Communication Skills
Lessons Developed by Sandy Magnuson

AGE GROUP: The content and language in these lessons can be adapted for students from approximately third grade through high school.

Please note: Primary students can also learn to active listen and compose I-messages.

ASCA Standards Area: Personal/Social Development

National Standard Personal/Social Development A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Student Competencies:
Students will recognize that communication involves speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior.
Students will acquire effective communication skills.

Lesson #1: Attentive and active listening

Suggested introduction:

Listen!
How do you know when someone is listening to you? (list on board or flip chart)
How do you know when someone is not listening to you? (list on board or flip chart)

Today we’re going to talk about skills for listening to friends, teachers, and others.

Demonstration #1:

Structure a demonstration with another adult or a student and ask the class to observe carefully so they can critique your listening behaviors.

While the other adult or student endeavors to engage you (the facilitator) in a conversation, overtly engage in distracting behaviors (e.g., advice giving, bragging, changing the subject, distracting, teasing, and other roadblocks to communication)

Invite class members to critique your listening behaviors.
(add behaviors identified to board or flip chart)

Inquire: Think about times when you have tried to talk to someone, and did not think he or she was listening. How was that for you? What thoughts and feelings did you have? What did you do?

Demonstration #2:

Structure a demonstration with another adult or a student and, again, invite the class to critique your listening behaviors.
While the other adult or student endeavors to engage you, overtly give your attention, maintain eye contact, and actively listen.

Invite class members to critique your listening behaviors. (add behaviors identified to board or flip chart)

**Lecturette:**

Listening involves far more than our ears. We actually listen with our whole body.

- Listening position
- Eye contact
- Responses

**Demonstration #3:**

Structure a demonstration with another adult or a student. Demonstrate solid listening skills as the other person tells about an event that recently transpired.

**Facilitated practice:**

Divide class into dyads (or triads with one observer).

Ask the youngest to tell the oldest about a favorite place.

Ask the oldest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).

Ask the youngest to give feedback to the oldest about his or her listening behaviors.

Ask the oldest to tell the youngest about a fun activity from the past two or three weeks.

Ask the youngest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).

Ask the oldest to give feedback to the youngest about his or her listening behaviors.

Invite demonstrations for the larger group.

**Concluding activity:**

Invite class members to compose written reflections, which you collect, review, and retain for subsequent lessons.
Lesson #2: Expressive communication with I-Messages

Suggested introductory activity:

Invite class members to share 7 things they learned during the lesson addressing listening skills.

Explain that communication includes receptive (listening) and expressing (speaking) components.

Provide overview of lesson.

Give an example of an age and context appropriate “you-message” and discuss reasons it would not be effective (e.g., “Every time I try to explain why I did something you shoot your mouth off and ridicule me. You always complain and never give my ideas a chance to work. You are just mean!”).

Invite students to discuss their reactions to such messages.

Demonstration #1:

With another adult or student, compose an I-message (e.g., “When you interrupt me when I’m trying to explain why I did something, I feel ridiculed and humiliated. I become angry because you don’t give my ideas a chance to work. I wish you would at least listen to me, and then, perhaps, try my suggestions before you discount them”).

Invite class members to identify differences between “I-messages” and “you-messages.”

Emphasize:
- Blame was assigned in the first.
- Responsibility was assumed in the second.
- The first would interfere with friendships.
- The second would be less likely to hurt the other person.
- The second would more readily lead to a resolution.

Lecturette: I-Messages

Include and explain:
- Stated from position of first person
- May include a request
- Can be used to address positive as well as negative situations
- Sometimes called “responsibility messages” (we take responsibility for our message and our feelings)

Structure:
- When you __________ (behavior or action is specifically identified)
- I feel __________ (a feeling such as mad, sad, happy, or afraid)
- Because __________ (an explanation of how the behavior affects the speaker)
- And I would like __________ (the request)

Goals include:
- Clear expression of problem and desire
Resolution
Maintenance of relationship

Non-examples:
Blaming messages
Ridiculing messages
Name calling
Sarcasm
Intimidation

Invite class members to critique “pseudo I-messages.”
(e.g., I think you are mean, When you didn’t talk to me outside, I felt like you were ignoring me. When you laughed at me I wanted to know why.)

**Demonstration #2:**

Structure the demonstration with another adult or class member who expresses an I-message to you (the facilitator). Coach as necessary.

Class member: [gives I-message]
Facilitator: [actively listens]
   Let me be sure I understand you correctly. When I _____, you felt _____ because _____.
   You would like me to _____. Did I understand you correctly?

**Facilitated practice:**

Divide class into dyads (or triads with one observer).
Ask the youngest to express an I-message.
Ask the oldest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).
Ask the youngest to give feedback to the oldest about his or her listening behaviors.

Ask the oldest to tell express an I-message.
Ask the youngest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).
Ask the oldest to give feedback to the youngest about his or her listening behaviors.

**Demonstration #3:**

Structure the demonstration with another adult or class member.

Facilitator: [gives I-message e.g., “When you listen to me, I feel understood, and it helps me understand myself. Thank you”]
Student: [actively listens while facilitator coaches if necessary]
   Let me be sure I understand you correctly. When I listen to you, you feel understood. It also helps you understand yourself. Did I understand you correctly?

**Facilitated practice:**
Divide class into dyads (or triads with one observer).
Ask the youngest to express a complimentary or affirming I-message.
Ask the oldest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).
Ask the youngest to give feedback to the oldest about his or her listening behaviors.

Ask the oldest to tell express a complimentary or affirming I-message.
Ask the youngest to practice active listening (as demonstrated).
Ask the oldest to give feedback to the youngest about his or her listening behaviors.

Application:

Invite class members to discuss times when they would use I-messages.
Facilitate a discussion of challenges in using I-messages.
Invite students to complete Conversion System individually or in groups.

Conclusion:

Sometimes we don’t have time to carefully compose complete I-Messages.
Examples of abbreviated I-messages:

Ouch
I would like you to stop.
I don’t like the way that feels.

Invite class members to generate ideas for other abbreviated I-messages.

Return reflection notes from previous lesson. Invite class members to compose written reflections, which you collect, review, and retain. Returning the reflections with your written comments can be affirming to students and provide opportunities for clarification.
### You message Conversion System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You Messages</th>
<th>Responsibility (I) Messages</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You make me so mad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You made me mess up my science project.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>You are so mean. (or You are a creep!)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You stole my idea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You ruined my plan.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>You hurt my feelings.</td>
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