

LIVING SKILLS

Personal Growth

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



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AN OVERVIEW OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Having effective interpersonal skills is essential in developing a healthy, positive life. Like any other acquired skill, interpersonal skills become easier with practice.

THIS WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SESSIONS

SESSION 1 defines interpersonal skills, discusses basic communication skills, and explores the difference between positive and negative communication.

SESSION 2 identifies a range of emotions and explores healthy ways to express emotions, especially anger.

SESSION 3 introduces the concept that conflict is normal and describes a positive conflict resolution process.

SESSION 4 defines a healthy relationship and discusses how to build and maintain healthy relationships.



SESSION 1.

Introduction to Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are the skills we use every day of our lives—in our work, in our homes, and in our play. We use them to grow relationships and make first impressions. We use them to manage intense feelings so they help our relationships instead of hurt them. We also use them when we prevent or resolve a conflict and when we connect with others.

In this session we will learn about the interpersonal skill of communication. Communication is at the center of almost everything we do. Knowing how to communicate positively helps us on the job, at school, and with friends and family.

Notice the difference between these two ways of saying the same thing:

“Would you please hand me that book?”

“Hey, give me that book, right now!”

These two examples will bring very different responses. The first is an example of positive communication. It is direct, clear, and respectful. The second is demanding and rude. The first will build a positive relationship. The second will cause conflict.

Why Are Interpersonal Skills So Important?

Human beings are hardwired to be interdependent. Humans are members of a tribe and need others in order to flourish. Like food and water and sunshine, relationships with other people—from family to friends to coworkers—are essential to life. Interpersonal skills enable people to develop and maintain these relationships in healthy ways, ways that will contribute to a satisfying and productive life.

What Are Positive Communication Skills?

Positive communication is honest, clear, direct, and respectful. It also means you really listen when someone else is talking to you. Instead of thinking about the next thing you want to say, you ask questions to check to see if you understood what the other person meant. Positive communication leads to understanding and respect. It helps people work together. Below is a quick list of tips to build positive communication.



Let the other person talk without interrupting.



Focus on listening and not thinking about how to respond.



Make eye contact.



Be objective; don't make assumptions.



Ask questions if you don't understand.



Repeat what the person said for clear understanding.
You might say, "What I hear you saying is . . ."

Negative communication, on the other hand, is indirect, bossy, or disrespectful. It strains relationships, spreads gossip, and causes fights and misunderstandings.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

We often think of communication as words (verbal communication), but it is much more than words. We communicate with our tone of voice and our body language (nonverbal communication), which can give positive or negative messages. It can tell people we are listening or not listening. It can tell people we want to be in a conversation with them or not. Put a **P** in front of the examples that are apt to give a positive message and an **N** in front of the examples that are apt to give a negative message. The correct answers are at the end of this session.

- _____ Make eye contact
- _____ Nod
- _____ Fidget
- _____ Yawn
- _____ Stand or sit at a comfortable distance
- _____ Look everywhere but at the other person
- _____ Face the other person
- _____ Tap your fingers
- _____ Mumble
- _____ Have a relaxed posture (arms open, hands in your lap)
- _____ Smile
- _____ Frown
- _____ Use an even voice
- _____ Yell

Positive communication also depends on using your words and body language to communicate the same message. Look at the following examples and decide if the body language gives the same message as the words. Write **Yes** in front of the example if the body language matches the words and **No** if it doesn't. The correct answers are listed at the end of this session.

_____ Tanisha told her friend she was happy her friend had gotten an invitation to the party and she wanted to hear more about it. Tanisha folded her arms and turned away from her friend as she said it.

_____ John said to his father, "I'm so happy to see you!" He wore a big smile and held his arms out to his father.

_____ Tanisha said she was eager to learn a new technique from her coworker. Tanisha nodded her head and looked directly at her coworker as the coworker explained the new technique.

_____ John told the waiter that he was not happy about the service he received. He smiled as he said it.

_____ Tanisha said to her friend, "I'm concerned about something and I really need to talk to you. Could we sit down for a moment?" She made eye contact with her friend, raised her eyebrows, and tilted her head toward her friend.

