

youthESource Retreat

Communicating Care

by Sue Von Fange

Objectives

That the young people may:

1. Become aware of strengths and weaknesses in their own communication skills.
2. Understand and incorporate helpful verbal and nonverbal communication skills.
3. Examine how Jesus communicates His love and concern for people verbally and nonverbally in His public ministry.
4. Evaluate their own ministry to others as they turn from failure to communicate God's love in Christ to others.
5. By the power of His forgiveness, practice new communication skills in ministry to God's people.

Possible Schedule

Friday

8:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Ice Breakers
9:00 - 9:30 p.m.	Communication Survey/Discussion/Overview
9:30 - 10:45 p.m.	Devotion

Saturday

8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 - 9:30 a.m.	Communication Game
9:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Verbal Communication: Asking Questions
12:00 noon	Lunch
1:00 - 1:45 p.m.	Nonverbal Communication
5:30 p.m.	Supper
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Closing Worship

Materials Needed

- Scramble puzzle sheet (one per team of 8) and small prize for winning team
- Communication survey (one per person)
- Discussion questions following survey (half sheet per person)
- Friday night devotion and half sheet of paper per person
- Blindfolds and direction slips for communication game
- Newsprint and markers
- Bibles
- Biblical reflection questions (half sheet per person)

Ice Breakers

Whoever has/is

All but one person grabs a chair and sits in a circle (you will want some space between the chairs). The person without a chair stand in the center of the circle and calls out, "Whoever has _____ (blue jeans on, for example)." Everyone who has blue jeans on must get up and move to another chair while the person in the center sits in a chair that has been vacated. The person left without a chair repeats the process: "Whoever is in 10th grade." Note: People must move at least two chairs from where they are seated. Also, the statement made must apply to at least two people. This game is usually good for 20-30 minutes.

Scramble Puzzle

Copy a crossword puzzle from a newspaper. Beside the puzzle, print the headings "ACROSS" and "DOWN." Leave quite a bit of blank space beneath each heading. Divide into teams of eight. In 20 minutes, each team is to try to: 1) get every person's first name to fit somewhere, 2) get at least one descriptive adverb or adjective for each person on the team, and 3) get at least one favorite activity listed for each person. At the end of 20 minutes, each team should have its puzzle completed and clues to the puzzle written out. For example, the "ACROSS" clues could read "Jane's hobby," "Name of gift who is very friendly," "Bob's favorite sport," and so on.

Have each team score its own puzzle. Each team that fits all the names of its members into the puzzle gets 300 points. Award 25 points for each adverb, adjective, or favorite activity, and a bonus of 500 points if there is an adverb or adjective for every person on the team. If there is a favorite activity for every team member, this is also worth a bonus of 500 points. Be sure to have a small prize for the winning team! (Adapted with permission from the Group Retreat Book, copyright 1983. Group Books, Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539.)

Retreat Overview

What is communication? A basic description: One person encodes a message and sends it and another person receives the message and decodes it. Interaction with people is a part of daily life, and communication enables us to shape that interaction by giving and receiving all sorts of messages: "I am hungry;" "The test is Friday;" "We won the game..."

Through communication we not only seek to meet our basic needs such as hunger and sleep, but also establish and maintain relationships. What we say affects the way people respond to statements. For example, "I appreciate you," or "That is a neat outfit!" can lighten our attitude and step for a day and make us thankful for that person. "That was a dumb thing to do," or "You are a real jerk," can be a downer for days if we dwell on it, and we will probably avoid that communicator. What we say can affect someone's self-image in positive or negative ways.

In this retreat we will assess our own strengths and weaknesses in communication and practice two basic communication skills: 1) the art of asking questions, and 2) observing and expressing nonverbal communication. The intent is to help youth and adults understand that Jesus is our model for ministry. As His Spirit helps us through the Word, like Jesus, our questions and sensitivity can be used to cheer, to build up, to support, to care and to enable others.

Our attitudes also affect our interacting with others. You may want to explore attitudes reflected in the survey questions that follow. Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 10 contribute to good communication; items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 11 reflect attitudes that set up barriers to communication.

