

What's Communication Got to Do With It?

Overview

This lesson and the next teach a valuable set of research-based skills for helping young people communicate and manage conflict more effectively with others. Research has shown that how people communicate and handle their conflicts over time will matter greatly to the health and happiness of their relationships. The skills youth will learn and practice in Lessons 9 and 10 are transferable to all kinds of relationships—at school; at work; with family, friends, partners; and later with children.

Lesson 9 begins by introducing the patterns (The Four Communication Danger Signs) that tend to harm relationships. Youth will have an opportunity to assess one of their relationships for the prevalence of these patterns in their own relationships.

Second, participants will examine how anger impacts the brain and discover the importance of being able to regulate emotions, especially strong ones like anger. This lays the motivation for learning the steps of the *Time Out Skill*. A strategy to regulate strong emotions is embedded within the *Time Out Skill*.

Next, youth will practice the *Speaker Listener Technique*, a structured framework to use when talking is difficult. This technique provides a way for two people to come back and address an issue or problem more effectively. It ensures both people are heard and validated and counters all of the communication danger signs.

The skills taught in these two lessons are adapted for youth from one of the nation's leading research-based programs for adult couples, PREP, the Prevention and

Relationship Enhancement Program. Thirty years of empirical research at various universities has shown that a couple's ability to communicate and handle conflict over time is strongly associated with future levels of relationship satisfaction and reduction of aggression, as well as distress and divorce.¹

Goals

- Raise awareness of the role communication and the ability to regulate emotions and handle conflict plays in relationship success or failure.
- Identify the patterns that are most damaging to relationships.
- Build skills to counter negative patterns and protect relationships of all kinds—starting with the *Time Out Skill* and then the *Speaker Listener Technique*.

Lesson at a Glance

9.1 What's Communication Got to Do with It? (20 minutes)

Activities: *Communication Danger Signs; Relationship Quiz*

9.2 Angry Brains and the Power of Time Outs (10 minutes)

Activities: *Demonstration—Your Angry Brain; The Time Out Skill; What's Behind Anger? A Way to Help Calm Yourself; Music Video Opportunity; Applying Time Outs*

9.3 The Speaker Listener Technique—When Talking Is Difficult (25 minutes)

Activities: *Speaker Listener Technique; Speaker Listener Practice*

Trusted Adult Connection



Materials Checklist

Resources:

- 9a. *Communication Activity Cards Instructor's Key* (pgs. 211–213)
- 9b. *Speaker Listener Scenarios* (pgs. 214–216)

- 9c. *Communication* activity cards (class set): (**Locate colored activity cards in back of manual.**) Cut. Duplicate masters can be downloaded at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- 9d. *Time Out* pocket cards (class set): (**Locate cards in back of manual.**) Cut. One per participant. Duplicate masters can be downloaded at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- 9e. *Speaker Listener* cards (class set): (**Locate cards in back of manual.**) Cut. One per participant. Duplicate masters can be downloaded at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.

Workbook:

- *Poor Communication—Relationship Wreckers* (pg. 38)
- *Relationship Quiz* (pg. 39)
- *Time Outs: Be Smart* (pgs. 40–41)
- *Speaker Listener Log* (pgs. 42–43)

Materials:

- PowerPoint slideshow is a digital download that comes with the curriculum. Easy-to-follow download instructions are found at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- Video clips embedded in the PowerPoint slides
- Two Alka-Seltzer tablets, clear glass of water
- Music video, *Ordinary People*, by John Legend (hyperlinked in the PowerPoint slide)

Downloadable Resources Located at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4

- Lesson 9 PowerPoint Presentation
- Duplicate masters for handouts and activity cards

**Preparation**

- ✓ Study both Lesson 9 and 10 while you view the corresponding PowerPoints in preparation for program delivery to grasp the full set of skills.
- ✓ Preview the video clips (embedded in PowerPoints). *Communicating Well* and *Anger & Stress* are each about 3 minutes. A longer 10-minute clip is included for *The Speaker Listener Technique*. To prepare yourself to teach it—and for a fast tutorial on the *Speaker Listener Technique*—view the 10-minute clip, titled *The Speaker Listener Technique*. Then decide whether you will use it in session. Options are not to use

it, or to use only one of the five-minute segments, or both. The first five-minute segment goes over the rules with cartoon type characters. The latter five-minute segment shows a real couple before and after learning the technique.

- ✓ Locate and cut the *Communication* activity cards (Resource 9c), found in back of manual. Sort them into the four categories by the letter on the back. Instructor has a *Communication Activity Cards Instructor's Key* (Resource 9a, pgs. 211–213).
- ✓ Locate and cut the *Time Out* pocket cards (Resource 9d) and the *Speaker Listener* cards (Resource 9e), two sets of activity cards located in the back of the manual. For future groups, print duplicates (in color or gray scale on card stock) from masters found at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- ✓ Read Section 9.3 and preview the role-plays to practice the *Speaker Listener Technique* in session. The expectations from the workbook, *My Expectations* on pgs. 6–9, are ideal to suggest for the required practice in addition to the practice in class. Duplicate the role-plays, Resource 9b found at the end of the lesson (pgs. 214–216), and cut in half.
- ✓ Preview music video *Ordinary People* (John Legend) (hyperlinked in the PowerPoint slideshow).
- ✓ Please note that it is very important to require a log of practice time for the *Speaker Listener Technique* outside of session. See information in Section 9.3. Suggest they use the *My Expectations* prompts from the workbook to practice the *Speaker Listener Technique*.
- ✓ Carefully review the workbook applications, as they are important for applying skills.

