YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Facilitator Guide
Do You Hear What I Mean?

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT

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Do You Hear What I Mean?

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 *(computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;*
✋ *(hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.*

Essential class content is noted in ***bold****.*

All class handouts are available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class covers the importance of effective communication and discusses how to improve communication skills.

Stage:

Pre-deployment, During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

If you have additional information or updated research to be considered for inclusion in this class, please send your suggestions to yrrp@psu.edu.

Audience:

Individuals experiencing the impacts of a deployment

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Laptop
- PowerPoint

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Do You Hear What I Mean?
  2. Objectives
  3. Communication
  4. Self-Reflection Exercise
  5. You- vs. I-Statements
  6. Complaints vs. Criticisms
  7. Active Listening
  8. LAFF Don't CRY Exercise
  9. Objectives
  10. Do You Hear What I Mean?
- Handouts
  1. Self-Reflection Exercise
  2. LAFF Don't CRY Exercise (original or alternate version)
  3. Interpersonal Communication Skills (printing unnecessary; available on YRRP website)

Exercises:

1. Self-Reflection
2. LAFF Don't CRY

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify the components of effective communication.
2. Identify the difference between you- and I-statements.
3. Identify the difference between complaints and criticisms.
4. Identify how to listen effectively.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Do You Hear What I Mean?

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

Welcome to the class Do You Hear What I Mean? Communication is part of our everyday lives. We talk to people and listen to what they have to say countless times a day through face-to-face contact, phone, e-mail, text, and social media. The channels of communication available to us continue to expand.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement "one cannot *not* communicate" (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967, p. 49)? Why or why not?

PAUSE for responses (Possible answers: agree – whatever you do or don't do you are communicating something; disagree – doing nothing (e.g., sleeping, being alone) does not communicate anything; unsure – it may depend on the interpretation of the receiver)

It is important to be aware that people will attribute meaning to almost anything we say or do. **Whether intentional or not, our actions have meanings to those around us** (Watzlawick et al., 1967). For example, you may stay silent during a meeting because you do not have additional information to contribute, but your silence can be interpreted by someone else as boredom, or you are uncomfortable with what is being discussed.

For communication to be effective, the sender must communicate a clear message, and the person receiving the communication must understand the message in the way the sender intended. This sounds simple, but it is not always easy to do.

Effective communication is key to the success of our relationships, careers, and other aspects of our lives. Think about how many times in a day you communicate! When we communicate poorly, we may struggle in these areas. Therefore, it is important to understand and practice the components of effective communication.

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

Let's go over our objectives. At the end of this class, you should be able to do the following:

1. **Identify the components of effective communication**.
2. **Identify the difference between you- and I-statements**.
3. **Identify the difference between complaints and criticisms**.
4. **Identify how to listen effectively**.

SHOW Slide 3: Communication

Let's start by taking a look at some definitions of communication. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of communication is "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior" (Communication, n.d.).

Another, more in-depth definition specifically involves interpersonal communication. One researcher defines interpersonal communication as "**a complex, situated social process in which people who have established a communicative relationship exchange messages in an effort to generate shared meanings and accomplish social goals**" (Burleson, 2010, p. 151). For example, we talk to people to do things, such as explain an idea, offer advice, get them to help us, cheer someone up, resolve a disagreement, make a good first impression, or let them know that we are thinking about them.

Regardless of the exact definition referenced, you should understand that **communication includes sending and receiving messages**. Now that we've looked at a couple of definitions, let's look at some other aspects of communication.

There are **two levels to consider in terms of messages: content-level and relationship-level messages**. **Content-level messages are those that pertain to information conveyed in the message** (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Relationship-level messages, on the other hand, **are those that convey how the message is to be taken depending on the relationship between the people sending and receiving the message** (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

For example, the same information can be intended (e.g., "This is important") but may be interpreted very differently depending on the relationship between people (e.g., boss, co-worker) and non-verbal signals (e.g., tone of voice, gestures). If a colleague says, "This is important" but rolls her eyes and has a sarcastic tone of voice, the message "This is important" means something very different than if your boss says, "This is important" with a firm tone of voice.

