

## Session 26

# COMMUNICATING (Or: I thought you said she said he said?) — Body language and assertiveness

**WHOSE FUTURE GOAL 20:** You will learn to communicate effectively in small group settings.



Welcome back! Come on in,



have a seat and get comfortable!  
What's that? You are sitting? And in a  
desk so that there is no way you can get  
comfortable? Well, yeah...I knew that. I  
was just trying to make you feel at home!

Anyway, here we go again! Let's see,  
where were we?

Oh yeah...communication. You remember  
that, of course. It means sending and  
receiving messages.



Last session you decided that  
communication was a process. That means



there are lots of steps  
that have to happen before you really  
communicate.

Then you looked at some of those steps.

Like what you say, how you say something,  
how you use body language, and how you  
listen.



Body language?

Well, yeah... body language. We talked  
about that, remember? Like when your  
teacher was really upset about you falling



asleep in class. She was looking at  
you like she was real mad, had her hands  
on her hips, and her face was red.

Body language. The way she looked at  
you, the way she had her arms, and her  
facial expression all sent a message. That's  
part of communicating.

The problem is that if you don't understand  
those messages, there is no real  
communication. Communicating takes  
someone sending a message and someone  
receiving the message.



You are going to spend a little time thinking  
about body language that happens at  
meetings like your IEP meeting. I mean, if

someone in the meeting is sending a message through their body language, it would be useful if you saw that message.

Plus, you are sending all sorts of body language messages yourself. You don't believe it? Well, it's true. You may sometimes send messages you don't want to if you are not aware of what you are doing.

Take a minute and think about the last IEP meeting you attended. If you have never been to a meeting like that, ask these questions to someone who has been to a meeting, like your teacher or a family member.

Think about who was there.



What did the room you were in look like?



How were the tables and chairs set up?



Okay. Keep those images in your mind as you think about what the body language people use in these meetings can mean.

Now, let's start with you. Can you see yourself sitting at the table? Go ahead, give it a try.



**Picture this.**

You are sitting in your chair all slouched down. You spend most of the time staring

at a scratch on the table, using the pencil you brought to color in the scratch. Every now and then you look up at the clock.



Then you go back to staring at the table.



What message are you sending?

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You are sending a couple of messages. One message that you send with your body language is that you are bored.



You keep looking at the clock,



which tells the other team members that you are counting the minutes until the meeting is over.

You are also telling the other team members that you are not interested in what the team is doing. You would rather kill time by marking up the table.

Your body language is telling all the other members that you don't want to be a part of the team that is making decisions. Do this long enough and people will not bother to have you there. Then **other people** will make those important decisions for you.

So, what types of body language would send the message that you are interested in

what happens at the meeting and that you want to be taken seriously as a team member?

① Sit up in your chair.



Yeah, yeah, yeah... I know. The chair is uncomfortable and you can't seem to keep your back straight that long!

You don't have to be "Miss Manners" and sit ramrod straight like some dummy that won't bend at the waist. But on the other

hand you shouldn't **SLOUCH** in your chair,

slide down so far that you can

barely see over the table


or lean on the back legs of the chair


so that you


**fall over**


six times during the meeting!


It seems silly, but by sitting up to the table you send the message that you are ready to be part of the team.

② Look  at whoever is talking at the time. When you look at people

 while they are speaking, they think you are listening to them. When you

look away  from someone, they think you have quit listening. You and I know that you can still listen to someone


even if you are  staring somewhere else. Still, if you want people to get the message that you are interested in what's

going on in the meeting,  look at the person who is talking.

It's usually better to look into the speakers' eyes while they are talking. When a new person begins talking, shift your gaze to them.

When you are talking, look at the people you are speaking to. That means looking at everyone on the team if you are speaking generally, or at one person if you are talking to that person. When speaking to the whole group, look from one person to the next.

③ Every now and then nod your head when you hear something you agree with,

smile  when someone compliments you or makes a joke, or make a facial

expression that says you don't understand if someone says something that you didn't



follow.

This tells people that you are listening and makes you an active part of the communication process.

④ If you have the chance, take notes



about things you want to remember, bring up later, or think would be useful. Don't spend the whole meeting slumped over the paper taking notes. Instead, just jot down a few short things that will help you remember the point that was made. If you want, you might have someone else assist you writing down these



notes.

These are a few ways to use body language to your advantage at your meeting. In the next few sessions you will learn other communication strategies to participate in your meeting. For now, let's look at some other team members and what their body language might tell you about them.



### Picture this.

You invited a friend from your neighborhood to your meeting. After it has been going on for about fifteen minutes, you look over at your friend. She is sitting quietly. She is frowning a lot, and keeps looking over at you, raising her eyebrows. Once she catches your eyes, she

shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head slightly.