SECTION 9.1

What's Communication Got to Do with It?

Through an activity, youth will be introduced to the Four Communication Danger Signs.

- ❖ **(PP)** *Today we know a lot more about how and why relationships can start well and then sometimes go bad. Researchers have been studying couples for almost three decades to find out why.³*
 - **(PP)** *Typically, relationships do start sweet. You can't wait to see each other. You show interest in each other, you talk nicely, do fun things, and treat each other well.*
 - *Then, gradually over time, partners can start to take each other for granted. They don't handle conflict well, they criticize each other, they make less effort to plan for fun things together and begin to get more irritated at each other's differences.*
 - *These negatives start to eat away at the relationship.*
- ❖ *How two people in a relationship communicate and handle their differences over time is very important. It is a key predictor of relationship happiness.*

- Resource 9a: *Communication Activity Cards Instructor's Key* (pgs. 211–213)
- Resource 9c: *Communication activity cards*
- Workbook: *Poor Communication—Relationship Wreckers* (pg. 38)
- Workbook: *Relationship Quiz* (pg. 39)
- Video clip: *Communicating Well*

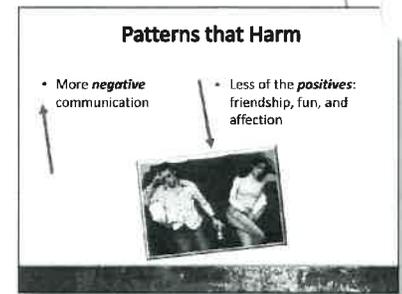
20 minutes



Lesson 9
What's Communication Got to Do With It?



- ❖ **(PP)** *When there is more bad communication and less good, the relationship is in danger.*
- ❖ *Let's look more closely at the negative patterns that are behind a lot of relationship troubles—relationships of all kinds.*



Activity: Communication Danger Signs

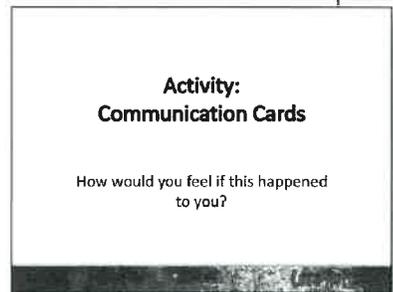
Announce that they are going to do an activity to help them recognize the kinds of negative patterns that slowly poison relationships. State that we'll call them the Four Danger Signs. Note: Leader should locate the *Communication Activity Cards Instructor's Key* (Resource 9a, pgs. 211–213). **(PP)**

Directions:

1. Have volunteers stand along an imaginary line in the room. Ask them to imagine that in the spot where they are standing they are feeling good about themselves. They should assume life is okay and things are going pretty well.
2. Give a *Communication* activity card (Resource 9c) to each person. Instruct them to read the card silently and consider the following:
 - *If this situation happened to you, would you continue to feel good or would it make you angry, frustrated, upset, or hurt?*
 - *Take a step backward if this interaction would make you mad, frustrated, upset, angry, or hurt.*
 - *Stay where you are if the interaction is positive and you continue to feel good.*

Pause, then say:

- *Notice how many of you have moved from that positive spot. Those who moved backward have situations with negative communication patterns.*



- *The two people who did not move have examples of the kind of communication that supports or strengthens relationships. Note: Those cards have an * asterisk.*
3. Ask participants to look at the letter(s) on the back of their communication card. Point out that E stands for escalation, PD for put-down or invalidation, W/A for withdrawal or avoidance, and NI for negative interpretation.

Discussion of Put-downs or Invalidations (PD)

(PP) Ask each person who has a “PD” on the back of his or her card, who stepped backward, to read it aloud at this time. Use these points:

- ❖ *These are put-downs or invalidations. Put-downs happen when feelings, actions, efforts, or thoughts are discounted, disrespected, or devalued. For example: “You can’t do anything right.”*
- ❖ *Another kind of put-down or invalidation is when positive actions are ignored. An example is the PD card about the grades. How does that feel?*
- ❖ *Also, note that while some put-downs can be really nasty, like, “You stupid jerk,” others can be more subtle, like, “It’s no big deal, you shouldn’t be so upset about that.” Even though the person was trying to help, it invalidates your feelings. To you it **was** a big deal. It **does** upset you.*

Ask the PD cardholder with a positive situation (the one who stayed in the same place) to read his or her card aloud.

