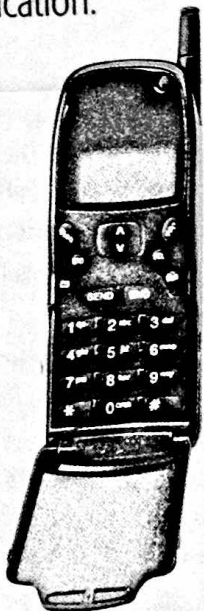


Communicating Effectively

To be a good athlete, you need to possess many skills. Skill development takes time and practice. In the same way, to build healthy relationships, you need to practice and master a variety of skills. Among the most important of these are skills related to the act of communication.



HEALTH TERMS

communication

"I" message

active listening

body language

constructive criticism

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- There are many ways to communicate with others.
- Effective communication means being a good listener as well as a good speaker.
- An aspect of good communication is making sure your body language and verbal communication are in sync.

Communication

Think about the messages you send to others and the messages others send to you. Think not only of messages expressed in words but also of those you deliver in the form of gestures, facial expressions, and behaviors. All of these are a part of **communication**. This is a *process through which you send messages to and receive messages from others*.

Communication is critical because it lets others know what you feel, what you want and need, and what you know. Effective communication is a two-way street. It means sending messages that are interpreted correctly, and it means correctly interpreting messages that you receive.

There are three basic skills associated with effective communication: speaking, listening, and body language. Although these skills take practice and energy, the time and effort are worth it because it helps you form healthy relationships with others.

HEALTH Online



At health.glencoe.com, find out how to improve your speaking and listening skills to help you in effective communication.

Speaking Skills

Having good speaking skills means saying clearly what you mean. Do not assume that anyone else can read your mind or know your needs or expectations. It is your responsibility to make them clear. This is the first step to healthy communication.

The changes in your tone of voice and its pitch and loudness can also play a large role in how you communicate. Kind words delivered with a sarcastic tone, for example, may not be processed kindly. Speaking too loudly can make you sound bossy or arrogant, even if you are shy. Saying no too softly makes it seem as if you don't mean what you are saying. So it is not just *what* you say that is important to communicating but *how* you say it.

An important step in the communication process, especially when the message to be delivered has a strong emotional content, is the use of "I" messages. An "I" message is a *statement in which a person tells how he or she feels using the pronoun "I."* Using "I" messages can help you avoid blaming, name-calling, or antagonizing the other person in other ways.

ANTAGONISTIC MESSAGE

You idiot! What have you done with my baseball glove?

Why do we always have to do what you want to do?

You're always late! I don't know why I even bother being your friend.

CONSTRUCTIVE "I" MESSAGE

I dislike when you borrow my things and don't return them.

I'll agree to go swimming today if I get to pick the activity next time we're together.

I worry about you when I expect to meet you at 6:00 and you don't show up.

update

▶ Looking at Technology

Machines that Talk

Everywhere you go, you probably hear pre-recorded voices talking to you, whether you're on the phone, in an elevator, or at the mall. Some of the new talking machines, however, are designed to synthesize—or mechanically re-create—speech so that they respond to what you say or put in front of them. What is more, unlike the robot-sounding voices of decades past, these voices are convincingly lifelike!

