

“Helpful Communication Strategies”

Length: 30 minutes

Grade level: 9-12

Materials needed:

- Paper
- Writing/drawing Utensils

Overview: The goal of this lesson is for students to critically think about the words they use when they communicate with others, especially if they are confronting someone about a sensitive subject. To have effective communication is more than just being clear with your words; they must be helpful as well, rather than harmful. Students will be given examples to reword phrases into more effective wording. Students will also be given the chance to create a short skit or comic strip of a scenario they would likely find themselves in, and determine what would be an effective way to navigate the conversation.

Lesson objectives:

1. Identify unhelpful ways a person can communicate
2. Learn helpful communication in what words they choose

Evidence of Learning:

1. Students will rephrase unhelpful statements into positive, effective statements
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of effective communication through a skit or comic strip

Lesson Steps:

1. Introduction:

Ask students if they've ever been in a situation where they didn't know what to say, or felt like they said the wrong thing. What about a situation where they felt upset because what another person was saying felt unhelpful, maybe even hurtful? Explain to students that the way we choose to phrase our words can have a very different effect on a conversation, and therefore affect the way conversations go.

Example: A person is angry and says, “**You don't care about me at all.**” How does that differ from “**I feel like you don't care about me at all.**” (The second is less accusatory. It acknowledges the way you are feeling without being as dismissive or blaming.)

When talking to someone you think is struggling with body image and/or an eating disorder, “**I**” **statements** are very useful because they honestly express what you are feeling, while taking into consideration the other person's feelings too.

2. Elaborate on “I” statements after the example. “*I*” *statements communicate what your needs and emotions are without putting all of the pressure and focus on the person you are talking to.* Examples: *I feel, I need, I'm concerned about, I've noticed...*

3. Go over “you” statement examples. Have students explain why these are not effective/helpful phrases.

4. Pair students up and have them complete the attached “You v. I Statements” sheet, where they will be changing a “you” statement into an “I” statement.

5. Now that students have a better understanding of “I” statements vs. “you” statements, have them come up with their own scenario they think they would likely encounter, or have encountered.

If time allows: Have small groups create a comic strip or write a skit to demonstrate effective communication. Students will show what not to say in this skit or comic strip, and then show what would be a more helpful, effective way to communicate with someone.

Additional Exercise:

1. Put students into small groups of about 3-4. Have them discuss possible barriers to communicating with someone in their life that might have an eating disorder. Present students with the following situation: *You believe a friend or loved one in your life might have an eating disorder, please write down:*
 - *3 things that might prevent you from talking to that person about your concerns*
 - *Afraid of making it worse*
 - *Saying the wrong thing*
 - *It’s awkward*
 - *3 things that might help you to talk to the person you are concerned about*
 - *“I” statements*
 - *Approaching the conversation in a private place*
 - *Asking a trusted adult for help*
 - *Do some research to find resources*
2. Allow students a few minutes to discuss with group members and write down their responses
3. Bring students back to large group and discuss the responses they came up with.
4. It is important to point out that while there are many things that cause people not to approach a conversation with a loved one, there is always a resource to use in order to help them along the way

Potential Questions for Journaling or Group Discussion:

1. Think of a recent time when you found yourself in a conversation that wasn’t using “I” statements. How did that conversation go? If it hasn’t been resolved, how can you use “I” statements to express yourself in a helpful way?
2. Besides “I” statements, what are some other strategies for effective communication? For example, the tone of someone’s voice can make a big difference in how their words come across.
3. Why is it important to take care of yourself, not just the person you are concerned about helping? What are some ways you can practice self-care so that you can more effectively communicate with another person?
4. What was the process of creating a skit or comic strip like? Was it easy or difficult? (Why?)