Some couples may argue about using the laundry basket as opposed to leaving dirty clothes on the floor. The *content* is whether or not the clothes are placed in the laundry basket, but the *relationship* message may be something like "You are being inconsiderate by not thinking about how your behavior affects me." In other words, the argument is about more than whether the laundry basket is utilized.

Why do you think it is important to attend to both the content and the relationship in communication?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: you need the content to get the message but understanding the relationship ensures the content is communicated clearly and effectively; it helps to connect the sender and receiver of the message; you don't want the receiver to misinterpret the message you are actually intending to send)

Now, let's take a few minutes to assess our individual communication skills.

Communication Self-Reflection

SHOW Slide 4: Self-Reflection Exercise

EXERCISE 1: Self-Reflection

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to self-reflect on the effectiveness of their interpersonal communication skills. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

Please locate **Handout 1: Self-Reflection Exercise**.

These statements were taken from a larger questionnaire (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988) and are designed to help you think about how comfortable you are communicating in different situations.

Please read each statement, and think about how skilled you are and how comfortable you feel in handling each of the given situations. This is an individual exercise.

The following statements are provided on the handout.

1. *Saying "no" when a date/acquaintance asks you to do something you don't want to do.*
2. *Telling a companion (e.g., friend, romantic partner) that he or she has done something to hurt your feelings.*
3. *Being able to patiently and sensitively listen to a companion (e.g., friend, romantic partner) let off steam about outside problems he or she is having.*
4. *Being able to work through a specific problem with a companion (e.g., friend, romantic partner) without resorting to global accusations (e.g., "You always do that").*
5. *When angry with a companion (e.g., friend, romantic partner), being able to accept that he or she has a valid point of view even if you don't agree with that view.*

STOP the exercise after 5 minutes and ask the following questions.

Which scenarios do you feel you would be most comfortable handling?

PAUSE for responses.

Are there any situations in which you were very uncomfortable at some point in your life, but, now, you feel more comfortable?

PAUSE for responses.

Are any of these scenarios areas in which you would like to improve?

PAUSE for responses.

Communication Skills

SHOW Slide 5: You- vs. I-Statements

In order for communication to be effective, we must choose our words and nonverbal cues carefully. In creating an environment conducive to effective communication**, it is important to avoid language or mannerisms that can be perceived as harsh or attacking**. This is true for many types of relationships, so we'll look at many different types of examples as we move through the rest of this class.

By using I-statements instead of you-statements, choosing words wisely, and paying attention to nonverbal cues, we can avoid putting those with whom we are communicating on the defense (Kubany, Bauer, Muraoka, Richard, & Read, 1995; Kubany, Richard, Bauer, & Muraoka, 1992; Rogers, Howieson, & Neame, 2018).

I-statements are messages presented as "declarative sentences that describe a thought, feeling, or other experience in a singular first-person manner" (Burr, 1990, p. 266). **I-statements focus on the speaker's feelings about a specified behavior without attacking or blaming others**. These statements "locate the feelings or concerns inside the person who is making the statement" (Burr, 1990, p. 266).

Here are **some examples of I-statements**.

- **"I feel frustrated."**
- **"I'm disappointed when my plans don't go according to schedule."**
- **"I feel sad when others let me down."**
- **"I'm anxious when I can't get in touch with you."**

In all of these examples, the point of view of the speaker is shared without placing blame on others.

How do you feel when someone says to you, "You are not listening to what I'm saying"?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: attacked; defensive; upset)

I-statements can be especially helpful when there is a need to discuss a problem (Burr, 1990; Rogers et al., 2018). **You-statements can suggest blame and may encourage the recipient to deny wrongdoing or to blame in return** (Biesen, Schooler, & Smith, 2016; Gottman, 1994). For example, "You broke your promise" may elicit a likely answer of "No, I didn't." This sets you up for a lengthy argument. "You broke your promise" could also elicit a response of, "Well you did, too." This also continues the conflict.

I-statements simply state a problem without blaming someone for it. This makes it easier for the other person to help solve the problem.