- ❖ *Notice that in this kind of interaction, you are likely to feel understood, validated, and taken seriously. Notice how different that is from the way the person was being blown off or discounted in the other negative PD example. In this one the person was validated, as in “You have valid concerns that I will take seriously.”*

Discussion of Escalation (E) (PP)

- ❖ *Escalation is when routine conversations erupt into destructive or out-of-control arguments. Negative comments spew out, often with hurtful and nasty words.*



- ❖ *People often regret the words they have said when angry. Unfortunately, the other person is likely to remember the stinging words said during a fight even if there's an apology later.*
- ❖ *Sometimes, if the fight is between two people who are very close, one may use a confidence, a secret, or something sensitive that they know about the other person to hurt him or her. We call this "hitting below the belt."*

Now have those with "E" on their cards read it aloud with voice and emotion to make it real. Continue with this point about escalation:

- ❖ *People in significant relationships of any kind can get angry, yell and have an escalating argument. We're all human.*
- ❖ *But people who are more successful in their relationships are often able to stop themselves before it goes too far. They learn how to stop—they know when to take a time out.*

Discussion of Negative Interpretation (NI) (PP)

- ❖ *This is when someone takes what you say and turns it around. Have you ever felt like another person was turning what you said or did into something more negative?*
- ❖ *Have you ever felt someone was looking at you in the worst possible light and that they were making only negative assumptions about you?*
- ❖ *It's when someone always believes or expects the worst about you.*

Now ask those who have cards marked "NI" to read their examples aloud. Conclude with this point:

- ❖ *The danger with negative interpretations is that they can take over your view of another person. Soon, you don't even see half of the positive things the other person does or says.*
- ❖ *In other words, you start to see or hear only what you expect. You become committed to a negative view regardless of what a person actually does.*
- ❖ *A person can get demoralized or discouraged by feeling that another person never recognizes anything positive.*

Discussion of Withdrawal and Avoidance (W/A) (PP)

- ❖ *This is when someone like a partner, friend, family member, or someone you work with avoids talking about important things with you or withdraws from the conversation once important issues comes up.*
- ❖ *It is very frustrating when you want to talk about something important or work something out, but you cannot get the person to connect with you and talk it over.*

First, ask those with cards marked “W/A” who stepped back to read their cards aloud. Then, ask the person with the positive situation to read his or her card aloud. Point out that this is a positive form of engagement and discussion.

Important Safety Message: Ask the group when withdrawal is very wise:

- ❖ *If the conversation starts getting heated, it is wise to withdraw. Take a time out until you've calmed down. And certainly, if a discussion has escalated to a point of potential physical aggression, then withdrawal is the only choice.*
- ❖ *When we say avoidance/withdrawal is a danger sign for relationships, we are talking about a kind of perpetual avoidance in dealing with issues or problems in a relationship. It's like you can never get the person to engage and talk about what's really going on.*

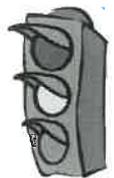
Activity: Relationship Quiz

Ask the group to turn to workbook pg. 39, *Relationship Quiz*. Introduce it with the following points: (PP)

- ❖ *This quick quiz offers you the opportunity to evaluate one of your own relationships.*
- ❖ *Most relationships tend to be in one of three places:*
 - *Green light: It's great!*
 - *Yellow light: It's okay. Could be worse. Has been or could be better.*
 - *Red light: It's not at all what you want it to be and it might even be dangerous.*

Relationship Check Up Quiz

How do we communicate?
How do we handle conflict?



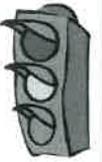
To fill out the quiz, instruct participants to focus on a specific relationship with someone. It can be a current or a past relationship or friendship, a family member, or any significant relationship they have. The directions are self-explanatory. Circle one, two, or three in terms of how prevalent those patterns are or were in that particular relationship.

Allow a couple of minutes and review the key with the group. (PP)

- ❖ *This quiz was designed to pick up the number of the four danger signs in your relationship.*
- ❖ *If you scored in the green light zone, this relationship is going smoothly. You can keep it good by maintaining healthy patterns of communication.*
- ❖ *If you scored in the yellow light zone, this relationship is so-so, it could be better. The skills you will learn can bring it to green.*
- ❖ *If you scored in the red light zone, it is time to stop and assess things. Danger signs exist. Maybe it is a destructive relationship that should end. If it's not a dangerous relationship, it could improve if both people are willing to learn skills to reduce the 4 communication danger signs.*
- ❖ *Warning: Your relationship is likely not to work if your boyfriend or girlfriend is resistant to learning skills to improve how you handle conflict and communicate. There is nothing like poor communication and an inability to deal with conflict to destroy a relationship—of any kind.*

Green, Yellow or Red?

- **Red** = Not good. You need to stop & think. There are danger signs.
- **Yellow** = Caution. Not all you'd like it to be.
- **Green** = Pretty sweet. Healthy relationship! Be sure to learn skills to keep it that way.



Video Clip: Communicating Well

- ❖ (PP) This short animated clip, *Communicating Well* (3.33 minutes), will review the Danger Signs and give teens a preview of the kinds of skills they will learn to counter them.

Ask participants to turn to workbook pg. 38, *Poor Communication—Relationship Wreckers*. Ask teens to notice the skull and crossbones. Conclude with these points:

- ❖ *These four danger signs are common, even normal. We all do them. But when we do them too much and they become the main pattern of interaction, they are likely to slowly poison the relationship.*
- ❖ *To keep a relationship good, you need at least five positives for every one negative during conflict conversations. If you don't maintain more positives than negatives, your relationship is probably going downhill. (PP)*
- ❖ *We will learn some skills to help reduce, stop and get out of negative patterns.*

Too Many Negative Interactions Hurt Relationships

- Need many more positives for every 1 negative!
- Learn to **Reduce, Stop, & Exit** out of these negative patterns!