A Starting Point: Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses Communication Survey

Directions

Read each statement and decide the extent to which it describes you. Circle the appropriate column:

"Always," "Often," "Occasionally," or "Never."

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Never
1. I look for ways to encourage people.	3	2	1	0
2. It's easy to criticize people and to put them down.	0	1	2	3
3. I'm comfortable touching someone's arm or shoulder to show my concern or care.	3	2	1	0
4. It's easy to look at someone's eyes when I'm talking to him/her.	3	2	1	0

5. I try to accept what people say and to understand them rather than judge them.	3	2	1	0
6. I have strong feelings of wanting "my way" and am good at convincing people to change their minds.	0	1	2	3
7. I seem to be able to identify with people and to sense how they are feeling.	3	2	1	0
8. I leave conversations feeling angry.	0	1	2	3
9. I feel misunderstood.	0	1	2	3
10. I find that people listen to what I have to say.	3	2	1	0
11. I feel tense and defensive when talking with people.	0	1	2	3

Scoring

Add the numbers circled. If you scored 22-33, you probably have good relationships with people stemming from some positive attitudes and communication skills. If you scored 11-22, you're on your way to good communication. Hopefully this retreat will give you encouragement to keep trying! If you scored 1-10, you need to grow in your communication skills. For everyone, consciously try to turn your 0, 1 or 2 scores into 3's. Be patient! Developing good communication skills takes years of practice!

Discussion

In small groups, develop a group response to the following questions:

1. What is communication? What is it used for?
2. Why is communication important?
3. What are important elements of good communication?
4. What causes communication to break down?
5. In what ways do feelings affect communication?

Reassemble into a large group and note group responses to these five questions on newsprint. (For leader background and group orientation, see "Retreat Overview.")

Friday Night Closing Devotion

Litany

Leader: Father, in Baptism, You have given us peace in our relationship with You.
 Response: Help us work for peace in our relationship with others.
 Leader: You daily and freely forgive our sins.
 Response: Help us forgive.
 Leader: You constantly reach out to us in love.
 Response: Help us reach out in love.
 Leader: We're your people, Lord.
 Response: Help us celebrate your unconditional acceptance by accepting others.
 Leader: You know our needs and serve others.
 ALL: Help us look to Jesus and to see Him ever more clearly so that we can imitate Him and communicate Your love in action. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Offering

Each person should reflect on the following questions: In what ways do you communicate God's love? Who needs you to do that, and how will you show love to them? Now, with a half sheet of paper and markers, use words and/or pictures to describe the action you will take to show love. These half sheets can be gathered and taped collage-style on a poster board for a take-home visual reminder in the youth room.

Closing Song

Communication Game

(Leader note: after breakfast, establish an area as temporarily off-limits to allow time for set-up.)

Rules

1. You will keep your assigned role throughout the game.
2. At all times the entire group must stay together.
3. You will be given a new directive after reaching each destination.

Divide into groups of ten. Put the direction slips (below) for each group in an envelope. Pass out slips to each person in the group. For safety purposes, at least one adult should be with each group as a spotter, but not as a participant.

Four slips say: You cannot see for the rest of the game. You can speak, but you cannot see. From this point on, you cannot see. (Provide blindfolds for the "blind.")

Four slips say: You cannot speak for the rest of the game. You can see, but you cannot speak. From this point on, you may not talk.

Two slips say: You are an observer and your task is to follow the group. Do not assist the group in any way. Your task is to observe. There is one exception: If members of the group get into a situation that is potentially dangerous, intervene so that no one is hurt. Things to watch for:

- How did your group work together?
- How was leadership dealt with?
- How did the group deal with the problem of communication?
- What evidence of trust or mistrust did you observe in the group?

After each person has received his/her role, give Directive One to each group. (Start group two when group one is halfway through the established course. They should wait in an area where they cannot observe group one.)

Directive One: Your group is to proceed to _____. Look for the next directive at that place.