Here are a few tips when using I-statements. **Make sure I-statements are specific. Do not use words like ought or should, because they usually refer to the other person and place blame or guilt. One model for an I-statement follows:**

I feel _____ when _____.

Let's practice I-statements. For the following two you-statement examples, try making the same point using an I-statement.

1. **"You're being a pain! Stop asking me to play because I don't have time!"**

   PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: I'm sorry that I don't have time to play with you, please stop asking me so that I can finish working and then maybe we'll have time to play; I'm disappointed I don't have time to play too, please stop asking me; please stop asking me to play with you, I don't have time now but will let you know if I do later)

2. **"You never come to my important events. How could you miss my promotion ceremony?"**

   PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: I'm disappointed that you couldn't make my promotion ceremony since your encouragement and support has helped me to get there; I was sad that you couldn't attend my promotion ceremony because it was a special moment that I wanted to share with you; I felt unappreciated that you didn't attend my promotion ceremony)

I-statements take a little practice but may help improve your communication success. They are a good technique to help us choose our words wisely. Keep in mind that I-statements don't have to follow the "I feel ____ when ____" model. The goal with I-statements is to acknowledge feelings and communicate a point without placing blame.

Incorporating positive aspects and components into the conversation can further reduce defensiveness from the receiver of the message. For example, **you may want to find a way to also express appreciation for the person** (e.g., "I really appreciate that you want to hang out with me, but I'd rather to do something besides go to the bar.") In addition, **you may want to acknowledge the feelings of the receiver, which may help him or her feel heard** (e.g., "I understand you're upset, but I feel annoyed that you continue to whine after I've said, 'No!'") (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978; Winship & Kelley, 1976; Zachary & Fischler, 2017).

SHOW Slide 6: Complaints vs. Criticisms

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be reviewed. This should take approximately 2 minutes.

Another related skill pertaining to communication involves understanding the difference between complaints and criticisms. According to researchers, **"A complaint focuses on a specific behavior, while a criticism attacks the character of the person"** (Honeycutt, 2015, p. 169).

Here is an example of the difference between a complaint and a criticism.

Complaint: "You told me yesterday that you didn't want to go to the movies on Friday night like we planned. I'm disappointed because I thought it would be fun for us to get out of the house and do something together now that you're home from deployment."

Criticism: "Why are you changing our plans for Friday? It's selfish of you, especially since you just got home after being gone the past 6 months. If you didn't want to go, you shouldn't have told me and we shouldn't have made plans. You always do this!"

Did you notice a difference in how these two interactions were handled?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the compliant seemed like a more respectful approach to the situation; the complaint did not place blame on the other person; the criticism states "you always do this" which is not focused on the specific situation and may lead to an overly defensive response)

How might you **change the following criticisms into complaints**?

1. **"You never get to work on time! You are so unreliable!"**

   *PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **I've noticed that you've been late getting into work recently; is everything OK?; I was disappointed when you were late to work because I felt like it made us look unorganized in front of our customers**; next time you are going to be late to work, please let me know so that we can make adjustments if needed)*

2. **"You always come to my house with your friend. You know that I can't stand him!"**

   *PUASE for responses. (Possible answers: **I enjoy you coming over to my house, but I would love for you to come alone and visit with just me; it would really mean a lot to me if you came over alone, so we could really enjoy each other's company**; it's awkward for me when your friend is here because I don't really get along with him)*

3. **"We never have money because you waste it on stupid stuff!"**

   *PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **I was upset when you bought a T.V. without discussing it first with me; I felt like my opinion should have also been considered in the decision-making process since we share finances**; I'm disappointed that you bought new golf clubs because I thought we had decided to try to save money)*

How do you think that using complaints instead of criticisms would benefit your communication with people in your life?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the receiver of the message may not get as defensive; the sender of the message may not come across as attacking the character of the receiver of the message; this technique can help communication during conflict be more productive)

If we refer to **Handout 1: Self-Reflection Exercise**, look at statements 4 and 5. Do you tend to resort to criticisms when in conflict with a companion? How might using complaints help you handle these scenarios more effectively?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: criticism may make the conflict escalate more than complaints might; complaints may show the receiver of the message that you are listening to his or her point of view; complaints can be used to avoid global accusations)

When using I-statements, be sure to focus on complaints rather than criticisms. In addition, it is important, as the sender of the I-statement, that you also actively listen to the person receiving the message and try to understand the message that he or she relays back to you.