SECTION 9.2

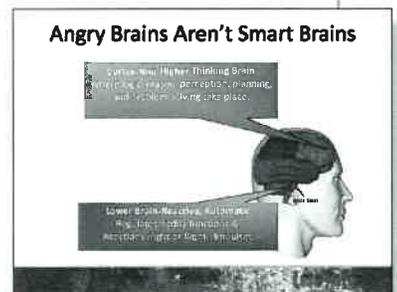
Angry Brains and the Power of Time Outs

- Resource 9d: *Time Out* pocket cards
- Workbook: *Time Outs: Be Smart* (pgs. 40–41)
- Video clip: *Anger & Stress*
- Two Alka-Seltzer tablets, glass of water

10 minutes

This section briefly presents the difference between an angry, reactive brain and a calm, thinking brain in an effort to build motivation for learning and employing the *Time Out Skill* and *Speaker Listener Technique*.

- ❖ **(PP)** *Have you ever tried to talk to someone who is all angry and riled up? It's not easy, is it?*
- ❖ *Have you ever been so angry that you later regretted what you said or did? Did you ever think later on, "Why didn't I say this?" or, "I could have said such and such...?"*
- ❖ *There's a reason why this happens and it has to do with how your brain functions when you're angry or upset. (PP)*
- ❖ *Your brain is very complex with many parts. The higher part of the brain, called the cortex (especially the prefrontal cortex, which we'll nickname FLO), is where logic, planning, problem solving, reasoning, and formal thinking take place. It allows humans to think, reason, and be rational. It truly is our thinking brain.*
- ❖ *The lower part of the brain controls vital bodily functions (blood pressure, breathing, reflexes, etc.) and our reactive impulses—our fight or flight response to threat. The amygdala is the body's alarm system (we'll call it AMY).*
- ❖ *When you are angry, aroused and threatened, you are operating in your lower brain.*
 - *Your lower brain doesn't think, it reacts. It's impulsive. That's why you can't reason with someone who is all riled up. It's why we say and do things we regret. We're truly not thinking.*



- ❖ *In addition, the brain is flooded with stress hormones. Small amounts of stress hormones can give you energy like when you exercise, but too much in your system can reduce your ability to think clearly.*
- ❖ *You can't return to your thinking, smart brain and use that power until you calm down with your blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones at normal levels. This takes at least 30 minutes.*

Demonstration: Hold up a clear glass of water and state that this is your brain in a calm state. You can clearly see through the glass. Then drop two Alka-Seltzer tablets into the glass and explain that this is what happens when a person is in an angry state. The amygdala (AMY) pushes the alarm button (lower brain) and that, along with stress hormones, keeps you from seeing clearly. Then, put the glass down and state that only with time will the water settle and return to clarity. Point out that this is what time outs do for one's brain. It will put the smart higher brain (FLO) back in charge.

Video Clip: Anger and Stress

(PP) This short animated clip, *Anger and Stress* (3.34), will reinforce what teens have just learned about anger, stress, and the brain.

Activity: The Time Out Skill

- ❖ *What do you think of when you hear the term "time out?"*
- ❖ **(PP)** *This is not the time out we think about for children. This is like a time out in sports. Why do you take a time out in sports?*
 - *get a few minutes to rest*
 - *get some coaching*
 - *come up with a plan*

**Time outs take you back up
to your Smart Brain!**



Point out that a time out sounds simple, but it is a skill that takes discipline and practice. It is not just about counting to 10 or taking a few deep breaths. There are

important steps and rules. Pass out the *Time Out* pocket cards (Resource 9d) at this time, then continue:

Rules and Steps for the *Time Out Skill*: (PP)

1. *Never say "You need to chill" or "You need a time out." This will just make someone even more defensive. Always say "we" or "I." Or, find some phrase that works for you and helps you back away, like the ones suggested on your Time Out pocket card. Read them.*
2. *Calm yourself after you've separated from each other. Have a couple of soothing messages to repeat over and over again to yourself to replace the negative thoughts that keep you angry. Let's read examples on the pocket card.*
3. *Ask yourself what's behind your anger. Is this person disrespecting you or putting you down? Rejecting you, leaving you out, or ignoring you? Are you jealous? Do you feel falsely accused? Mistrusted? Do you feel unliked, uncared for, or unloved? Do you feel powerless? Thinking about why you are angry will help you be more effective when you do come back to deal with the problem.*
4. *Remember VIEW: You are Valuable, Important, Equal, and Worthy. It always helps to remember your self-worth. Close your eyes, envision a place of peace and see these letters: V-I-E-W. It can help calm you, if you need it.*
5. *Come back and talk. Wait 30 minutes, but no longer than 24 hours. Your brain takes at least 30 minutes to calm down and return to your thinking, smart brain. You need to come back to talk about the issue within 24 hours so each of you knows you aren't blowing it off. You may need to use the Speaker Listener Technique to help you talk it through. You'll learn this soon.*

Explain why rule number 2, on calming yourself down, is important and how replacing hot, negative thoughts with soothing thoughts is key: (PP)

1. *Anyone can go outside and repeat in their head all the nasty things they'll say when they talk to the person again. But, rehearsing*



negative thoughts or vengeful comments you plan to make when you talk again only keeps you angry and defeats the whole purpose of a time out, which is to get you back to your calm, thinking, smart brain (FLO).

Examples: “She’s a jerk.” “I’m not taking this any more.” “I’ll show her.”

2. *Have a couple of soothing messages to repeat over and over to yourself (like a mantra) to replace negative thoughts that can keep you angry.*

Examples: “We both might be a little wrong here.” “We’ll figure this out.” “Don’t take it personally. This is not about me.”