Directive Two: You have been in a car wreck. Two members of your group have broken legs and must be carried. One person has been blinded. Your group is to proceed to _____. Look for the next directive in that place.

Directive Three: You have been mugged. Two more in the group have been blinded. One more has a broken leg. Proceed to _____.

When all groups are finished, assemble for discussion. Ask the observers for their reports and let group members add their insights as well as the thoughts and feelings they experienced.

With minimum instructions, group members discover that they need to help one another, organize themselves to follow the directives, and find ways to communicate with one another. The directives can move the groups up and down stairs, over not too difficult walls and barriers, and/or outside for distances of not more than 500 to 1000 feet.

(Adapted from "A Stimulation Game" by Lee Hovel, Resources for Youth Ministry 73.1, Board for Youth Services, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.)

Transition

Sometimes, in daily life, too, we need to find ways to communicate, especially when we do not know another person well, when they pull away from us or when some sort of barrier to communication has been established. Knowing how to ask questions can often help us bridge the gap and show care for another person.

Verbal Communication: Asking Questions

Group experience

Gather in a circle and ask each person to identify (not talk about) two personal interests that he/she enjoys or gets excited about (they do not have to be experts). The leader should not go first.

Ask the person with the most unusual/uncommon interest if he/she would be willing to have the group ask him/her questions about that interest. If none seem unusual, ask a person you would like to draw into active participation.

Brainstorm questions related to the special interest and record them on newsprint.

Now, explain to the one chosen that although he/she might be willing to answer all the questions listed, he/she should indicate which questions he/she would especially like to answer, and then give him/her time to respond to the top rated question.

The group should now develop a list of further questions that could be asked based on the one response.

Discussion

What differences do you see between the questions the person chooses to answer and those he/she does not? (Generally, people choose questions that allow for telling about personal achievements, experiences or values.)

Make points clear about four types of questions:

1. Closed - These often require only a one-word answer: What is your favorite sport? Do you like sports?
2. Open - What do you like about running? What thoughts and physical reactions do you experience at different stages of a marathon run?
3. Factual - How long have you lived in Minnesota?
4. Feeling - How do you feel about being in your first year of high school compared with your last year of junior high?

The group experience may have demonstrated that people prefer responding to open-ended and feeling type questions. Our questions, though, are often closed and factual type questions. We get lazy because some people will respond with an extended or open answer to a closed question. If we want to improve our communication with people, we need to practice asking the kinds of questions that show we are interested in and concerned about them (i.e. open-ended and feeling).

Biblical Reflection

In small groups develop responses to the following questions:

1. Explore the kinds of questions Jesus asked. What is His purpose in asking the questions? Look up and discuss: Luke 18:35-43; Luke 7:41; Mark 4:37-41; Luke 11:11-13.
2. Contrast Jesus' intent and purpose in asking questions with the intent and purpose of the Pharisees.
3. What can we learn from this study?

Note that Jesus' questions were asked out of concern and in an effort to meet a need or to help people see themselves more clearly. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were trying to trap Jesus, to put Him on the spot and /or to discredit Him. Our questions, too, must be from a heart of love, and be asked in an effort to show care for one another.

Practice Asking Questions

Group members should pair up with someone they do not know well. One person asks the other questions about that person's interests. If the question is closed, a closed answer should be given. The questioner must listen closely, so that he/she can ask further related questions. It is okay to change subjects, but the questioner is not to respond in a conversational way. (The practice is in asking questions, although we usually do not want to interview people.)

Discussion

Talk about which role was easier and why. Ask how many were trying to ask open-ended questions. What made it hard to stay in a questioning role? How did you know whether your questioner was interested in you? What kinds of questions helped you get to know your partner better? What kinds of questions do you and your parents ask each other? How do you feel when you are with friends who never ask questions about your feelings or ideas? What roles do questions play in establishing positive communication and relationships? (They gather basic information, provide a starting point to discover common interests, show another you are interested in them/care for them, provide an opportunity for another to share themselves with you.) Who can benefit from your questions?

