

Module 1
Section 6

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Talking, Knowing Yourself, and
When Things Get Tough

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

Learn how talking and listening help us
in four important ways.

Discover how to be a really good
listener.

Explore the importance of sharing your
thoughts and feelings with others.

Recognize why it is important to know
yourself well - who you are and how
you think

Identify how being aware of your
feelings and being mindful can help
you communicate better.

Find out about "implicit bias" and learn
how to recognize your own biases.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Why is talking so important?

Way back in the time of the ancient Greeks, over 2,000 years ago, people thought talking was really important. They even studied how to talk well and convince others. Talking is something we do all the time, even if we don't think about it. It's like an art that we can learn to do even better!

Why should we learn to talk better?

Talking is a big part of our lives. Studies show that we spend almost all of our waking hours talking to people. Learning to talk better can help us in lots of ways:

- Getting a job: Companies want people who can talk clearly and listen carefully.
- Making friends: Talking well helps us understand each other and get along.
- Feeling good: Talking to people makes us feel connected and happy.

Listening is important too.

Have you ever talked to someone and then realized you couldn't remember what they said? It's easy to forget what people say, even though we spend a lot of time listening. Listening is really important for getting along with people and understanding them.

When things get tough, we need to listen carefully.

Sometimes, when we're arguing with someone, we need to listen really hard to understand how they feel. This is called "empathetic listening." It means trying to see things from their point of view and being kind.

There are some bad listening habits to avoid:

- Interrupting: Don't jump in before someone finishes talking.
- Distorted listening: Don't just hear what you want to hear.
- Eavesdropping: Don't listen in on other people's conversations.
- Narcissistic listening: Don't make everything about yourself.
- Pseudo-listening: Don't pretend to listen when you're not paying attention.



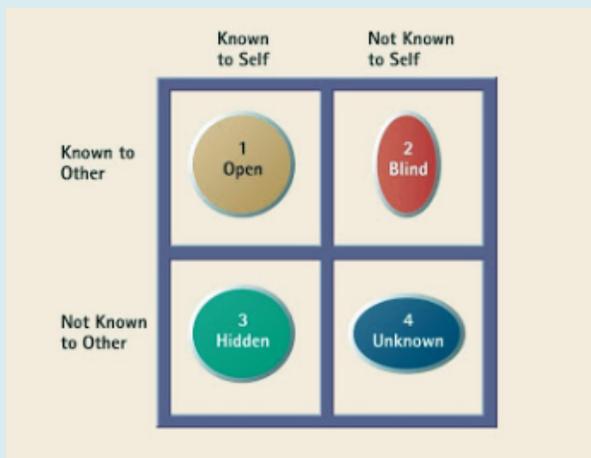
To be a good listener, try the HEAR method:

- **HALT:** Stop what you're doing and focus on the other person.
- **ENJOY:** Take a deep breath and be open to what they're saying.
- **ASK:** Make sure you understand what they mean. Ask questions if you need to.
- **REFLECT:** Repeat back what you heard to make sure you got it right.

The value of talking

Knowing yourself is key.

It's important to understand who you are and what makes you special. Think about your strengths and weaknesses. What makes you happy? What makes you stressed?



The Johari Window helps us understand ourselves better:

This can help us understand the differences between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

- **Open quadrant:** Things you and others know about you (like your hair color).
- **Blind quadrant:** Things others know about you, but you don't (like if you talk too fast).
- **Hidden quadrant:** Things you know about yourself, but others don't (like your biggest fears).
- **Unknown quadrant:** Things neither you nor others know about you (like where you'll live in the future).



Emotional intelligence is important.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is about understanding your feelings and how to manage them. It's like being smart about your emotions. People with high EQ are better at getting along with others, handling stress, and making good decisions.

Mindfulness can help us develop our EQ.

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment and paying attention to what's happening around you. It can help us calm down and make better choices, especially when we're feeling stressed or upset.

Here's a mindfulness strategy to try:

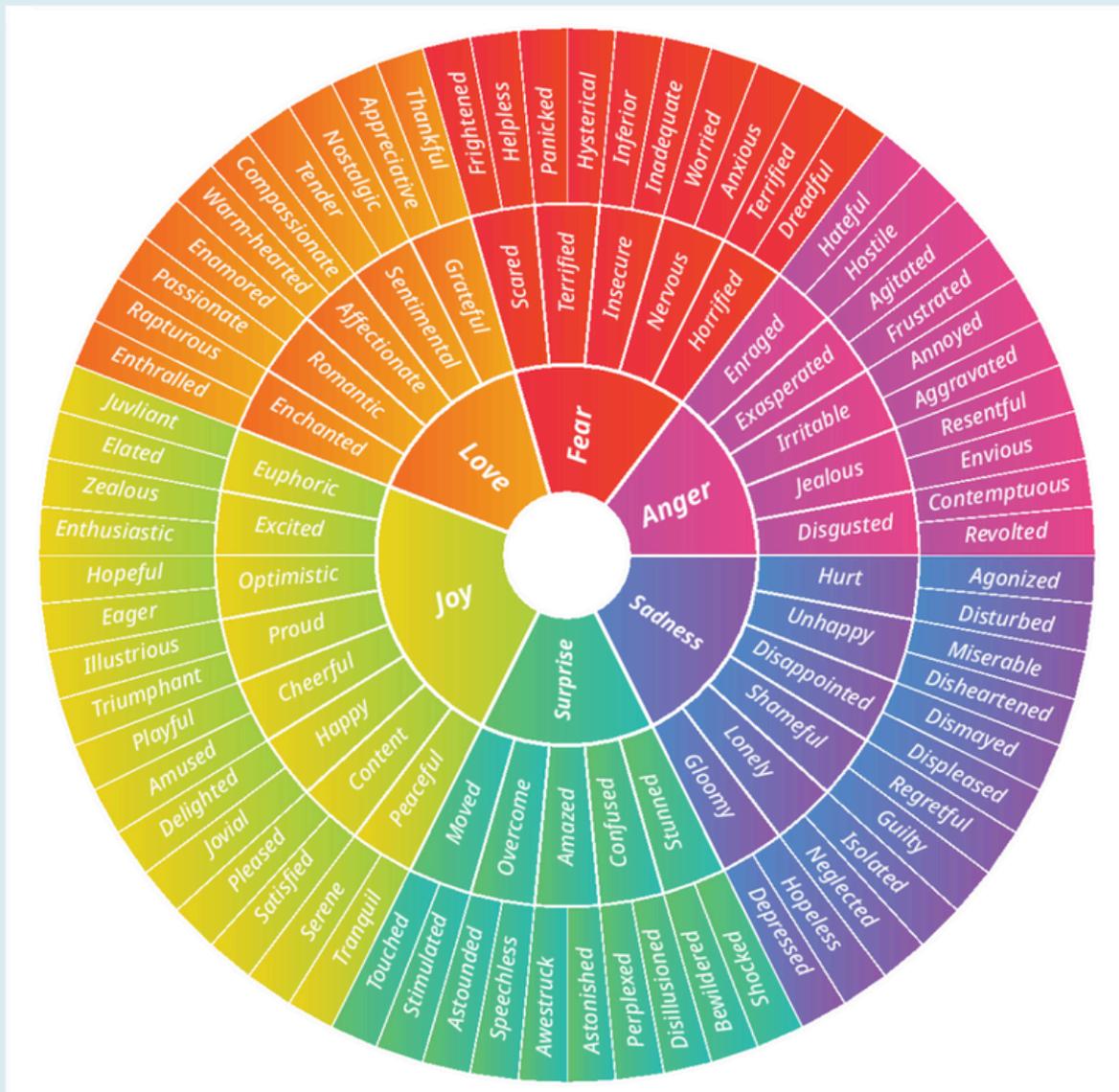
- Notice: Pay attention to your body and your thoughts.
- Shift: Accept your feelings without judging them.
- Rewire: Let go of the need to change how you feel.

Naming our emotions is important.

Sometimes it's hard to put our feelings into words. There are lots of different

emotions, and the wheel below can help us understand them better. The wheel shows how different emotions are connected and helps us figure out what's going on inside us.

Understanding emotions can help in arguments, too. When we're arguing with someone, it's helpful to think about what emotions they might be feeling. For example, if someone is acting withdrawn, they might be feeling scared.



Understanding Ourselves: Recognizing Hidden Biases

It's important to know ourselves really well. This means thinking about the ideas and beliefs that have shaped who we are. Everyone has these ideas, but they can sometimes get in the way of talking to others in a good way.

Think about it: most people like to be around people who think like them. It makes sense! Who wouldn't want a friend or someone they like who shares their interests and beliefs? But sometimes, this can make our thinking stuck. We might start to believe that certain things are true for everyone, even though they are just our own way of seeing things.

These ideas come from our experiences and the way we were raised. They can lead to hidden biases, which means we might have unfair thoughts about others without even realizing it. We might say things that are based on stereotypes, or we might do things that make others feel uncomfortable without meaning to. These are called microaggressions.

For example, telling someone who looks different from you that their English is good, or telling a woman who works construction that she is strong, can be microaggressions. These things might seem harmless, but they can make people feel bad.

Here are some things we can do to avoid letting our biases affect how we talk to others:

- **Be honest with ourselves.** It can be hard to see our own biases, but it's important to try. Ask a friend or someone you work with for their honest opinion about the things you say and do.
- **Get to know people.** When we get to know people, we often find that we have a lot in common and are surprised by how different we are.
- **Watch ourselves.** Think about the things you say and do. Try to avoid making unfair judgments or saying things based on assumptions. Don't put people into groups and assume they all think or act the same way.
- **Apologize.** If you realize you've said something unfair or made a mistake, it's okay to apologize. Everyone makes mistakes, and apologizing can help us build stronger relationships.

Think about this:

*When you think about people from different places or groups, what comes to mind? Do you think about their looks, strengths, weaknesses, or how they dress?