_____ John was very angry at his wife for promising that he would help their neighbors put a new roof on their house without checking first with him. He raised his voice, his shoulders were tight, and he frowned as he told her he was angry.

When our body language does not match our verbal message, it can be very confusing for others. It can result in misunderstandings and resentments.

■ Can you think of a time when a message you gave or received was misunderstood?

■ What were the consequences?

■ If you were able to do it all over again, how would you communicate differently, both verbally and nonverbally?

■ What challenges have you had in being a good communicator?

■ Imagine yourself as a good communicator. How would it change your life?

■ Set a goal for yourself to improve your communication skills. Do you want to learn how to keep communication lines open between you and your friends? Your spouse? Your coworkers? Your children? Do you want to learn how to manage your anger so it doesn't get in the way of accomplishing things? Do you want to be more skilled at resolving conflicts? Be more honest in your friendships? Write your goal here for completing this interpersonal skills program.

SUMMARY

- It takes good interpersonal skills to build healthy relationships.
- Positive communication is honest, clear, direct, and respectful.
- Tips for positive communication are let the other person talk, focus on listening and not thinking about how to respond, make eye contact, be objective, ask questions, and repeat back what the person has said.
- There are two types of communication: verbal and nonverbal.

CHALLENGE

Take a situation that is difficult for you and begin to practice using positive communication techniques.

ANSWER KEY

(page 5)

You were asked to put a **P** in front of the examples that are apt to give a positive message and an **N** in front of the examples that are apt to give a negative message. Here are the answers:

 P Make eye contact

 P Nod

 N Fidget

 N Yawn

 P Stand or sit at a comfortable distance

 N Look everywhere but at the other person

 P Face the other person

 N Tap your fingers

 N Mumble

 P Have a relaxed posture (arms open, hands in your lap)

 P Smile

 N Frown

 P Use an even voice

 N Yell

ANSWER KEY

(page 6)

You were asked to look at the following examples and decide if the body language gives the same message as the words. Here are the answers:

No Tanisha told her friend she was happy her friend had gotten an invitation to the party and she wanted to hear more about it. Tanisha folded her arms and turned away from her friend as she said it.

Yes John said to his father, "I'm so happy to see you!" He wore a big smile and held his arms out to his father.

Yes Tanisha said she was eager to learn a new technique from her coworker. Tanisha nodded her head and looked directly at her coworker as the coworker explained the new technique.

No John told the waiter that he was not happy about the service he received. He smiled as he said it.

Yes Tanisha said to her friend, "I'm concerned about something and I really need to talk to you. Could we sit down for a moment?" She made eye contact with her friend, raised her eyebrows, and tilted her head toward her friend.

Yes John was very angry at his wife for promising that he would help their neighbors put a new roof on their house without checking first with him. He raised his voice, his shoulders were tight, and he frowned as he told her he was angry.



SESSION 2.

Managing Emotions

Emotions are what make us human, and everyone has a full range of them. Emotions are not good or bad, but we need to be mindful of how we express them. Expressing emotions in healthy ways is key to building and maintaining strong relationships.

Ignoring Emotions Hurts Your Body

We may ignore or avoid our emotions because they feel so uncomfortable. For instance, when Peter's father died, he felt like the sadness might eat him up inside, so he stayed busy. He went out every night to distract himself. When people offered their sympathy or asked him about it, he said he was fine and changed the subject. After a while, he forgot he was sad, but his body knew it. He became really depressed. He cried easily, sometimes it was hard for him to breathe, and he had trouble getting out of bed in the morning. Avoiding emotions can:

Make the emotion stronger



Increase physical stress and increase the risk of developing certain illnesses, such as high blood pressure and heart disease



Result in poor memory and more misunderstandings in conversations



Create anxiety or depression

Recognizing Emotions

People often bury or ignore feelings that are uncomfortable, such as fear or sadness. One of the emotions people find most difficult to manage is anger. Some people let anger control them and use it to control other people. Some people have learned so thoroughly to ignore their anger that they don't even know when they are feeling it. Being aware of what is going on in our bodies can help us know what we are feeling.