Nonverbal Communication

Read Mark 1:40-42 about a leper who came to Jesus to be healed. Note that Jesus didn't say, "Be healed, but do not get too close. I just hate the sight of lepers!" He reached out and touched one who was considered unclean.

Talk about situations in which we might be saying the right things, but showing by our actions that we do not want to get "too close." (Perhaps being a friend to an unpopular person only when no one else is around; being afraid to touch the sick or elderly, other...)

Reports say that we need four hugs per day, and that people become starved for touch. What are ways and times that we can appropriately use touch? (A hug to share in joy, a hand on the shoulder to comfort, holding the hand of an elderly person...) What are other nonverbals that communicate our care, concern or interest? (eye contact, facing a person in conversation, smile...) Ask: What do people do to make you feel welcome and comfortable, at ease?

Demonstrations

1. Two people are in conversation. One begins looking around the room, ignoring the speaker and seeming bored with the conversation. (Illustrates importance of eye contact.)
2. Ask the group to contrast these two demonstrations:
 - Two people in conversation, seated on chairs. The speaker is leaning forward, slightly intent in what he/she is saying. The listener is slumped in his/her chair, obviously comfortable, with legs crossed.
 - Same setting, only the listener is also leaning forward slightly, showing interest and occasionally nodding his/her head in understanding or agreement.

Nonverbal Communication: Observing in Order to Understand

Introduction

Discuss the following questions:

- When family members come home from school or work, how can you tell what kind of day they have had, even before they say anything?
- How can you tell how your teachers are feeling before they say anything?
- What clues do you use to interpret the mood of your friends? Of those students you do not know well?

As we develop relationships and become familiar with people, we can “read” their nonverbal behavior in an accurate way. With such familiarity, we may misinterpret or miss the meaning behind the action.

Demonstration

The leader should express an emotion in a nonverbal way that would be natural and recognizable to those who know him/her. Suggestions for expression are: sad, cheerful, angry, shy, excited, lonely. For demonstration, the group should guess the emotion and suggest a question that could be asked to open communication with the leader.

For Discussion

When you come to youth nights, what nonverbal communication (actions) do you observe? What does each communicate? What might you do to bridge gaps between people? What questions could you ask to open communication?

(Material on verbal communication and nonverbal communication adapted from the Peer Ministry Training Manual by Barbara B. Varenhorst, Ph.D., Palo Alto, California, copyright 1978, renewed 1980. Used with permission.)

Closing Worship: How Can I Love You, Lord? Let Me Count the Ways!

Worship Preparation

We show God our love when we serve people and seek to meet their needs. Brainstorm personal needs that you know about. Follow-up with a way to meet each need. Example: Those who are lonely...need our presence. Those who are discouraged...need our encouragement. This list will serve as the basis for the litany. For the message portion of the worship, divide into teams of four to six people, assign a section of Scripture to each, and ask that they prepare to 1) pantomime the section of Scripture as it is read, and 2) present a skit that presents the same message to a contemporary situation, where as Christians we serve in Jesus' role. For example, in John 8:3-11, a contemporary situation might relate to standing up for, or speaking on behalf of, one being accused or ridiculed. Other texts you might use are John 13:1-16; Matthew 15:32-39; Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 9:3-37; Luke 10:25-37.

Have the song leaders select songs with which the group is familiar that reflect the fact that God loves us and calls us to share that love with people...to communicate care.

Order of Worship

Begin in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Song

Confession

Father, we confess that sometimes we ignore people to make them feel bad...that we fail to accept people as they are...that we are more concerned with building ourselves up than building up others...that we often take family members for granted rather than being agents of Your care. We ask that You forgive us and help us to learn from Your example how to show care for people.

Absolution (Leader)

In the Name of Jesus, your sins are forgiven. May you know the depth of His love for you so that you are enabled to love others.

Song of Praise

Message, as prepared above.

Prayers

Assign each person to read one of the needs (see worship preparation) as the first phrase in a litany. The group responds with, "Lord, enable us to serve _____ (i.e. "the lonely").

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