



# Communications

## *New Hampshire's 4-H Communication Series for Leaders*

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Communication is the basis for all human interactions and groups depend on it to function.

Why is communication important? When we talk, it is because we have an idea or a feeling that we want to share with someone. In order to share it, someone has to hear what we are saying. Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets the sender's messages in the same way the sender intended. This effective passing of information is what is needed for groups to solve problems and accomplish goals. To communicate, there must be a sender (talker, writer, painter, etc) and a receiver (listener, reader, audience, etc).

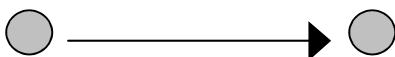
People communicate verbally and nonverbally. Messages are made up of verbal and nonverbal cues. What is said and how it is said are equally important. The sound of the voice, the facial expression, and the body posture carry strong messages.

### The Communication Process:

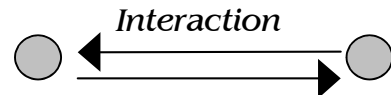
Interpersonal communication includes any verbal or nonverbal behavior that is perceived by another person. It is much more than just an exchange of words. All behaviors convey some messages and are, therefore, a form of communication.

Communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving messages. Human relationships and communication are interpersonal and the interpersonal communication of messages is a two-way process.

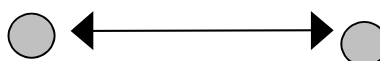
#### **One-Way Communication** *Action*



#### **One-Way Communication with feedback** *Interaction*



#### **Two-Way Communication** *Transaction*

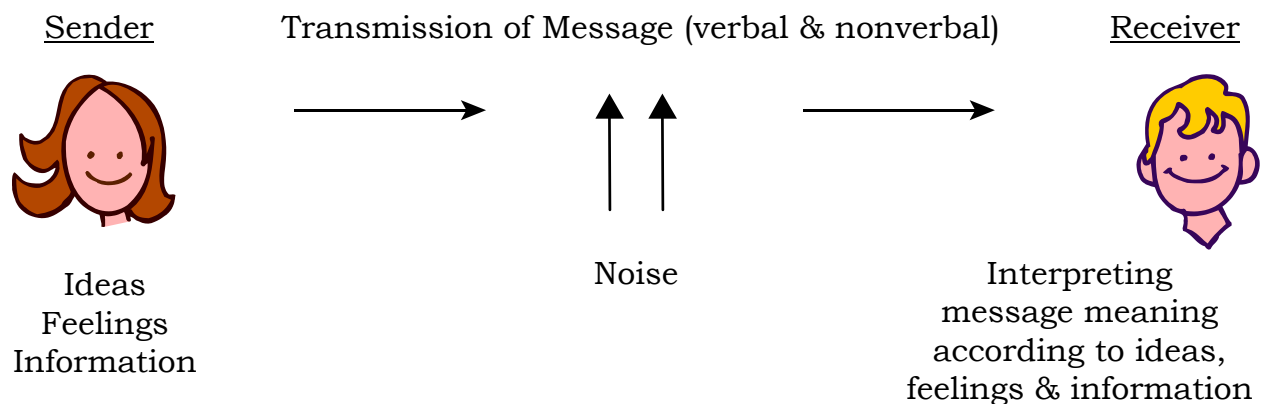


When communication is viewed as a two-way process, the understanding of meaning and interpretations of messages is crucial to positive communication. In order for positive communication to occur, individuals need to be responsible in both speaker and listener roles so that they share a clear and accurate understanding of their messages.

The process of communication between two people includes seven basic elements:

1. The intentions, ideas, feelings of the sender and the way he/she decides to behave, all of which lead to his/her sending a message that carries some content.
2. The sender encoding his/her message by translating his/her ideas, feelings, emotions, and intentions into a message appropriate for sending.
3. Sending the message to the receiver.
4. The channel through which the message is translated.
5. The receiver decoding the message by taking it and interpreting its meaning. His/her interpretation depends on how well the receiver understands the content of the message and the intentions of the sender.
6. The receiver responding internally to this interpretation of the message.
7. The amount of noise that interferes with communication.

Interpersonal communication is more commonly defined as a message sent by a person to a receiver with a conscious intent of affecting the receiver's behavior. The diagram below shows how this process works.



What forms of communication are practiced in 4-H? Public speaking is often the first type that comes to mind and is probably the most visible form of communication in 4-H. It is very important and can be found when running a meeting, leading discussions, presenting a demonstration or talking to a civic group.

Public speaking competence is not the only communication skill needed by youth, however. Youth must communicate effectively in less formal settings, such as in one-on-one conversation and in small groups. Youth need to be good listeners and understand the importance of nonverbal cues in communication. Skills in this area of communication can help build interpersonal relationships and cohesiveness within groups, and is also helpful in the professional world, such as in job interviews and other situations. Also, writing skills are important for maintaining good public relations and for correspondence, keeping records, creating agendas, and other leadership tasks.