Anger gives us physical signals. Below is an exercise to help you recognize your anger. Put a check mark in front of the emotions or feelings that apply to you when you feel angry.

- Feel tense all over
- Have tense muscles in my face
- Grind my teeth
- Tighten my fists
- Get red or feel hot in the face
- Get goose bumps
- Have chills
- Have a racing heart
- Feel sick to my stomach
- Feel a tightening in my neck
- Sweat a lot
- Have hot or cold flashes

- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

There are several unhealthy ways that people manage anger. They may *stuff* it. They pretend, to themselves and others, that something doesn't bother them, but ultimately the anger builds up into resentment.

They may try to *delay* anger. They may think if they ignore their angry feelings, those feelings will go away. But if the cause of the anger is an ongoing problem, the anger won't go away. Delaying it will have the same effect as ignoring it. The anger will build and may become explosive.

Shifting anger is another unhealthy way to manage this emotion. This is when people take their anger out on somebody with whom they are not really angry. For example, a person might be angry with a boss but show the anger at home toward his or her spouse.

Do you use any of these unhealthy ways of managing anger?

Put a check mark in front of the following questions if the answer is yes.

- Have you ever told someone that you weren't angry, but that person told you that you looked angry?
- Have you ever felt angry and used a mood-altering drug to feel temporarily better?
- Have you ever tried to ignore your angry feelings?
- Do you sometimes believe that it will be "safer" to experience your anger later?
- Have you ever expressed anger at one person even though you were actually angry with someone else?

Expressing Emotions

While emotions are neither good nor bad, it is important to express your feelings in healthy ways. Have you ever expressed anger in these unhealthy ways?

Put a check mark in front of examples that apply to you.

- Blaming and attacking someone (“It’s your fault.”)
- Using sarcasm (“Sure, I’d love to wash your dishes forever.”)
- Exaggerating the issue (“You always mess up our plans.”)
- Yelling, screaming, and using abusive language (“You’re stupid.”)
- Withdrawal and pouting (“No, nothing’s wrong.”)
- Projecting guilt (“If you only tried harder.”)
- “You” statements (“You make me feel so worthless.”)
- Physical violence (hitting, throwing objects, making threats)

Think back to a time when you were angry and used one or more of these ways of expressing anger.

■ What were you trying to accomplish?

■ How did you want the other person to feel?

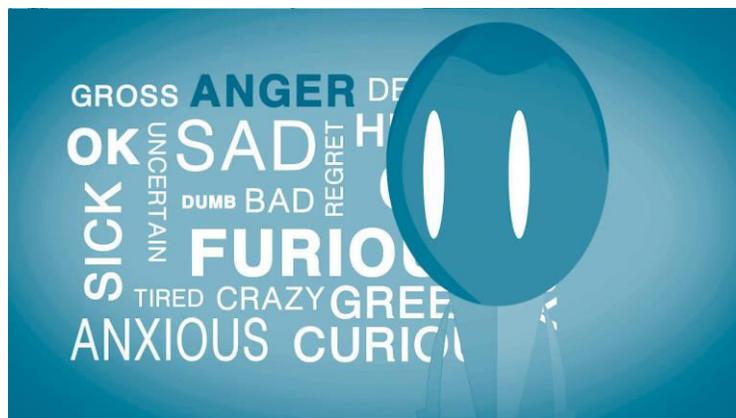
■ What were the results?

Positive Ways to Express Anger

Anger can be expressed in healthy ways. It shouldn't be used to punish or intimidate or control others. However, it is appropriate to be assertive in setting boundaries for yourself and deciding what you will do in response to what you are angry about. Assertiveness, being self-assured and confident without being aggressive, can help people protect themselves, improve communication, and build healthier, stronger relationships.

Here are some tips for healthy ways to express or deal with anger.

- Don't respond while you are feeling angry. Wait until you are calm, but don't put it off indefinitely.
- Exercise self-control. Use deep, slow breaths to calm down.
- Listen and accept that other people may have a point of view different from your own.
- Don't repeat your reasons for being angry over and over again.
- Notice what you are feeling and then let it go.
- Step back and look at the situation. Is this really that big a deal?
- Learn from your anger. Is there something that needs to be changed?
- Find a positive way to say why you are angry without exploding or blaming.