What’s Behind Anger? A Way to Help Calm Yourself

Focus on numbers 3 and 4 on the *Time Out* pocket card. Sometimes people need strategies to calm down. Here’s one:

- ❖ **(PP)** *Hurt is usually what lies behind anger. Think about it. When a person disrespects, rejects, ignores you, or leaves you out, that hurts. It hurts to feel jealous, or accused, or mistrusted. And it especially hurts when you feel uncared for, or that you have zero power in the situation. If you can identify what’s behind your anger, it will help you talk about the issues when you come back after a time out to deal with it.*
- ❖ *During a time out, remind yourself of step four. You are Valuable, Important, Equal, and Worthy—no matter what the other person says or does that makes you angry. You can remember this by recalling the letters V-I-E-W.*
- ❖ *For a moment I’d like everyone to close their eyes and come up with a vision of something that brings you a sense of well-being and calm. What is the most pleasant picture you can imagine that makes you feel good? (a rainbow, a meadow, a full moon over a lake, a sunset, the ocean, a special room or place). Picture that image as you say V-I-E-W (I am Valuable, Important, Equal, and Worthy) to yourself.⁵*

During a Time Out

Remind yourself that you are:

V = valuable,

I = important,

E = equal, and

W = worthy

Remember the word VIEW



Final Points on Time Outs:

1. *Time outs are not about sweeping things under the rug. They are about taking control and dealing with things when you can best handle them—and that is when you have returned to your calmer and more rational thinking, smart brain.*
2. *Time outs can be **used secretly**, even when the other person has never heard of it. A person can say: "I need to calm down. Let's agree to stop for now and come back and talk later today." Or, "Our emotions are running high. Let's both chill a bit and talk when we're calmer." Or, "I need some time to think."*
3. **Safety note:** *Sometimes a person wants to take a time out when it's escalating, but the other person won't let it go. That person may feel like you are blowing them off. No one likes to feel like they are being blown off, hung up on, or shut out. It might help to reassure the other person that you aren't trying to avoid it, you will come back and talk about it.*

Music Video Opportunity

(PP) Play John Legend's music video, *Ordinary People*. This visually engaging music video shows young couples and families engaged in escalations with those they love. The message is that they don't want this; they are not happy about their negative interactions and especially some of which become physical. After viewing, point out that all of the people in the music video could benefit from the skills in these lessons to help them handle their conflicts with one another.

Music Video Opportunity

Ordinary People, John Legend

- People don't like having hurtful fights with ones they love.
- Many just don't possess the communication skills to handle conflict in a better way.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pjh07c_P4hc

Workbook Activity: Applying Time Outs

(PP) Ask participants to locate the workbook pgs. 40–41, *Time Outs: Be Smart*. Have participants complete individually now or assign to complete them outside of session.

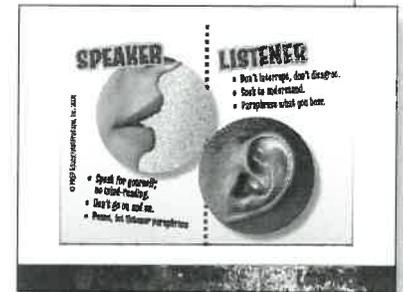
SECTION 9.3

The Speaker Listener Technique—When Talking Is Difficult

- Resource 9b: *Speaker Listener Scenarios* (pgs. 214–216) (or use *My Expectations*, pgs. 6–9 in workbook)
- Resource 9e: *Speaker Listener* cards
- Workbook: *Speaker Listener Log* (pgs. 42–43)
- Video clip: *The Speaker Listener Technique*

25 minutes

The *Speaker Listener Technique* is a powerful tool to use to come back and talk through a problem or issue.⁶ This is a core component of *Love Notes*, so be sure to devote the time to practicing this skill. (PP)



- ❖ *So you have started to get into a heated discussion with your friend or partner about something really important to you. You decide to take a time out and a few hours later agree to come back and talk about it. What will keep it under control this time?*
- ❖ *When you're in an argument, more than anything, you want to be heard, which is the same thing the other person wants! The Speaker Listener Technique is a way for both of you to get what you want.*

The basic idea of the *Speaker Listener Technique*:

- ❖ *The Speaker Listener Technique is simple. One talks while the other listens.*
- ❖ *Sounds easy, but here is the catch. The listener has to listen so well that she or he will be able to **paraphrase** back what she or he heard.*
- ❖ *During an argument, while the other person is talking, what are most people doing? (Pause for responses) Yes, you are thinking about your response. You are either forming a response, disagreeing, and often interrupting. You are definitely **not** listening very well.*
- ❖ ***Paraphrasing** simply means saying in your own words what you heard. Paraphrasing feels artificial and slow, but it is the only way to ensure the listener is effectively listening and not being distracted by thinking of his or her response.*

Pass out the *Speaker Listener* cards (Resource 9e) to each person at this time. Review the rules:

Rules for the Speaker: (PP)

1. *Speak for yourself—Don't mind-read! This is your opportunity to give information about your concerns or why something upsets you.*

- *Don't mind-read, as in saying, "You did this, you said that, you don't care...."*
- *Just speak for yourself. Remember, this is your opportunity to help the other person understand your point of view. For example, one can say, "I'm upset because when you did..., it made me feel... because...." Or, "It means a lot to me because...." Or, "I'd like to explain why I did...."*