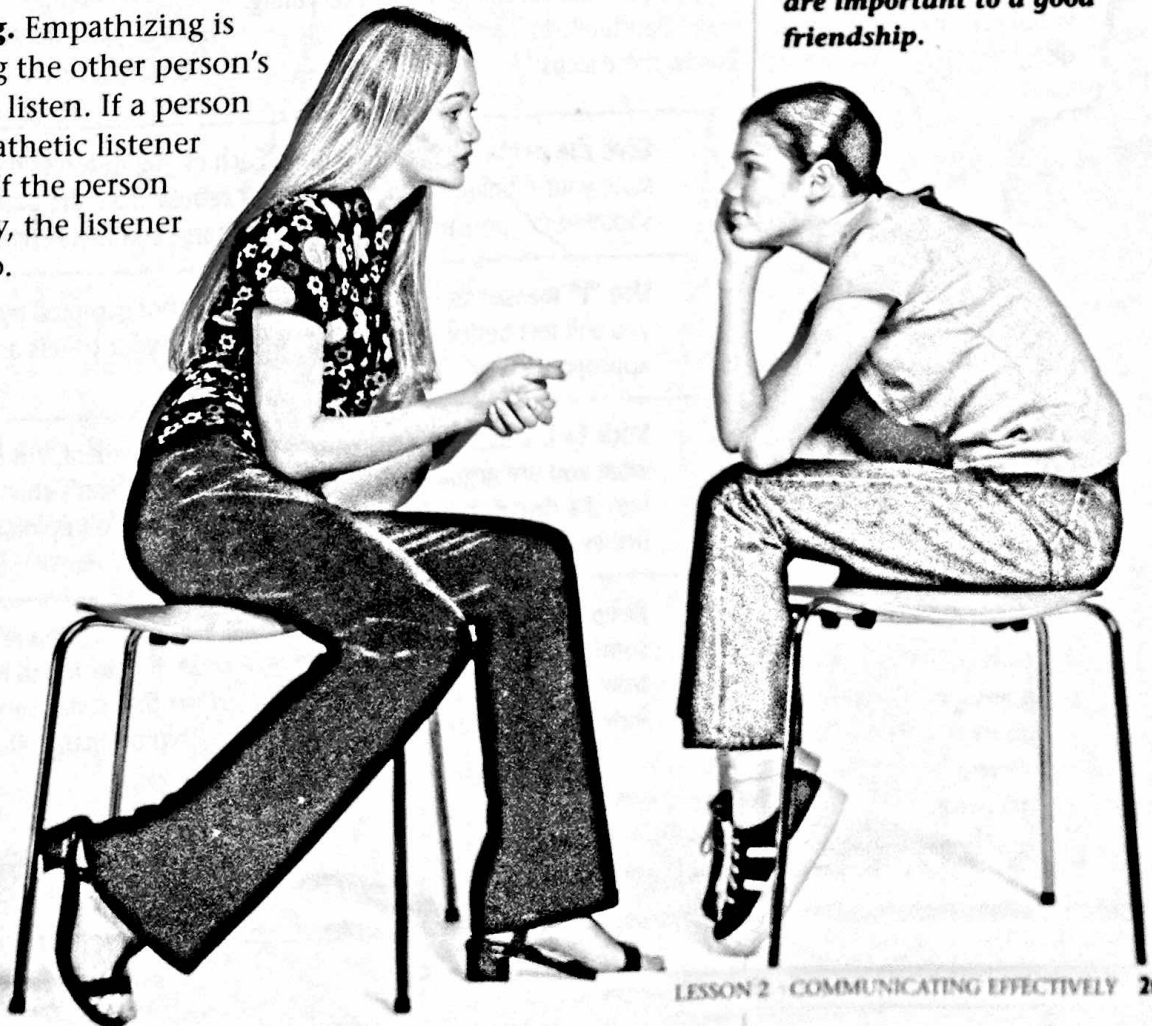
Most amazing of all are new computers being developed that recognize the speech of individuals. In these voice-recognition systems, spoken language is converted into electrical currents with unique patterns, which are then turned into code that the computer stores. For people unable to move their arms or hands, new machines can also type words automatically as they are spoken. Voice-activated controls can also direct a wheelchair to move or tell a door to open or close.

Listening Skills

Listening is as important to effective communication as speaking, but it is the part of the communication process that is most often overlooked. Of the 80 percent of our waking hours that we spend communicating, we spend a high proportion of that time as hearers rather than as speakers. Hearing, however, is not the same as listening. Consider that the average listener correctly understands, properly evaluates, and retains only about 30 percent of what he or she hears in a 10-minute presentation. Within 48 hours, memory of what was said drops to an even lower percentage.

Skilled listeners use **active listening**, *really paying attention to what someone is saying and feeling*. Active listening involves careful attention to what the speaker is saying without making judgments or interrupting. Active listeners incorporate these listening techniques:

- **Reflective listening.** In reflective listening, you rephrase or summarize what the other person has said so that you are sure you understand what is intended.
- **Clarifying.** Clarifying is asking the person how he or she feels about the situation or asking questions to understand more fully what is being said.
- **Encouraging.** Encouraging is giving signals that you are really interested and involved. You can show your interest by quietly saying "Uh-huh" or "I understand" or "I see."
- **Empathizing.** Empathizing is actually feeling the other person's feelings as you listen. If a person is sad, an empathetic listener feels sad, too. If the person talking is angry, the listener feels angry, too.



Did You Know?

- About 45 percent of a person's communication time is spent listening.
- About 30 percent is spent speaking.
- Reading can, on average, take up about 16 percent of a person's communication time.
- Writing accounts for an average of 9 percent of all time spent communicating with others.
- It has been estimated that 85 percent of what you learn is learned through listening.

▼ **A good friend is able to empathize with another friend's feelings.**

ACTIVITY Name several other communication skills that are important to a good friendship.



Listen Up!

