Paraverbal Communication

Prime Objective: Raise awareness of how the sound of our voice may be perceived by an individual in crisis.

Customization Themes:

- Use examples to show that Rational Detachment, or its absence, is conveyed through paraverbal communication.
- Explore how the significance of paraverbal communication is magnified when the speaker can’t be seen (e.g., over the phone).
- Demonstrate that directions are easier to follow and frustrations can be reduced with calm paraverbals.
- Discuss how paraverbal communication changes via written messages. Consider punctuation, use of all CAPS, font or text size, for example.

Nonnegotiable:

- Use the same exact words in at least two examples to show tone, volume, and cadence. Don't add words like please to change the meaning.

Supporting Concepts: Albert Mehrabian designed a communication model describing that when a person speaks only 7% of the message perceived by the listener is acquired through the actual words spoken. The remainder is acquired by the listener perceiving the message through the tone of voice (38%) and body language (55%).


Sample Links/Transitions/Forward and Back:

- Nonverbal and paraverbal communication provide the foundation for effective verbal interventions. We should keep this in mind as we examine specific verbal intervention strategies in the next unit.

Ideas for Initial Trainings:

- Use a key word to freeze action of participants to control the group.

Ideas for Ongoing Training Process:

- No magic words.
- In a crisis, people focus more on primal communication.
Paraverbal Communication

Activity: Careful Paraverbals Control Confusion

Objective: To show that directions are easiest to follow when delivered with calm, smooth paraverbals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED GROUP SIZE</th>
<th>SUGGESTED TIME</th>
<th>SUGGESTED MATERIALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6–40</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Plastic cups, stress balls, or similar item to pass (1 per person)</td>
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DIRECTIONS

This is an adaptation of Tom Jackson's listening activity from his book, Activities that Teach (Red Rock Publishing, 2001). Assemble all participants standing in a circle, each with a plastic cup (or similar item—balloon, stress ball, etc.) in hand. Write a story using the words “right” and “left” frequently in the story. (You may want to use Tom Jackson's story.) Instruct the participants to pass their item to the person on their right each time they hear the word, “right.” Also instruct them to pass their item to the person on their left each time they hear the word, “left.” Participants should each have only one item at any given time.

You will read the story to the group twice. The first time, read fast, loud, slow, choppy, soft, etc. It is likely that the group will have difficulty following their directions and the plastic cups will be hitting the floor and bunching up. The paraverbals will make the task frustrating and funny.

For the second reading, use calm, smooth paraverbals, and the group will probably be much more successful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

During the first reading, how did you feel about the task? The facilitator? Yourself? The teamwork?

Can you think of examples in which directions may have been made confusing to service users/students/patients by the paraverbals used to deliver them?

NOTES