2. *Don't go on and on. Make a couple statements and pause so the listener can paraphrase what you said. Too much at once and the Listener can forget what you said to begin with.*

- *After the Listener paraphrases what he or she heard you say, indicate by some body or verbal language (for example, "Yes, that's it. You've got it.") to show they understood correctly what you were trying to say. And then continue with your thoughts.*
- *On the other hand, you might find yourself saying, "Well, yes, you got part of what I was saying, but that's not it exactly. Here, let me try again." Or you might say, "No, that isn't what I mean. Let me try again."*

3. *Hang on to the Speaker Listener card while the listener paraphrases.*

Rules for the Listener: (PP)

1. *Do not disagree, give your side, interrupt, or try to solve the problem.*

2. *Try to understand what your partner is saying.*

Rules for the Speaker

- **Speak for yourself:** This is your opportunity to give information about yourself—your concerns, why you are upset, etc.
- **Don't mind-read the other person:** You mind-read when you start with "You did this... you said this..., you don't care."
- **Don't go on and on:** Get an idea out and pause.
- **Pause to let the Listener paraphrase:** Speak in small chunks—one idea, let them paraphrase what you said, then continue with your thoughts.

Rules for the Listener

- **Don't disagree,** give your side, interrupt, or try to solve the problem.
- **Listen and try to understand** what the Speaker is saying.
- **Paraphrase back** what you heard.
- **Ask questions** to clarify if needed. You can say, "I don't understand. Try to explain that again."

3. *Paraphrase back what you hear. "So what I hear you saying...."*
4. *Ask questions to clarify if needed. You can say, "I don't understand. Try again to explain to me."*
 - *When it is said that you can't disagree while listening, it doesn't mean you can't disagree.*
 - *When it is your turn to speak, you can disagree. Then, you can give your perspective.*

Rules for Both (PP)

1. *Stay on one topic at a time.*
2. *Both people should be sure to share the Speaker Listener card, passing it back and forth a number of times as needed. The key is for both partners to feel heard and understood.*
3. *The Speaker holds the card while the Listener paraphrases.*

Rules for Both

- **Stay on one topic at a time:** Don't throw in everything but the kitchen sink!
- **Share the Speaker Listener Square,** passing it back and forth a number of times as needed.
- **The goal** is for both people to feel heard and understood.

Brief demonstration by facilitator:

Ask for a volunteer to tell something that happened to them that either upset them or made them feel good recently. As the facilitator, you will need to give a "cut" signal so they don't go on and on. Paraphrase what they say. Then, ask them to continue. Cut and paraphrase. Be sure they get the idea of small chunks and not going on and on.

Optional video clip on the *Speaker Listener Technique*

(PP) The first 5 minutes uses cartoon characters to review the rules. The second 5 minutes show a couple before and after being taught the *Speaker Listener Technique*.

Note: Regardless of whether you show one segment, both, or none to the youth, it's an important clip for the facilitator to view to prepare to teach this skill. The real-life couple does a good demonstration of it.

Speaker Listener Technique

Activity: Speaker Listener Practice

Organize into pairs. Pass out a *Speaker Listener* square (Resource 9e). Use either the *Speaker Listener Scenarios* (Resource 9b, pgs. 214–216) or one or two of the expectation questions in the workbook on pgs. 6–9.

If using the scenarios cards, emphasize that they are to read the scenario and come up with their own script, but are to use the *Speaker Listener Technique* to talk through it.

If they are using an expectation from the workbook, the Speaker is to express his or her personal view and explain why. The Listener paraphrases. If they have time, switch roles and have the new Speaker pick an expectation to talk about.

Point out to youth that the goal is to practice paraphrasing. Remind them of the rules. Get an idea out, have the Listener paraphrase, and then continue, Listener paraphrases, then continue. The point is to break it up in smaller pieces so the Listener can remember and paraphrase accurately. If the Speaker goes on and on, it will be hard for the Listener to remember everything. Let the Listener paraphrase and the Speaker indicate if they understood correctly. Then, the Speaker continues their thoughts. After a short while, they switch roles. The Listener is now the Speaker. Facilitator should circulate around to be sure they are paraphrasing. Time permitting, ask for volunteers to role-play their scenario in front of the group.

Processing the practice:

When finished, ask them how it felt. Offer the following:

1. *Yes, it feels slow and unnatural. Yelling, interrupting, talking over each other may be natural, but it's not helpful. Paraphrasing is the only way we know of to ensure a person really listens.*
2. *Most people in the heat of a disagreement cannot suddenly put into practice the active listening skills of the Speaker Listener Technique. Take a time out and then come back and use the Speaker Listener Technique.*

3. What if the other person has never heard of the Speaker Listener Technique or is resistant to trying it? Well, you can **use it secretly** by employing the basic principles.
- Say to someone, “Let’s stop and try again. How about I just listen and see if I understand what you’re saying?” Or, “I want to understand your point of view—but it’s hard with us both talking over each other.
 - Then give the speaker a “cut” sign or ask if he or she can pause for a second to see if you understand what they said. Say, “So, what I hear you saying is.... Is that it?”
 - After listening for a while, ask him or her to switch and listen to you. If necessary, ask him or her to tell you what he or she heard you saying.

