

SPIILT MILK

THE IMPROV TOOL FOR HANDLING BIG FEELINGS!



Lesson Three: Communication

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Communication means sharing information or ideas.

It allows others to understand what we are thinking and feeling, and it helps us understand what others are thinking and feeling.

And why is that important? There are a few reasons...

Because people need to know how we are feeling in order to give us what we need.

If we let others know when we are angry with them, they can change or at least explain their behavior, apologize, or help us calm down. That helps them understand us better and helps us understand them. (Which is great for our relationships!)

If we let others know when we are sad, they can comfort us.

If we let others know when we are overwhelmed - and we all know that feeling - they can help us get calm.

Because it helps others understand our behavior.

If someone is yelling and crying and making fists, they might look like they want to hurt someone else, instead of just trying to deal with BIG feelings! And that may make them “fight back,” which could be dangerous.

If someone is talking quickly and loudly at us, they may seem like they are angry or about to hurt us, when they are actually just nervous and trying to be heard. And that may make us “fight back,” which could be dangerous.

Because it helps us begin to trust each other.

Learning about each other and our feelings helps us understand each other. And when we can do that, we can feel safe that they want to help us.

But we have to do it in a way that people can HEAR us - not just our words, but how our behavior can let others know how we feel. Let’s explore good communication!

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What are the different types of communication?

There are two main types of communication: verbal (using words) and non-verbal (using our face and body to let others know our thoughts and feelings).

VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

Verbal communication doesn't just mean talking, it means any kind of expression that uses words, including writing, typing, and texting. This type of communication is very clear when it is used clearly and calmly.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

Non-verbal communication relies on body language (using our body in a way that helps others know what we think, feel, and want) and facial expressions (using our face to convey our feelings). This type of communication can be very effective if we use the right ones - and we can practice with improv!

So, which should we use: verbal or non-verbal?

It depends!

If we are comfortable using our words, if we can keep our voices calm, and if we can speak slowly and clearly, verbal communication is a great choice!

If we prefer to stay quiet and we know how to use our face and body to show meaning, non-verbal might be for you!

Both types of communication are great if you use them in a way that lets others really "hear" you (meaning, they get what you are letting them know!), but there are effective ways to use each.

In this lesson, we'll learn about how to communicate thoughts and feelings!

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Good and Not-So-Good Ways to Communicate

...whether verbally or non-verbally!

There are three types of “voices” - ways to communicate - that we use, but only one really helps others hear us!

What if some walked up to you slowly and mumbled something (sounding something like “mmprrrphhmmmbllle”). They are looking at the ground and their hands are in their pockets. You ask, “What did you say?” And they very quietly reply, “My house is on fire.” Are you likely to take what they say seriously?

And what if someone came screaming down the street, flailing their arms, and shouting in your face. Would you stop to listen to what they have to say?

Now imagine that someone walks up to you with purpose, they look you right in the eye, and say in a clear, firm voice, “My house is on fire!” You’d be more likely to call 9-1-1, right? That’s the importance of choose the right “voice” for communication.

Not-So-Good:

PASSIVE VOICE: Quiet, not specific, tells people that you don’t really mean it.

Examples include:

Verbal:

Whispering

Mumbling

Using phrases like, “I guess so,” “I’m not sure,” “Maybe,” “I don’t know”

Non-verbal:

Shrugging

Looking down or avoiding eye contact

Hands in pockets

Slumped shoulders

Leaning



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Not-So-Good:

AGGRESSIVE VOICE: Loud, bullying, makes you not want to listen/leave.

Examples include:

Verbal:

- Yelling
- Using bad language
- Interrupting
- Blaming

Non-verbal:

- Getting too physically close
- Pointing in your face
- Making physical contact, like pushing or poking
- Clenched fists
- Angry-looking face (furrowed eyebrows, tight lips)

Good:

ASSERTIVE VOICE: Calm, firm, lets others know you mean what you say

Examples include:

Verbal:

- Voice loud enough to be heard, but not yelling
- Even tone
- Slow enough to be understood
- Precise language

Non-verbal:

- Standing still and tall
- Eye contact
- Calm hand gestures
- Serious expression

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Should I always let everyone know all my feelings?

There are more important times to let people know your thoughts and feelings than others. Times to let others know what's going on with you are:

- If you need physical help (“I hurt my knee,” “I’m hungry - want to get lunch?”)
- If you need emotional support (“I’m just so upset, can we talk?”)
- If you are angry with someone (“I need to tell you how I feel so we can work it out.”)
- If someone is asking you important questions (“I will tell you what I feel/ know.”)

