Communication Skills Workshop

DP 009 - Developmental Intervention

By

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS WORKSHOP
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INTRODUCTION

The outreach program described herein is one of a series prepared by the staff of the Counseling-Psychological Services Center. The series includes the more frequently requested outreach topics and is designed to assist CPSC staff members responding to such requests. All programs in the series follow the format outlined below:

I. Goals/Objectives
II. Target Population(s)
III. Overview/Summarization
IV. Outline
V. Description of Content
VI. Special Instructions/Recommendations

These materials are intended for use in single-session (1-2 hour) outreach presentations or workshops. At the presenter's discretion, materials may be used in part or as a whole.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS WORKSHOP

Goal
The primary goal of the communication skills program is to help participants learn techniques that will enhance their ability to be effective communicators. Specifically, participants will be trained to: (a) listen more effectively; (b) communicate what they hear more effectively; (c) understand barriers to effective communication; and (d) resolve conflicts more satisfactorily.

Target Population
The program can be used for any student, faculty, or staff group interested in enhancing their ability to communicate effectively. It is especially well suited for individuals involved in helping services (resident assistants, health center personnel, academic counselors, etc.).

Overview
The program content involves didactic and experiential activities designed to accomplish program goals. Participants will be taught specific skills through brief lecturettes and then will be asked to engage in exercises designed to put those skills to use.

Outline
I. This section of the program will take approximately thirty minutes and will focus on effective listening. Participants will be given a brief lecture in which the concepts "restatement" and "reflection" are defined, along with an explanation of what the concept "listening with the third ear" means. Participants will then break into dyads and practice each of these skills.

II. This section of the program will take approximately thirty minutes and will focus on barriers to effective communication. Specifically, barriers to communication such as interrupting, distorting, and advice-giving will be discussed in a group format. Participants will then break into dyads and purposely act out various barriers to communication, processing with their partner about how it felt to do this, and getting feedback from their partner about how it felt to be on the receiving end of these barriers.

III. This section will also take thirty minutes and will focus on resolving conflicts through the skills that have been practiced. Participants will break into triads, with two participants being given a conflict to resolve and the third serving as a processor in this exercise. Once each person has had a chance to work on conflict resolution and to process others doing it, the group as a whole will discuss their experiences. A brief discussion, led by the leader, will follow in which the effects of a "win/lose" attitude in conflict resolution are discussed.
IV. This section will take thirty minutes and will involve a summary of the concepts and techniques that have been examined in the program. The group leader will encourage participants to continue practicing the skills they have learned so that they become an habitual part of interacting with others.

Description of Content

I. Introduction

A. Group leader introduces him/herself.

B. Group members break into pairs, spend approximately ten minutes getting to know each other, and then are asked to introduce their partner to the group.

C. Group leader will introduce topic of communication skills to participants.

1. Leader can use how the participants learned about and presented one another to the group as an example of how we communicate with others and how what we hear/say can be distorted.

2. Leader should state goals of the program:
   a. to help participants listen more effectively;
   b. to help participants communicate what they hear more effectively;
   c. to help participants understand barriers to effective communication and how they can be avoided;
   d. to help participants use their communication skills to resolve conflicts more effectively.

II. Effective Listening (30 minutes)

A. Leader will give brief talk on the nature of effective listening. The following points should be mentioned:

1. Few people feel really listened to most of the time.

2. Really listening to someone means more than just hearing the words they use.

3. Listening to someone means hearing what may lie behind the words being used. This involves listening with the "third ear," for the feelings, beliefs, etc., that are really being expressed.

B. Leader will give examples of how deeper meanings may underlie a statement. (Example: "I'm glad it is the end of the week," may translate into, "I am really tired from a long week of pressure and am looking forward to getting some rest and relaxation.") Once examples have been given, have group members get into pairs and
try listening with their "third ear" while carrying on a conversation. Have them check out their deeper level understandings with one another.

C. Brief talk by leader on the concepts "restatement" and "reflection."

1. Define "restatement" as communicating back to someone what you heard them say with basically the same words they used in their communication.

   Have people quickly break into pairs and try using restatements with one another.

2. Define "reflection" as communicating back to someone what you heard them say, using different words than theirs that go beyond what they said.

   a. Reflections capture feelings that may have been underneath the words a person used to express themselves.

   b. Have participants break into pairs again and try to reflect back to one another what they hear during their conversation.

III. Barriers to Effective Communication (30 minutes)

A. Have the group start out with a discussion of what they feel interferes with effective communication.

B. Ask group members to talk about what other people do that bothers them the most when it comes to communication, and ask them to share what they may do that may bother other people.

C. Discuss the following barriers to communication.

   1. Advice-giving
   2. Moralizing
   3. Interrupting
   4. Distorting
   5. Psychologizing
   6. Judging
   7. Going off on tangents

D. Have the group break into pairs, choose two or three of the barriers above, and purposely do them with their partner. Have them process how it felt to both do these things and have them done to them.
Description of Content (continued)

E. Briefly explore the action-reaction nature of how these barriers tend to work.

The more you commit some of these barriers, the more likely others are to do them to you. In other words, effective/ineffective communication leads to more of the same.

IV. Conflict Resolution (30 minutes)

A. Possibly, the time that good communication skills are needed the most involve conflict situations. People disagree over a lot of things, and most of us have a difficult time handling disagreements well.

B. One barrier to successful conflict resolution is a "win/lose" attitude.

This attitude almost always ensures that a conflict will not be resolved satisfactorily because it leaves one or both people feeling blamed, wronged, and/or cheated. A key aspect of successful conflict resolution is whether or not this win/lose attitude can be suspended and a compromise mind-set adopted (although there are situations that often involve value conflicts in which a person may be within his/her rights to refuse to compromise).

C. Ask the group to think of conflicts they have had with people and how they dealt with them. Get them to identify the factors that may have played a role in conflicts going unresolved. Using these situations, have group members pair up and attempt to resolve conflicts they have had trouble with in the past, but have one member of the pair make it difficult to resolve the conflict. Have each member of the pair play the role (through the use of good communication skills and a compromise mind-set) and the role of a person who is win/lose oriented and who exhibits a number of the barriers to good communication.

D. Now, give the group a problem to resolve (one person wants to see a movie, while the other wants to go to a basketball game). Have them get into pairs and attempt to resolve the conflict, using the following steps:

1. Describe the main issue in the conflict.
2. Clarify the opposing sides.
3. Reverse roles--try to put yourself in the other person's position to see what it is like.
4. Generate two or three potential compromises.
5. Each person states which compromise solution they like the most--if the same, adopt this solution; if different--generate a compromise both can live with.
Description of Content (continued)

E. Important to avoid judging or blaming the person for having a point of view that is different from yours.

F. Stress the importance of showing the other person that you are really listening to them and willing to meet them halfway.

V. Summary (15 minutes)

A. Briefly review the following:
   1. Importance of good listening skills.
   2. Listening with the "third ear."
   3. The use of restatement and reflection in communicating to people that you have heard them.
   4. Barriers to communication.
   5. Negative impact of win/lose attitude in resolving conflicts.
   7. Steps for resolving conflicts.
   8. Importance of practicing these techniques so they become entrenched in day-to-day patterns.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

Only two: 1) let people talk about their personal experiences, but don't let them use the program for psychotherapy; and 2) use your own sensitivity in deciding how to pace things and what exercises to do/not do.