SHOW Slide 7: Active Listening

Active listening leads to the perception that the person sending a message is being understood by the receiver of the message. This may improve the communication process. In this section, we are going to talk about active listening and how it can improve your communication skills.

Active listening is a multi-step process. **One method that may improve the process of active listening involves the acronym LAFF don't CRY** (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2007; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010; Thistle & McNaughton, 2015). This method includes the following:

- **L Listen, empathize, and communicate respect**
- **A Ask questions and ask permission to take notes**
- **F Focus on the issues**
- **F Find a first step**

The other part of the LAFF don't CRY method portrays **reactions we DON'T want to use because they are not conducive to active listening**. CRY includes the following:

- **C Criticize people who aren't present**
- **R React hastily and promise something you can't deliver**
- **Y Yakety-yak-yak – talking to avoid silence**

This method was developed to assist teachers in communicating with parents, but it may also be used in many types of communication situations. Keep in mind that depending on the specific scenario, **all parts of the LAFF method may not be**

entirely appropriate (e.g., note taking). You will notice that some of what is presented here overlaps with what we have already learned about I-statements and complaints vs. criticisms.

Let's talk about the "L." What are some examples of ways we can effectively listen, empathize, and communicate respect?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: expressing an understanding of concern; acknowledging a person is upset or angry; giving a person your undivided attention)

Now, let's discuss the "A." It is important to ask suitable questions and to ask permission to take notes, if appropriate. This response is used to clarify any misconceptions you might have and reinforce to the person with whom you are communicating that you are engaged in the conversation. **By asking questions and taking notes, you express interest in the well-being of others. Asking questions also stops you from making hasty conclusions**.

Focusing on the issues is also important in the communication process. This is the first "F." Try focusing on one issue at a time.

How many of you have ever been in an argument with your spouse or loved one and ended up talking about something completely different than what you originally wanted to discuss?

PAUSE for responses.

Remember, whenever you feel the conversation is getting away from you, try to gently steer it back to its original intent.

Finding a first step, the second "F," helps to ensure you are actively listening. It requires that you understand what you learned from your conversation and apply it to finding a solution. Considering the feelings of all parties in the communication is critical to this step. Use what you learned by active listening to implement a proper action to resolve any disagreement or issue that arises.

SHOW Slide 8: LAFF Don't CRY Exercise

EXERCISE 2: LAFF Don't CRY

Facilitator Note:

Handout 2 will be used. Two versions are available. Facilitators may choose either the original version (presented below) or the alternate version of the scenario. If the alternate version is chosen, all applicable text below should be adjusted accordingly. The purpose of this exercise is to give participants an opportunity to practice LAFF Don't CRY. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

Please locate **Handout 2: LAFF Don't CRY Exercise**.

This handout contains two scenarios of a parent-teacher conference with a child's homeroom teacher using the LAFF don't CRY method (McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). The first scenario is of a teacher employing LAFF behaviors. The second scenario is of a teacher demonstrating CRY behaviors. Some of you who are parents may recognize aspects of these scenarios.

With a partner or someone sitting near you, please appoint one person to read each role. When you are finished with both scenarios, discuss them with each another.

The following scenarios are provided on the handout.

