

PART TWO

Building Relationships with Youth One-on-One

25 Guidelines for Good Communication

Let's start with the basics -- good communication is at the heart of effective ministry with youth. Here are 25 guidelines that capture the essence of effective communication. Study them, practice them, learn from them. Good Luck!

Be Committed

1. We must be committed to communication.
2. We must be convinced that we are a gift to be given, and that through their self-disclosure, others are a gift offered to us.
3. We must be determined to be honest with ourselves.

The Successful Practice of Sharing Oneself (Speaking)

4. In sharing ourselves with others, we must always take full responsibility for our own actions and reactions. As a consequence of this, we will make "I statements," not "Your statements."
5. We must speak only for ourselves. In communicating I should make it clear that I am speaking only *my* truth, and not *the* truth.
6. We must share all our significant feelings with those to whom we are relating.
7. We must be courageous enough to share our personal vulnerability with one another.
8. We should express gratitude to our listeners.

The Successful Practice of Accepting the Sharing of Another (Listening)

9. We should be "present" and "available" to others who offer to share themselves with us.
10. We should accept others wherever they are.
11. We must listen attentively to learn the "inner consistency" of others.
12. We must not indulge in mind games by judging the intentions and motives of others.
13. We should register emphatic and reassuring reactions to others when they are sharing themselves with us.
14. We should clarify the message that is being delivered, trying always to understand accurately the meaning of others.
15. In the role of listener we should offer only suggestions and never directions.
16. As listeners we should avoid all blocks to communication.
17. We should explicitly thank those who have shared themselves with us.

General Practices that Promote Good Interpersonal Communication

18. Good communication requires that the communicators spend special or quality time together.
19. Touching is an important form of communication.
20. To become more effective communicators we must "stretch" beyond our "comfort zones."
21. We must be ready to apologize when an apology is appropriate and helpful.
22. We must avoid a buildup of tension.
23. At times of crisis in communication we will need to use special approaches.
24. Whether speaking or listening, the motive of the good communicator must always be love.
25. We should pray for the enlightenment and the courage to communicate well.

Effective Communication Skills

Developing skills for listening and speaking will enable us to more effectively communicate with youth. Learning and using communication skills is crucial in relationships and fundamental to effective ministry with youth. Robert Bolton, in his book *People Skills*, identifies three essential sets of skills for effective communication: **Attending**, **Following**, and **Reflecting**. When these skills are used appropriately and in balance with one another, communication will be clear and effective. A helpful analogy is the playing of a piano. You play chords and bass with the left hand (the non-verbal attending skills) while the right hand provides melody and harmony (following and reflecting skills). Putting the two together in a harmonious way creates a piece that is pleasing to the ear. An effective communicator listens to the music of another and responds with integrated and often improvised music of his or her own.

The following chart outlines the three skill clusters and the skills specific to each. After the chart skill cluster is described with examples.

Skills Cluster	Specific Skills
Attending Skills	A Posture of Involvement Appropriate Body Motion Eye Contact Non-distracting Environment
Following Skills	Door Openers Minimal Encourages Infrequent Questions Attentive Silence
Reflecting Skills	Paraphrasing Reflecting Feelings Reflecting Meanings Summation Reflections

Attending Skills

Attending Skills involve total presence—to “tend” to (versus checking an attendance list in class). To tend to another is to care enough to work at being as present as possible to the person before you.

A Posture of Involvement

- ☑ **Relaxed Alertness:** body posture expresses balance between “I feel at home with you and accept you” and “I sense the importance of what you are communicating to me and am intent on understanding you.”
- ☑ **Inclining One’s Body Towards the Speaker:** “on the edge of your seat” with attention
- ☑ **Facing the Other Squarely:** no “cold shoulders,” be at eye level, particularly if you are an authority figure
- ☑ **Maintaining an Open Position:** keeping legs/arms uncrossed
- ☑ **Positioning Appropriate Distance from Speaker:** not too close or too far

Appropriate Body Motion

- ☑ **Being Moved by Another:** body movement in response to the speaker
- ☑ **Avoidance of Distracting Motions and Gestures:** do not move to stimuli other than speaker

Eye Contact

Non-Distracting Environment

- ☑ **Cut Environmental Distractions to a Minimum**
- ☑ **Remove Physical Barriers:** desks, intrusive furniture

Following Skills

Following Skills involve following the line of communication of the speaker without getting in his or her way, but fostering the better telling of his or her story. Following Skills focus on remembering who the center of the communication is—the speaker.

Door Openers

- A statement that describes the other’s body language** (“You look like you’re not feeling quite up to par”)
- An invitation to talk or continue talking** (Want to talk about it?)
- Silence:** giving the other person room, time, and space to decide whether to talk or how to begin to talk or what to communicate about
- Attending:** eye contact and posture of involvement

Minimal Encourages

- “Comma comments” like....

Tell me more	You bet	Oh?
Yes	For instance?	Really...
I see	I get it	Gosh
Right	And?	Then?
Go on	So?	Sure

Infrequent Questions

- Open questions:** asking for more than yes or no, leaving space for the speaker to choose to fill in/respond to
- One at a time**
- Don’t over-rely:** beware of dictating the direction of the conversation more than allowing the speaker the chance to address/retell/explore their situation in their own way

Attentive Silence

Appropriate silence is positive. A good listener attends bodily, observes the speaker, reflects on what has been communicated -- content and feelings.

Reflecting Skills

Reflecting Skills provide a mirror to the speaker. The listener restates the feeling and/or content of what the speaker has communicated and does so in a way that demonstrates understanding and acceptance.

Paraphrasing

- ☑ **Concise Response** stating the essence of the speaker's content in the listener's own words.

Reflecting Feelings

- ☑ **Feelings—not only content:** focus on feeling words, observe body language, infer feelings from content.

Reflecting Meanings

- ☑ **“You feel....because....” also “I feel.... because....”**
Keep it concise and be open to clarification -- it's an invitation, not an ultimatum.

Summary Reflections

- ☑ **Giving summary of what is heard**—what speaker brought up. Not a summary of listener's thoughts of the matter. Summaries invite the speaker to respond, pull together summary data for themselves.