Workbook: Speaker Listener Log

(PP) Announce that you are requiring practice with the *Speaker Listener Technique* outside of session. State that if they don’t practice, they are unlikely to master it. Each practice should be short—five minutes or less. (Ask a friend, trusted adult, sibling, partner, etc.) They are to record each practice on pgs. 42–43 of the workbook, *Speaker Listener Log*. Review the example in the workbook. Suggest they use more of the *My Expectations* from their workbooks (pgs. 6–9) for their practices. The goal is to master the ability to really listen and paraphrase.

Speaker Listener Log
Workbook pgs. 42-43

Trusted Adult Connection

Trusted Adult Connection

Show your parent or trusted adult the Time Out card and the Speaker Listener square. Explain both. Ask if he or she will practice the Speaker Listener Technique with you (it’s your homework) on one of the expectation questions that you have chosen and feel comfortable talking about. Use the Technique and take turns listening to each other’s point of view. Remember, agreement is not necessary.

Notes

- ¹ For almost 30 years, researchers have collected all sorts of empirical information about couples over time, as well as analyzed couples' videotaped interactions. Overall, a wealth of data has given researchers a good understanding of the patterns that harm and the patterns that protect relationships. Leading researchers, including Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and their colleagues at the University of Denver, John Gottman at the University of Washington, and many others, have conducted studies of this sort. See also, Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said, "I do": Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years based on premarital data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 613-626. For a concise summary of the findings and practical applications see the following: *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by J. Gottman (1994) Fireside / Simon & Schuster, and *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, J. Gottman & N. Silver (1999) Crown Publishers. Also see *Fighting for Your Marriage* by H. Markman, S. Stanley, & S. Blumberg (2001) Jossey-Bass.
- ² For complete information and research on PREP go to prepinc.com.
- ³ See footnote one.
- ⁴ In his book *Why Marriages Succeed and Fail* (1994), John Gottman discusses a 5-to-1 ratio.
- ⁵ Dr. Steven Stosny, who has developed a technique called HEALS to regulate anger and other strong emotions, says it is important to have a personal visual image to bring to mind. This image should be one that radiates goodness and peace of mind to you. It should be an image that you can close your eyes and visualize to help remind you that, no matter what, you have "core value."
- ⁶ The Speaker Listener Technique is the centerpiece skill of the *Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program* (PREP).
- ⁷ Grych, J. H. , and Fincham, F. D. (2001). *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Applications*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. Cummings, E. M. & Davies, P. (1994). *Children and Marital Conflict*. New York: Guilford.; Emery, R. (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. *Psychological, Bulletin*, 92, 310-330.; Kitzman, K.M. (2000). Effects of marital conflict of subsequent triadic family interactions and parenting. *Developmental Psychology*, 36, 3-13. Amato, P. R. (2005) "The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation" in *Future of Children* Vol. 15, Number 2, Fall 2005. p. 75-96. See page 80 in particular. For more in-depth, see Amato, P. R. "Children of Divorce in the 1990's: An Update of the Amato and Keith (1991) Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Family Psychology* 15 (2001): 355-70.
- ⁸ It can have a calming effect. For more on HEALS, an anger and emotional regulation technique developed by Steven Stosny, see: compassionpower.com
- ⁸ Karr-Morse, R. and Wiley, M.S. (2013) *Ghosts From the Nursery*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press. See also Daniel Goleman's books, *Emotional Intelligence* and *Social Intelligence*.
- ⁹ Ibid.

Communication Activity Cards Instructor's Key

Put-downs/Invalidation

- ❖ He's had a hard time getting a job. He finally got one and is proud of himself. The interview went well, there are benefits, and it's not a temp job. He tells his fiancé and she says, *"You're kidding! Why would you want to work there? You have to wear a uniform and they pay nothing. I need better."*
- ❖ You've offered your opinion, about which you've given a lot of thought, to your friend. She responds to you: *"You don't know what you're talking about. You are so stupid."*
- ❖ Your grades haven't been the best, but you've decided to try to turn things around. You're pretty proud of the fact that you raised two of your D's to C's, and even got one A this term. When the grades come in the mail, all your mother can say is: *"You'll never get to college with these grades."*
- ❖ My boss will criticize me for the smallest mistake, but never gives me one positive comment about how fast I've learned this job or how much work I accomplish in a shift.
- ❖ You've really let your guard down and been open and honest with your partner. He always listens attentively and lets you know he cares. He also confides in you and is honest. **(Positive example of Validation)**

Escalation

- ❖ You want to talk to your friend about something he or she has done that really bothers you. You are careful and gentle in how you bring it up, but immediately your partner gets defensive and counter-attacks you, listing a whole bunch of complaints about you. You end up both yelling and attacking each other. You both say some pretty nasty things to each other.

- ❖ Things have been going okay with the two of you. Then you have an argument that starts over something small. The exchange gets heated pretty quickly, yelling back and forth. Your partner says, *“Forget it. It’s over; I’m not coming back,”* and storms out the door.
- ❖ You told your boyfriend something you’ve never told anyone else—not even your best friend. Then you overhear him and his friends joking about it. When you see him later you yell, *“What if I told your guys about the time you were acting like a punk, crying over that movie?”*
- ❖ My supervisor blamed me in front of everyone without even asking what happened. I blew up and cussed her out. She fired me.