*Do you speak up when your friends or family say things that are unfair or hurtful to others?

*Do you have friends or people you know who are different from you? Have you tried to get to know them better?

Conflict: It's Not Always Bad

Many people try to avoid disagreements and arguments, but this can be a problem. Avoiding conflict can make people feel resentful, frustrated, and

angry. It can also stop us from talking to each other in a healthy way and can even lead to problems in our relationships.

Believe it or not, conflict can actually be good. Here's why:

- * It helps us find common ground.
- * It helps us learn how to handle disagreements in the future.
- * It gives us a chance to learn about other people.
- * It can lead to creative solutions.
- * It can help us talk openly and honestly, which builds trust.
- * It helps us grow as people and become better communicators.
- * It can make us more confident and less aggressive.
- * It helps us learn to manage our emotions.

When we handle conflict with kindness and thoughtfulness, it can make our lives and the world around us better.

Different Views on Conflict

Just like beauty is in the eye of the beholder, conflict can be seen differently by different people. Some people are comfortable with disagreements and think arguments are normal. Others feel personally attacked when they disagree with someone.

There are also different ways of thinking about conflict. Some people think it's a problem that should be avoided, while others think it's a natural part of life. It's also important to remember that what one person sees as a conflict, another

person might not see as a problem at all.

It's important to remember that everyone experiences conflict differently.

How We Handle Conflict

There are many ways to describe how people handle conflict. One way is to think about the ABCs of conflict management:

- **Avoiders:** These people try to avoid conflict by denying it, making jokes, or delaying the conversation.
- **Battlers:** These people might threaten, blame, shout, or use sarcasm during a conflict.
- **Collaborators:** These people take responsibility for their actions, show empathy, and are willing to compromise.

In the next part of this series, we'll learn more about how to manage conflict in a healthy way.

The Power of Forgiveness

Before we talk about managing conflict, it's important to remember that forgiveness can make a big difference. Forgiveness means letting go of anger and resentment towards someone who has hurt us. It means choosing to be kind and compassionate, even though they may not deserve it.

Forgiveness is about helping others, but it also helps us. When we forgive, we free ourselves from negative feelings. So, be willing to forgive!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Think about a time when you had to communicate with someone to get something you wanted. What did you do to make sure they understood you? How did you feel during the conversation?

2

Think about a time when you listened to someone who was upset. How did you show them you cared? What did you learn from listening to them?

3

Think about a new friend you made this year. Did you talk to them a lot? Did you tell them about yourself? Did you tell them too much? Did your friend tell you about themselves the same amount as you told them? Is there anything you would do differently next time you talk to your friend?

4

Think about a time when you might have made an assumption about someone based on how they looked or what you thought you knew about them. How did that make you feel? How could you have handled the situation differently?

5

This section talks about how conflict can be a good thing. Can you think of a time when a disagreement with someone helped you learn something new or understand their point of view better?

6

Think about how well you know yourself. Do you know your good habits and your not-so-good habits? Or are you like someone who can't see their own mistakes?

PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR JUST MORE TO CONSIDER

1 Imagine your own life right now. How could being a better talker and listener help you at your job? Would it make your friends and family happier? Could it even help you feel better?

What's One Thing You Can Do? Today, try to do something that makes talking and listening important. What could that be?

2 Join groups or two or three people to help you practice something called the HEAR method. Ask them to tell you about what's been on their mind lately.

Go through the steps: Halt, Enjoy, Ask, Reflect.

After you've listened, discuss what was easy and what was difficult to do. Ask the speaker if they felt like you were listening to them. Then switch roles and the other person becomes the listener.

3 Think about how we see people who are different from us. Answer these questions together and discuss and explore where these beliefs and thoughts came from.

- When you think of people from different places or groups, what pictures come to mind?
- Do you think of them as having certain looks, being good at certain things, or having certain personalities?
- Do you think about how they dress?
- Do you speak up when your friends or family say mean things about people who are different?
- How many of your friends and family look and act differently than you?
- Have you tried to get to know people from different places or groups?

RESOURCES

“Blind spots Challenge assumptions.” YouTube, 10 November 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tLbrOoB660. Accessed 9 July 2024.

(If you would like more information on implicit bias and the nature of human assumption, this short video is inspiring. Reflect on the quote from the video, “Living our lives with blind spots can put us in a tunnel.”)

Robbins, Mel. “5 ways to listen better | Julian Treasure | TED.” YouTube, 29 July 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSohjlYQI2A>. Accessed 9 July 2024.

(I have used this and other Julian Treasure videos with my classes for many years. I especially enjoy the practical strategies provided here to become a better listener.)

Westmaas, Laura. “9.4 ABCs of Conflict – Conflict Management.” eCampusOntario Pressbooks, Creative Commons, 2022, <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/conflictmanagement/chapter/9-3-abcs-of-conflict/>. Accessed 9 July 2024.

(This online book shows tactics commonly used by avoiders and battlers, which tend to lead to unhealthy handling of conflicts. In the final section, techniques used by collaborators demonstrate better options for managing conflicts.)