Here are some other tips for becoming a more effective listener:

- Give your full attention to the person speaking.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Do not interrupt. Wait your turn.
- Listen for feelings and watch for gestures. These are as much or more of a clue than words are.

Nonverbal Communication

Not all communication takes place on a verbal level. People send many messages through **body language**—*nonverbal communication through gestures, facial expressions, and behaviors*. Waving your hand to say good-bye is an example of body language. So is bringing your hands up to your mouth when you are surprised.

Most nonverbal communication is subtle and often takes place on a subconscious level. A person who is feeling embarrassed or ashamed may look at the ground when speaking rather than at his or her listener. Maybe you have found yourself leaning toward a speaker who was saying something of great interest to you.

Being aware of your body language helps you make sure you are sending the messages you intend and that those messages are understood. If your words and your face or body seem to be saying two different things, the other person may be confused or unsure of what to think or believe.

Building Health Skills

Communication: Agreeing to Disagree

IT'S NOT REALISTIC to think that you and your friends will agree on everything. When you disagree, think of it as an opportunity to learn how to handle disagreements in relationships. Follow these steps:



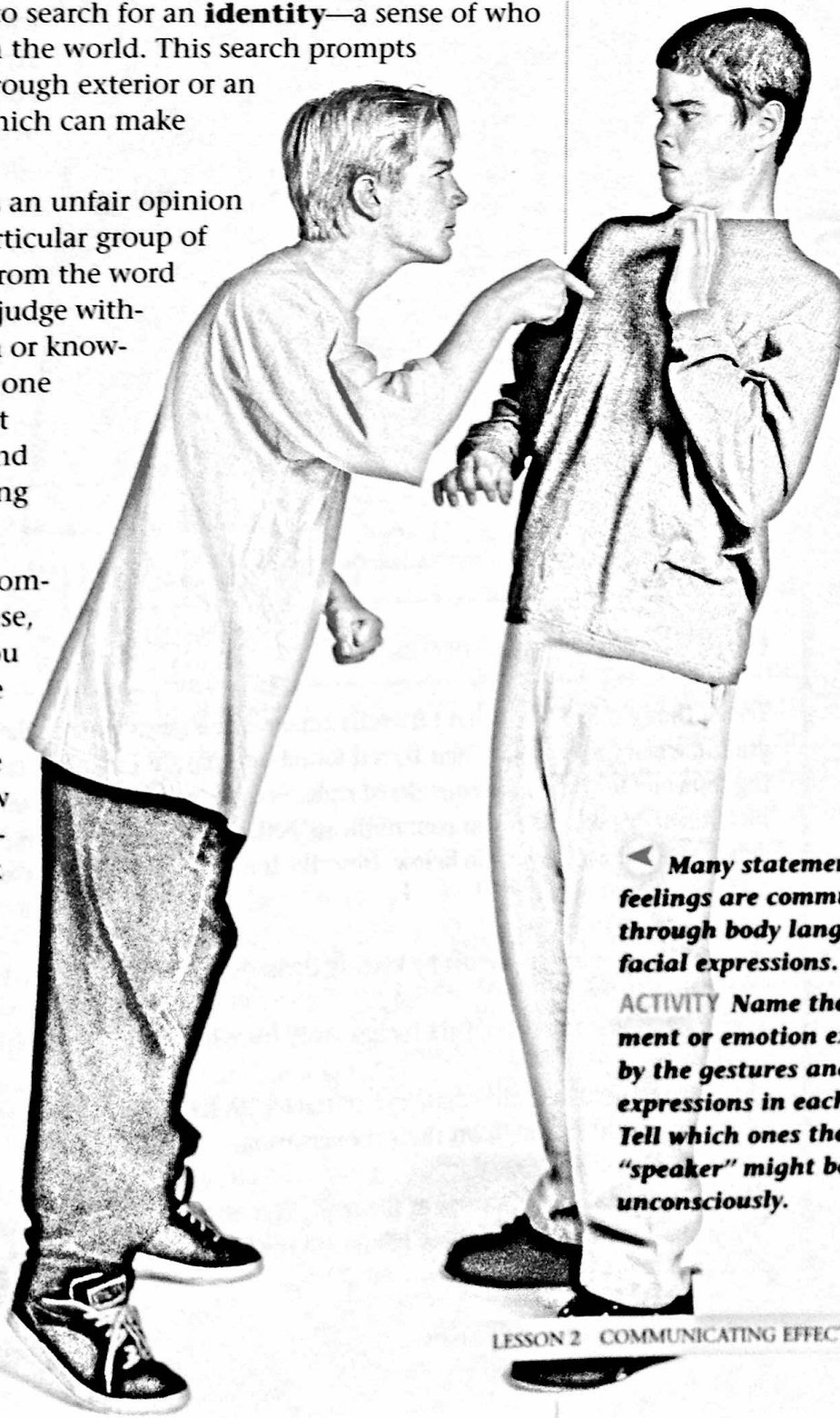
- 1. Give the person a turn to speak.** Each of you deserves the same chance to state your opinion without hostility or rebuke from the other person. Avoid shouting the person down. Keep your ears—and mind—open.
- 2. Use "I" messages.** Even if your position is not accepted by the other person, you will feel better in the end if you express your beliefs and feelings in an appropriate way.
- 3. Stick to the subject.** At the height of a disagreement, it is easy to lose track of what you are arguing about. Don't bring the person's character or personality into the discussion. Avoid appeals to other people's opinions as well. They are irrelevant to the situation at hand.
- 4. Keep the tone friendly.** Remember, this is a friend you are dealing with—someone whose companionship you value. If your friend holds a different view from yours on a particular topic, remember that tastes vary from individual to individual. You can still enjoy your friendship on many other levels.