A Teacher Employs LAFF During a Conference with a Parent

LAFF Steps	*Parent-Teacher Conference*
L *Listen, empathize, and communicate respect*	*Parent: My son, Ethan, is having trouble in his math class. He's gotten a D or an F on the last three quizzes.* *Teacher: That must be frustrating. I appreciate you coming in to talk with me.*
A *Ask questions and ask permission to take notes*	*Parent: He really struggles with his homework each night.* *Teacher: May I take notes so I can be sure to remember all of your concerns?* *Parent: Sure, that's fine.* *Teacher: What does Ethan say?* *Parent: Ethan says he can't keep up with the teacher in class, so he doesn't understand what he is supposed to do without help.* *Teacher: Let's talk more about the homework; what do you see when Ethan is working at home?* *Parent: Sure, that's fine. He gets some of his homework done in resource room, but, by the time he gets home, he's confused again. He works through the example problems, but he can't figure out where he's making his mistakes.*
F *Focus on the issues*	*Teacher: I want to make sure I have got all this, so I'd like to check my notes with you. You are saying that he has struggled on the last three tests; he can do his homework at school where he has help, but he really struggles at home. Have I got it? Is there anything you would like to add?* *Parent: Yes. Our nights are getting pretty frustrating. We try to help him, but that's not working very well.*
F *Find a first step*	*Teacher: As a first step, I'd like to meet with his math teacher. I want to find out what he is seeing. I will call you by Friday, and we will make a plan for next steps.* *Parent: Thanks for listening. I wasn't sure quite what to do, but I'm glad I came in.*

A Teacher Demonstrates CRY Behaviors During a Conference with a Parent

Don't CRY	*Parent-Teacher Conference*
C *Criticize people who aren't present*	*Parent: My son, Ethan, is having trouble in his math class. He's gotten a D or an F on the last three quizzes.* *Teacher: Ethan has Mr. McDonald, a first-year teacher. He may not be familiar with Ethan's accommodations.*
R *React hastily and promise something you can't deliver*	*Parent: Ethan had a first-year teacher last year! Why should he have to suffer because there is so much turnover?* *Teacher: That's really frustrating. You know, there are other algebra sections, other teachers. Maybe I can switch Ethan to a more experienced teacher.*
Y *Yakety-yak-yak – talking to avoid silence*	*Parent: What is going to happen about the low quiz grades he's already gotten? Why should Ethan get bad grades because things are so disorganized?* *Teacher: I understand how important grades can be. My daughter is applying for colleges and she is under so much pressure…* *Parent: But what are you going to do for Ethan? Perhaps I should talk to the principal about our problem.*

STOP the exercise after 5 minutes and ask the following questions.

How did the teacher's responses in the LAFF version lead to very different outcomes than the CRY version?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: LAFF contributed towards a more solution-focused outcome; the CRY scenario did not end productively as there did not seem to be a takeaway first step; the parent was more appreciative in the first scenario because the teacher listened and focused on the problem at hand without criticizing others)

How can the LAFF method be helpful in ensuring active listening, particularly in stressful situations?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: it can help clarify any misunderstandings; it can help identify an action for helping to solve the problem; it can be used to express interest in the well-being of all involved)

What are some other examples or scenarios from your own lives where you can use the LAFF don't CRY method?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: when working through a conflict with friend, spouse, or other loved one; when trying to engage respectfully with someone who holds different viewpoints than you; to avoid tense situations from escalating further)

Remember to keep practicing active listening skills using the LAFF don't CRY method.

Summary

SHOW Slide 9: Objectives

Effective communication takes effort and practice. It combines a set of skills that includes using I-statements, complaints rather than criticism, and active listening techniques. The more effort and practice you put into developing effective communication skills, the more successful you may be when communicating with others.

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What are some components or techniques for effective communication?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: sending and receiving messages that have both content-level and relationship-level messages; I-statements; discussing complaints rather than criticisms; active listening)

2. **What is the difference between a you-statement and an I-statement?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: you-statements can be perceived as harsh, aggressive, or attacking; I-statements focus on the speaker's feelings about a specific behavior without attacking or blaming others; I-statements can be used for more effective communication)

3. **What is the difference between a complaint and a criticism?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: a complaint focuses on a specific behavior; a criticism attacks the character of the person; using complaints instead of criticisms may improve your relationships)

4. **How can someone listen more effectively?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: active listening; using the LAFF don't CRY technique: listen, empathize, communicate respect, ask questions, focus on the issues, find a first step; don't criticize, react hastily, or yakety-yak-yak)

SHOW Slide 10: Do You Hear What I Mean?

Thank you and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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