■ Write an example of a time when you have used one or more of these tips to deal with your anger.

■ Imagine yourself using one or more of these tips in the future to express your anger in a positive way. Then write out the scene. What would it look like?

SUMMARY

- Expressing emotions in a healthy way helps build strong relationships.
- Ignoring emotions can make the emotions stronger, increase risk of illness, result in poor memory, and cause anxiety or depression.
- Recognizing negative emotions prevents unhealthy ways of managing them.
- Expressing negative emotions in a healthy way improves communication, makes you feel better, and builds healthier relationships.

CHALLENGE

Identify people you know well who seem to express their emotions in healthy ways. Ask these people what they do to manage their emotions.



SESSION 3. Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a normal part of life. Everyone experiences conflict from time to time. It can feel frightening or frustrating, but it can also be used as an opportunity to build healthier, stronger relationships. The key is learning a healthy process for resolving conflict.

Let's look at the way Fiona and Ron resolved their conflict.

Fiona and Ron had a four-year-old child. Both parents worked full-time. Ron headed off to work by 7 a.m.; Fiona left at the same time to drop Sophie at the child care center and then get herself to work by 8 a.m. Sophie had been sleeping through the night reliably for a couple of years. Then, suddenly, she started waking up about 3 a.m. with nightmares and needed to be comforted in order to go back to sleep. Each time she awoke in the middle of the night, Ron turned over in bed and grunted, "Hear that?" So Fiona dragged herself out of bed to help Sophie. By the fourth night Fiona was exhausted. When Sophie woke again and Ron grunted, Fiona asked Ron to get up. He said "sure," but he continued to lie in bed as Sophie cried harder and harder. Fiona finally got up with her, but when their alarm went off at 6 a.m. Fiona was filled with rage at Ron.

She looked at him lying in bed next to her and thought, "He makes me so mad I want to throttle him!" She took a deep breath and told herself to stay cool. She'd talk to him that night after they put Sophie to bed.

continued ▶





When they got home from work and Sophie was once again tucked into bed, she told Ron she needed to talk to him. She said, "I feel pretty angry right now. I am exhausted. I need a good night's sleep, so I need you to get up with Sophie if she has another nightmare tonight."

Ron said, "I hear you are getting worn out with this stuff. I'm getting so irritated with Sophie I think I may yell at her instead of comfort her."

Fiona answered, "Yes, I am getting too worn out. I need your help. But you're afraid you'll lose control with her?"

"Yes, sort of," said Ron, "but I know I can handle it. I'll focus on what she needs. I'm sorry I left you with all the night work."

"I should have been clearer that I needed more help before I got this tired," said Fiona. "How about if we take turns? You tonight, then me, then you."

"I'm good with that. We also need to get to the bottom of what's going on with Sophie, how we can help her with this nightmare business."

Fiona and Ron hugged each other; then they talked about what may be causing Sophie's nightmares.

Healthy Steps to Conflict Resolution

- 1** Pause for a moment to cool off.

- 2** Tell the other person what’s bothering you using “I messages.”

- 3** Each person restates what he or she heard the other person say.

- 4** Take responsibility for your part in the conflict.

- 5** Brainstorm solutions and come up with one that satisfies both people.

- 6** Affirm, forgive, apologize, or thank the other person.

Practicing the Conflict Resolution Process

■ Think about a major conflict you have had in the past that you wished you had handled differently. What was it?

Now answer the following questions to think about how you could have used the conflict resolution process to handle this conflict.

1. What could you have done to cool off?

■ Answer: _____

2. What is the “I message” you could have given?

■ Answer: _____

3. How could you have restated the other person’s position or feelings?

■ Answer: _____

4. What was your responsibility in the conflict? How could you have expressed it?

■ Answer: _____

5. What are some possible solutions that will satisfy everyone?

■ Answer: _____

6. What might you have done to affirm, forgive, or thank the other person?

■ Answer: _____

It is only with practice that we are able to improve and use these skills when we need them, so let's try this one more time. Think about another major conflict you have had in the past that you wished you had handled differently.

■ What was it?

