listening takes your ears, eyes, body and mind.

While you’re listening to someone, turn your body toward them, look them in the eye and nod your head to show that you understand.

Listening also means you can’t be talking at the same time. Listen quietly and patiently and try not to interrupt. When there is a break, ask questions.

If you do all that, the person who is speaking will feel you are paying attention. And if you pay attention and listen to others, they will be even more willing to practice good listening skills when you’re talking!
You can’t communicate without a common language. Speaking English to someone who only speaks French will get you nowhere.

Even if you speak the same country language, though, you still may not be speaking the same language. Huh?

Would you walk into a job interview and say, “Wassup!”?

Write a letter to your grandmother that reads:
“Hey gurl. What’s ↑?”

IM your best friend with:
“Hello. How are you doing? How nice of you to write me.”?

While you may use all these phrases at one time or another, when you use them usually depends on the situation. Every day, often without even realizing it, you choose the best language for the people you are communicating with. That’s an important part of connecting with others.

If you want the job, your language in a job interview should be formal and polite.

To show respect and love to your grandmother, your language will be friendly and free of slang that might confuse her.

The first step in getting people to listen to you is to speak in a "language" they will understand.

Have you ever played the game “Telephone,” where you whisper something into someone’s ear, then they whisper it to the next person and so on? Usually, the message that comes out at the end of the whisper chain doesn’t sound anything at all like the message you started with. That’s because it’s “third-person” information.

Third-person information is information you get from someone who wasn’t directly involved in a situation. Rumors and gossip are examples of “third-person” information and they are often untrue and hurtful.

But not all third-person information is negative. The news on TV or in the newspaper is third-person information, too. Usually, a reporter isn’t directly involved in a story; he or she is just reporting it to you. The difference, though, is that a responsible news reporter tries very hard to tell you the true story. Some spend weeks or even years looking for the facts before they tell the story.

Spreading rumors and gossip is irresponsible. It can hurt a person’s feelings and their reputation and sometimes get them into trouble with parents and friends. Before you pass on something you’ve heard, be sure you have your facts straight.
Here in the United States we have the right to freedom of speech and expression, but does that mean we can freely communicate anything? Not at all. There are laws to protect people from those who use communication irresponsibly.

Starting an untrue rumor about someone just to hurt them is actually called slander. Doing the same thing in written form is called libel. Both are against the law. Hate crimes, which are things that are written, said or done to hurt or intimidate someone because of his or her race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc., are also illegal. Burning the American flag because you are upset with the government will also get you arrested. All of these are examples of irresponsible forms of communication not tolerated by authorities or most citizens.

As a class or family, and with your teacher's or a parent's help, do some research on slander, libel, hate crimes and flag burning. Have you had many incidences in your town or state? Pick one of the topics and write a few paragraphs on whether you think these types of communication should be illegal. Discuss your opinions in class, making sure to be respectful of other's opinions.

Activities

- Look through the different sections of your newspaper and read a few stories from each. Do you notice any difference in the language that is used? Are some sections more formal than others, easier to read? Which sections are formal and which are informal? Why do you think there is a difference?

- Look through the advertisements in your newspaper. Do some ads use language and images that are more appropriate for a certain age group than others? Why do you think that is? Discuss as a class or with your family.

- Invite a newspaper reporter to your classroom and ask her to describe some of the tools she uses to be sure her stories are factually correct.

- One of a reporter's best tools for making sure a story is correct is to interview the people involved in the story. The more people they interview the more perspectives they can get on what really happened. Looking through some stories in the newspaper, compare what the reporter learned from each person he or she interviewed. How would the whole story have changed if the reporter hadn't interviewed one or two of them? Would you, the reader, get the same story whether the reporter interviewed one or five people?
THANK YOU