Barriers to Effective Communication

A chain, it is said, is only as strong as its weakest link. The same may be said of communication. When one person in a relationship uses communication skills and another does not, the entire communication process is impeded. Other obstacles to effective communication include the following:

- **Unrealistic expectations.** If your goal is to help another person understand your feelings, you need to be prepared for the reality that he or she will not receive the message in the spirit you intended. The person may become defensive and feel attacked.
- **The need to project a tough or superior image.** During the teen years it is common to search for an **identity**—a sense of who you are and your place in the world. This search prompts some teens to develop a rough exterior or an attitude of superiority, which can make them hard to reach.
- **Prejudice.** **Prejudice** is an unfair opinion or judgment against a particular group of people. The term comes from the word *prejudge*, which means to judge without sufficient information or knowledge. Prejudice can keep one person from hearing what another is really saying and from freely communicating his or her own ideas.

When people put up communication barriers like these, there is little you can do. You simply need to accept the situation for what it is and move on. If you have made an effort yourself to follow the rules of good communication, you can at least walk away with the satisfaction of knowing you have done all you can in the interest of a healthy relationship.



hot link

identity For more on the search for identity during the teen years, see Chapter 21, page 482.

prejudice For more information on prejudice and how it harms relationships, see Chapter 13, page 300.

◀ **Many statements and feelings are communicated through body language or facial expressions.**

ACTIVITY Name the statement or emotion expressed by the gestures and facial expressions in each photo. Tell which ones the “speaker” might be doing unconsciously.

▼ **Accept constructive criticism positively. This is one way you can learn from others and improve yourself.**

ACTIVITY *Name an example of how a critical statement can be turned into constructive criticism.*

Constructive Criticism

No one, not even your best friend or parent, is perfect. It's not realistic to think that you won't be disappointed in a relationship at least occasionally. Perhaps your brother suddenly hogs the TV remote, insisting that you watch his show, not yours. A friend that you were to meet in front of the theater is late, causing you to miss the beginning of the movie. The dry cleaners loses or damages your favorite sweater.

Giving feedback to the person can be helpful to him or her as well as to your relationship. Make sure you use **constructive criticism, non-hostile comments that point out problems and have the potential to help a person change.** Using constructive criticism means that you avoid attacking the other person. It means not placing blame or resorting to name-calling. You might want to start with an "I" message. Then point out what the person is doing or has done,



and describe a better way to do it. You might say to your friend, "I really dislike missing the opening of the picture. Please try to arrive earlier next time." What might you say to the dry cleaners?

Acknowledgments and Compliments

Have you ever received a thank-you note or a verbal pat on the back for a job well done? Have you ever given one? Complimenting another person is a way of acknowledging his or her self worth. Unlike other forms of communication, acknowledgments and compliments are not necessarily done with an eye toward receiving a response. Yet, these small, unexpected gestures can go a long way toward improving the health of a relationship and another person's opinion of you.

Some compliments are given to acknowledge a skill or to show appreciation. An example would be telling a family member how much you enjoyed a meal he or she cooked. Other compliments are purely selfless—for example, telling another person that he or she looks nice. Still others are *self-effacing*. They are kind words offered at the expense of your own pride or personal feelings. Congratulating the team that defeats yours is an example of a self-effacing compliment.

▼ **A pat on the back and praise for a job well done leads to healthful relationships.**

ACTIVITY Describe situations in which you can encourage someone by offering compliments.