## **Skills Needed in Communication**

### **I. Sending Effective Messages**

- A. You must be able to send messages effectively as well as receive the information that is sent to you. There are eight basic skills in making sure your ideas and feelings are effectively communicated:
  - 1. Clearly “own” your message by using personal pronouns such as I and my.
  - 2. Make your messages complete and specific.
  - 3. Make your verbal and nonverbal messages congruent with one another.
  - 4. Be redundant.
  - 5. Ask for feedback concerning the way your messages are being received.
  - 6. Make the message appropriate to the receiver and frame of reference.
  - 7. Describe your feelings, by name, action or figure of speech.
  - 8. Describe other member’s behavior without evaluating or interpreting.

### **II. Effective Listening**

A. Listening can have a very big effect on how people relate to one another. When you focus and really listen to the words, feelings and meanings behind what someone says, it makes it easier to gain an understanding of what that person has communicated. Listening also involves either verbally or nonverbally encouraging the speaker to continue. Listening is often separated into three levels:

- 1. Hearing - this is the lowest level of listening when you comprehend the spoken word, but do not react to it. Sometimes known as a “half-listen.” An example is when you hear your teacher talking, but you don’t know what he/she has said.
- 2. Listening - this is the second level of listening and it is characterized by the listener becoming more aware of the meaning of the sounds they hear. Little response occurs from the receiver of the message.

3. Perceiving - this is the highest level of listening. This level involves being attentive to the sender and processing the message thoroughly by relating it to experiences, ideas and feelings. Perceiving is critical, appreciative, and creative listening.
- B. Three things are needed before we can get others to accept the idea of exchange:
  1. We should help people to feel free to express their opinions in order to establish channels of two-way communications.
  2. We need to help people feel secure enough to be willing to experiment with new ideas.
  3. We must be willing to respect the right of the person willing to try change or new ideas to fail, on occasion, without condemnation.
- C. Active or Reflective listening is a communication process aimed at helping the speaker to communicate meaning, feeling and intent. Often it is compared to looking in a mirror. The role of the listener is to reflect back to the speaker all the verbal and nonverbal parts of his/her message--to be the mirror of words, feelings, and actions. The speaker, then, can confirm the reflected response or restate his/her message so as to more accurately convey the intended meaning.

Active listening can:

- promote understanding and acceptance of others.
- facilitate problem solving.
- promote a relationship of warmth between the sender and receiver.
- influence people to be more willing to listen to others.

### **III. Use of Feedback**

Feedback is reporting to an individual the kind of impressions he/she is making on you or reporting your reactions to him/her.

Feedback is useful when:

1. It is descriptive rather than evaluative.
2. It is specific rather than general.
3. It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver of feedback.
4. It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about.
5. It is solicited, rather than imposed.
6. It is well-timed.
7. It is checked to insure clear communication.

Although written and verbal communication is important and often the first thing that comes to mind when we talk about communication, there are other equally important forms of communication.

### ***Expressive arts***

Various media, i.e., dance, paintings, instrumental music, etc. can be used to convey a message. Interpretation of a work of art is the reception part of communications.

Photography is a popular way to communicate feelings or tell a story.

Videos are great ways for youth to express feelings, tell stories or try to convince someone to do (or not do) something.

### ***Technology & Media***

Youth are already very active on the Internet. They are creating web pages, emailing and chatting. Teaching them to communicate when feedback and nonverbal clues are limited is an important skill.

Creating electronic presentations is a skill youth are likely to use later in life. Whether it's creating printed slides or a full-multi media presentation, youth should be able to apply basic communications skills.

### ***Learn by Doing!!***

Not only is this 4-H's motto, but research has shown it is truly the best way to teach youth. A model for teaching youth called "The Experiential Model" basically tells us it's important for kids to learn by first "**Doing**". They need to give a demonstration, talk in front of their peers, practice conversations. There are several great activities compiled as part of this series to assist you leading your youth through this.

The next piece of the model is "**Reflecting**". Take time after an activity or project to talk about what happened. Ask how your youth feel about the activity. Encourage them to share their thoughts with others. They will be practicing communication even more and not even realize it!

The final step in the Experiential Model is "**Applying**". This means the youth is able to take the skill learned and apply it to another situation. Once a youth has successfully applied a skill to a "real life" situation they are well on their way to mastery of that skill. For instance, they may be able to communicate effectively with a school group with skills they learned in 4-H, or give an effective presentation to another group in a non-4-H setting.

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One of the most important life skills we teach youth in 4-H is communications. Many 4-H alumni comment that 4-H really taught them to be effective speakers and that job interviews and presentations were much easier for them because of the experiences they had in 4-H. Teaching youth about all aspects of interpersonal communications, public speaking, creating effective media materials and how to really listen is something they will thank you for later in life.

*Material for this fact sheet was adapted from:*

*Dynamite*

*Moving Ahead, USDA/Army School-Age & Teen Project*

*Peer Plus II*

*Unlock Your Leadership Potential, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida Cooperative Extension, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, April, 1997*

*Communication's Tool Kit, Michigan State University Extension, 2000.*

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