And if you have feelings that just, well, feel too BIG, that is the perfect time to use your assertive voice to explain what you are feeling!

The same goes for when someone needs to hear from you; just use your calm, assertive voice to tell them what they need to know.

But what if I’m scared or overwhelmed?

Sometimes, our emotions get the best of us. If we think something will be uncomfortable at the dentist’s office or a teacher/boss is angry with us or a police officer has to ask us questions, we may feel a meltdown coming on. We may feel like we want to yell or run away. We may even forget how to use our assertive voice or our calming techniques (we’ll learn a new one at the end of this lesson)!

That’s ok! It’s why we practice. Because the more at ease we feel with staying calm and even and using our words and gestures in a meaningful way, the more likely we are to communicate this way when we’re under pressure. That’s why we improv!

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Discussion questions and exercises:

1. Choose an emotion from lesson one - happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, or disgust.
 - a. Can you think of a time this feeling became overwhelming?
 - b. How did you respond? (In other words, how did it make you behave?)
 - c. How could you have used assertive communication to help you?

Choose two volunteers. Have one communicate the overwhelming emotion they chose above. The other volunteer should interrupt them and be argumentative, making it hard for the first volunteer to get their point across. What happens to their verbal communication? What happens to them physically? Discuss ways you can make communicating easier when the other person doesn't want to hear them.

get up
ON YOUR FEET

2. Allowing others to communicate is just as important as our communicating to them.
 - a. What can we learn from listening to others tell us what they want and need?
 - b. How can we be good listeners? How can we make others feel comfortable communicating with us? When should we talk? How can we let them know that we are listening?

Have volunteers stand in front of the class one at a time and use non-verbal communication to convey one of the emotions above. See if the class can guess what the emotion is, and then ask questions to figure out what the volunteer is trying to convey. Is there a way to make it clearer?

BONUS: Have each volunteer play with the type of communication - passive, aggressive, or assertive - to see how the class reacts. How is each "voice" effective or not effective?

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ON YOUR FEET

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Calming technique spotlight: **BREATHING**

Aren't we already breathing?

Of course! But there are special ways to breathe that help us slow our heart rate, calm ourselves, and help us gain control when we feel like we might meltdown. One way is called "diaphragmatic breathing."

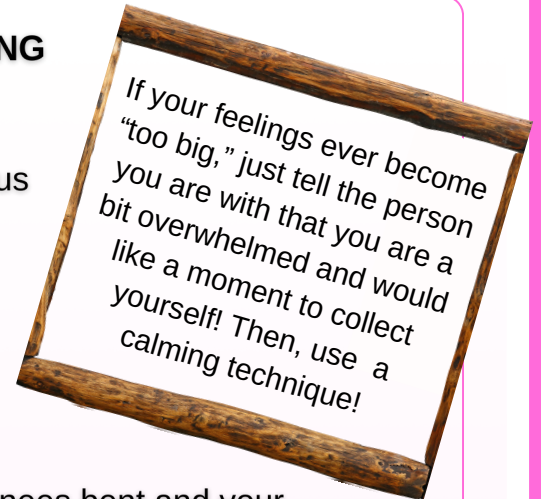
How do we do it?

First, practice while lying down!

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported, like with a jacket. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs.
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out, causing your hand to rise. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Tighten your stomach muscles, so that your stomach moves in, causing your hand to lower as you exhale through pursed lips (like you are breathing out through a straw). The hand on your upper chest should remain as still as possible.

As this becomes more comfortable, try practicing while sitting in a chair!

1. Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Tighten your stomach muscles, so that your stomach moves back in, as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.



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Practice these other types of breathing exercises so you become comfortable with them!

★ Before using these while in a real-life stressful situation, tell the person you are with that you are overwhelmed and just need to breathe for a moment before you can continue! Make sure they know what you are doing so they don't think you are just ignoring them!

Box breathing

1. Imagine a box. Notice the left side, top side, right side, bottom side.
2. Now try to breathe "around" the box.
3. Inhale as you visualize going up one side of the box, then hold your breath for one to five seconds.
4. Exhale as through a straw as you imagine going down the other side of the box.

Morning breathing:

1. Take a deep breath in through your nose.
2. Imagine you are breathing in all the light around you. The light is filling your lungs.
3. Then slowly breathe out through your lips, like you are quietly blowing out a candle.
4. Imagine you are blowing out all the darkness and any bad feelings. It is all escaping your body with the breath. The only thing left in you is light.
5. Do this two more times.
6. Then, slowly open your eyes.

4-7-8 breathing:

Inhale through your nose for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of seven, and exhale through your mouth for a count of eight.

Now, give yourselves a big round of applause and go do some improv!