Answer the following questions to think about how you could have used the conflict resolution process to handle this conflict.

1. What could you have done to cool off?

■ Answer: _____

2. What is the “I message” you could have given?

■ Answer: _____

3. How could you have restated the other person’s position or feelings?

■ Answer: _____

4. What was your responsibility in the conflict? How could you have expressed it?

■ Answer: _____

5. What are some possible solutions that will satisfy everyone?

■ Answer: _____

6. What might you have done to affirm, forgive, or thank the other person?

■ Answer: _____

Facing Our Challenges

Early in Fiona and Ron’s marriage they’d had some really unproductive fights, circling around the same issues over and over. They worked with a marriage counselor to help them with their conflicts. In the past, Fiona probably would have silently raged at Ron in the middle of the night when he had continued to lie in bed ignoring Sophie. Her own father had been gruff and distant, so she didn’t believe she could count on Ron to be a caring father. She would have immediately assigned bad motives to Ron. Instead of considering that Ron might be having trouble coming to terms with his own irritation with Sophie, Fiona would have assumed Ron just didn’t care that much about Sophie. She would have dug in her heels and just let Sophie scream in order to prove a point to Ron. Of course, that would not have gotten them anywhere but into deeper anger, and Sophie would likely become more frightened. But using their new conflict resolution skills, they were able to keep the conflict from hurting their marriage or their daughter.

■ What are some of the challenges that make it hard for you to use the conflict resolution process?

Saying you’re sorry is very important to the healing process when you have contributed to a conflict. Even thanking the other person for helping to work things out contributes to stronger relationships and makes things easier when the next conflict arises.

■ Make a list of people to whom you owe an apology.



Do Your Core Beliefs Contribute to Conflict?

We all have core beliefs—the essential way we see ourselves, others, the world, and the future. Core beliefs tend to be rigid and enduring. We look for ways to confirm them. When they are self-defeating, core beliefs can contribute to conflict in relationships. For instance, Jill held a core belief that men would always hurt her. This led her to interpret the behaviors and words of men in her life in very negative ways, even when they were not intended that way. Fred believed that if people loved each other, they would never fight. As a result, when he felt angry with his girlfriend, he avoided her because he was sure if they had a fight it would mean the end of the relationship. Look at the following core beliefs. Check those that are self-defeating. The correct answers are included at the end of this session.

- I am always in danger of being hurt.
- If my partner is not happy, it is my fault.
- I am a competent person.
- I am really dumb.
- Most people are good at heart.
- Women only really care about men for the money they get from them.
- There is only one right way of doing something.
- A person can only be real friends with someone who thinks the same way about things.
- I am lovable.
- I am not good enough.

Our core beliefs are not always obvious, even to ourselves. One way to recognize your own core beliefs is to peel back the layers of your thoughts. For instance, Marion plays in a band, but she gets sick to her stomach every time the band performs. She is afraid people will think she is a lousy guitarist. What are the beliefs that underlie her fear? She believes she doesn't play the guitar very well. And what is the belief that lies under that? She believes that if she doesn't perform well at something, she isn't worth anything. And what is the belief that lies under that? She believes she is unworthy. Because of this deep belief, she responded with anger when one of her bandmates pointed out that she kept hitting a bad chord in a song.

■ What are your core beliefs that lead to conflict? List them here.

Conflict is normal. In fact, conflict can be healthy. Honest, meaningful relationships can only exist if conflicts are acknowledged. The key is in learning how to resolve those conflicts in healthy, caring ways.

SUMMARY

- People can learn healthy ways to resolve conflict.
- There are six healthy steps to resolve conflict: cooling off, telling people what's wrong, restating what the other person is saying, taking responsibility, brainstorming solutions, and forgiving each other.
- Apologizing is an important part of the healing process of conflict resolution.
- Core beliefs are a part of who we are; however, they may contribute to conflict in relationships.

CHALLENGE

Practice the conflict resolution steps the next time you experience a conflict.

ANSWER KEY

(page 24)

The following core beliefs that are checked are self-defeating.