Negative Interpretations

- ❖ My best friend cheated on her man and my boyfriend knows about it. Me, I’ve never stepped out on him. I’ve never given him a reason to doubt my faithfulness, but now he acts like I’m the cheater. He questions me and calls me a liar. Yeah, she’s my friend, but that doesn’t mean I do everything she does. Doesn’t matter what I say or do.
- ❖ My dad will just believe what he wants to about me. I try in so many ways to be responsible. I just can’t please him. It seems he always points out the little screw-ups and never notices the good things I do.
- ❖ I’m a hard worker. I’m not the crazy kid I used to be. It’s frustrating being on parole. It’s so hard to get an employer to give me a chance to prove myself.
- ❖ I got suspended for going to the prom under the influence. Yeah, I know it was stupid—but it’s not my pattern. I’ve seen alcohol mess up my mother, and it keeps me straight. I got slammed with an athletic suspension and a court date. I won’t be able to go to State... and that will wreck my chances at a college scholarship.

Withdrawal/Avoidance

- ❖ I really want to talk to my partner about where she stands with our relationship. I don't know how serious she is. Every time I try to bring it up, she either totally avoids by changing the subject or says, *"I don't want to talk about it. Don't bug me."* And then we never talk about it.
- ❖ I know she's upset, but when I try to get her to talk, she just sits stone-faced and stares ahead and won't talk. It's like I get the silent treatment all the time and I'm supposed to read her mind.
- ❖ I really want to talk to my fiancé about our finances and plans for the future. Every time I bring it up, he says, *"We'll talk about it later. I'm too busy now."* He just blows me off.
- ❖ Something I did must be bugging my co-worker. I keep asking what's wrong so we can talk it out, but he just says, *"Nothing."* We work housekeeping on the same floor of the hospital, and when he sees me coming, he will drop what he is doing and find somewhere else to work.
- ❖ I told my girlfriend I wanted to talk about some problems in our relationship with me seeing my kid and dealing with my ex. We actually set a time to sit down and talk. I felt she really listened to me and then she asked me to listen to her worries. Afterward we were able to come up with some solutions that we both can live with when it comes to seeing my ex. **(Positive example of Engagement and Discussion)**

Speaker Listener Scenario (Sister/Brother)

Scenario: Mario and Maria are twin brother and sister. While they usually agree on most things, they recently have been fighting over their parents' car. Mario has a part time job after school and thinks he should have the right to use the car. Maria is training to be a ballet dancer and has classes three days a week after school and thinks she should have the right to the car.

Directions: Decide who will be Mario and who will be Maria.

Mario is the Speaker first and Maria is the Listener. Once Mario feels Maria is hearing what he is saying, Maria can be the Speaker and Mario the Listener.

----- Cut Line -----

Speaker Listener Scenario (Boss/Worker)

Scenario: Mr. Ness is Annie's boss at the Veggie Hut. Annie has worked for Mr. Ness for 8 months and been a very dependable employee, taking extra shifts last minute, opening the store when Mr. Ness could not, etc. Annie has recently taken another job at the Moondollar Coffee Shop and has asked to reduce her hours at the Veggie Hut. Mr. Ness is not happy with Annie because she was recently promoted to Assistant Chief Carrot Cutter and received a pay increase.

Directions: Decide who will be Mr. Ness and who will be Annie. Mr. Ness is the Speaker first and Annie is the Listener. Once Mr. Ness feels Annie is hearing what he is saying, Annie can be the Speaker and Mr. Ness the Listener.

Speaker Listener Scenario (Friend/Friend)

Scenario: Eli and Becky were working on a science project together. Eli was supposed to research the idea and Becky was going to write the paper and together they would do the presentation. Eli did the research and Becky wrote the paper but on the day of the presentation Eli did not come to class. Becky has just seen him in the school lobby.

Directions: Decide who will be Becky and who will be Eli. Becky is the Speaker first and Eli is the Listener. Once Becky feels Eli is hearing what she is saying, Eli can be the Speaker and Becky the Listener.

----- Cut Line -----

Speaker Listener Scenario (Boyfriend/Girlfriend)

Scenario: Denny and Amari have just started dating exclusively. Denny overheard Amari talking on the phone to her ex-boyfriend Peyton. Denny is afraid Amari still has feelings for Peyton. They just got into an argument and are coming back from taking a time out.

Directions: Decide who will be Denny and who will be Amari. Denny is the Speaker first and Amari is the Listener. Once Denny feels Amari is hearing what he is saying, Amari can be the Speaker and Denny the Listener.

Speaker Listener Scenario (Parent/Child)

Scenario: Mom is upset because Anthony said he would pick up his sister, Kaden, after school but he did not. After calling and texting Anthony, Mom had to use some of her sick time in order to leave work early to pick up Kaden.

Directions: Decide who will be Mom and who will be Anthony. Mom is the Speaker first and Anthony is the Listener. Once Mom feels Anthony is hearing what she is saying, Anthony can be the Speaker and Mom the Listener.

----- Cut Line -----

Speaker Listener Scenario (Teacher/Student)

Scenario: Mrs. Langley told her students they would lose a grade for every day their midterm paper was late. Anita was home sick but failed to notify the school so her she received a D on her otherwise A paper.

Directions: Decide who will be Mrs. Langley and who will be Anita. Mrs. Langley is the Speaker first and Anita is the Listener. Once Mrs. Langley feels Anita is hearing what she is saying, Anita can be the Speaker and Mrs. Langley the Listener.