- I am always in danger of being hurt.
- If my partner is not happy, it is my fault.
- I am a competent person.
- I am really dumb.
- Most people are good at heart.
- Women only really care about men for the money they get from them.
- There is only one right way of doing something.
- A person can only be real friends with someone who thinks the same way about things.
- I am lovable.
- I am not good enough.



SESSION 4.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Human beings are made to be in relationships. We need each other to survive, and we need each other to thrive.

Learning relationship skills is critical to having a healthy and happy life. If you are shy, or you have had troubled relationships in your past, or you've never had models of healthy friendships, you may not really know how to get started building healthy relationships. Here are some tips:



Give people the benefit of the doubt.



Get to know people and their interests and hobbies.



Look for people who have interests similar to your own.



Stay involved with them.



Resolve conflicts.



Keep interests alive.



Communicate.

What Have You Learned in Your Relationships?

Think about two relationships you have developed. Identify the relationships in the tables below. Write each person’s name in the top space, then write the role, such as “friend,” “coworker,” “spouse,” “minister,” and so on. Then make a list of things you learned in each relationship, both positive and negative.

Whom Was This Relationship With?	
Role:	
POSITIVE THINGS I LEARNED	NEGATIVE THINGS I LEARNED

Whom Was This Relationship With?	
Role:	
POSITIVE THINGS I LEARNED	NEGATIVE THINGS I LEARNED

Characteristics of Good Friends

■ Think about what characteristics you consider important in people you want to have a relationship with. Write those here.

■ Keeping these characteristics in mind, name some people you would like to get to know better.

■ Have you thought about what kind of friend you want to be? List those characteristics.

■ There are many ways people can grow and maintain relationships. John was athletic and knew that Tyrone liked bicycling. He suggested they take some Saturday bike rides together. Monique suggested to Paula that they go shopping at the new boutique. Rosa organized a book club for people who liked to read memoirs. What are some of the things you could do to grow and maintain a relationship with the people you listed above?

SUMMARY

- Learning relationship skills is critical to having a healthy life.
- There are seven tips for relationship skills: give people the benefit of the doubt, get to know people, look for people who have interests similar to your own, stay involved with them, resolve conflicts, keep interests alive, and communicate.
- Looking back on relationships and documenting lessons learned helps people learn how to improve their relationships.
- Thinking about the characteristics of friends a person likes helps them choose the relationships they want to grow and maintain.

CHALLENGE

Look for a positive, healthy person whom you want to become friends with and begin to build that relationship.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

**Resources Available through Hazelden Publishing
(800-328-9000, hazelden.org/bookstore)**

Emotions

How to Change Your Thinking about Anger: A Hazelden Quick Guide

(Order No. EB4802)

This e-book helps people apply practical strategies from the latest expert research to change the way they think and react to feelings of anger.

The Anger Workbook

Lorraine Bilodeau, M.S. (Order No. 7619, E-book Order No. EB7619)

This workbook combines scientific research with engaging questions and exercises to take readers to the very source of their anger, their attitudes about it, and their power to use it as a positive force for change and growth.

Little Book of Big Emotions: How Five Feelings Affect Everything You Do (and Don't Do)

Erika M. Hunter (Order No. 1656, E-book Order No. EB1656)

Mad. Sad. Glad. Scared. Ashamed. For many people, these five ordinary and necessary emotions lead to “big” emotional turmoil. As Erika Hunter expertly explains, people can create greater peace and clarity in their lives when they learn to identify and accept their true feelings—and release unwanted emotions.

Of Course You're Angry: A Guide to Dealing with the Emotions of Substance Abuse

Gayle Rosellini and Mark Worden (Order No. 5689, E-book Order No. EB5689)

This best-selling book shows readers how to make anger work in a positive and effective way that can ease, rather than exacerbate, the problems and challenges of early recovery.

Relationships

Fearless Relationships: Simple Rules for Lifelong Contentment

Karen Casey (Order No. 1998; E-book Order No. EB1998)

Tending our relationships is our highest calling as human beings. All of our relationships with loved ones, coworkers, neighbors, and even strangers provide opportunities for us not only to enrich our lives but also to create a more nurturing world. Drawing from her own life experiences and lessons learned the hard way, Casey offers wise counsel about what helps and what hinders relationships.