What message is she sending?

Your friend is confused




She is probably lost and doesn't really understand what is going on. You might feel the same way the first time you take part in one of these. There are lots of reasons to be confused. We've talked about them before, remember? There are a lot of initials like IEP, VR and on and on.

If you do get lost in the meeting, what kind of body language will help tell people that you are confused?

⑤ Like before, if you get lost or something is said that you don't understand, let the speaker know by your facial expressions that you have a question about what is happening. Raise

your eyebrows  , lift

your finger (like you are raising your hand in

class)  to let them know you want to say something. Again, don't just sit there and hope it gets better. Odds are, you will just get more and more lost!



### Picture this.

Your dad has been sitting quietly next to you the entire meeting. He hasn't said a word, but you've noticed several things about him. First, he is frowning more and more as the meeting goes on. He is thumping the table in front of him with his ring finger and doesn't seem to notice the noise he is making. He is beginning to sweat a little, even though it's not that hot.

What message is he sending?

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Easy, right? Your dad is mad



Something or someone has made him angry. It happens! Usually it happens because the communication process breaks down. People misunderstand each other. That is why it is important to recognize



body language. In the next set of lessons you will learn what the leader of the meeting should do to deal with this when it happens. What body language should you use if you find yourself getting



angry?

© When you hear something that makes you angry, let the speaker know by your facial expressions that you have a question

about what was said. Raise your



eyebrows,

lift your finger to let them know you want to say something. Don't just sit there and get madder and madder



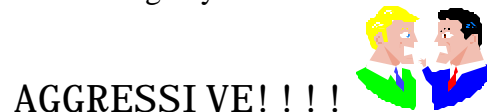
Which makes me think of something else about communication you should think about. Let's talk about how to get what you want without making people angry! You need to know two words:

*Assertive*  
&  
**AGGRESSIVE!!!!**

These words are things that you are (or can be!). What does that mean? Well, you can



be *Assertive* in a meeting or you can be



**AGGRESSIVE!!!**

One is a good idea, but one is not a good idea. You tell me which is which.

To be *Assertive* means to stand up for yourself, to be confident, and to make sure that your opinions are listened to.



To be **AGGRESSIVE!!** means to attack other people, to be hard to deal with and to argue.



When you are angry it is easy to be **AGGRESSIVE!!** You might feel like yelling at them or arguing a lot. If you feel like no one is listening to you, you might think you have to be loud and noisy to get some attention. Or you might think you want something so badly that you won't listen to anyone else and argue with other team members.

Not a good idea? Well, sure, I know you would never do those things, but I bet you know someone who might, right?

When you are **AGGRESSIVE!!** in a meeting, how are **other people** going to react?

Well, think about this situation. That kid down the block (the one who got his head stuck in the fence that you had to go help last session) is at it again. He has another



neighbor's cat backed into a corner and is teasing it by squirting water on it from some squirt gun. Cats hate water. The neighbor kid is being **AGGRESSIVE!!** by attacking the cat and teasing it. You know that cat well...she is normally a very nice cat and lets you pet



her all the time. In fact, you've never seen the cat actually bite anyone. But

there it is, backed into the corner and getting water squirted on it. To make matters worse, the neighbor kid is not too smart because he keeps getting closer and closer to the cat. When the boy gets too close, how do you think the cat is going to



react?



Well, that's not too hard. The cat is going to be **AGGRESSIVE!!** right back! When the neighborhood boy gets close enough, that cat is going to spit and hiss and scratch the heck out of him. I know, he probably deserves it!

But, think about it.

When someone becomes **AGGRESSIVE!!** toward you, what is the first thing you are likely to do?

Right!

Be **AGGRESSIVE!!** right back! If someone comes up to you and says "I can't believe you gave that answer in class, that was really dumb" you are going to get angry and say something right back.

Now, think this through.

If you are in your meeting and you are **AGGRESSIVE!!** in the way you talk to **other people**, are you going to get what you want?



Probably not. All you are going to do is make **ot her peopl e** angry! And they will not invite you to the next meeting!

So, does that mean you sit quietly when someone says something you don't agree with? Or do you keep your opinions all to yourself just because you are afraid to make someone mad?

Well, no...those are not good ideas either. It is probably a good idea to become more *Assertive*.



That means letting people know you have some ideas. It means letting people know that you are an equal part of the team.

The important thing to remember is to do that without becoming



**AGGRESSIVE!!**

How? Well, in the next session you are going to work on some things that will help you advocate for yourself.

Advocate...that means stand up for yourself. And you can remember these rules for being *Assertive*.

- Keep your voice calm. Don't yell, holler or scream. If you have something to say, speak up but don't shout out!
- Wait for your turn to speak. Don't interrupt **ot her peopl e**, it only makes

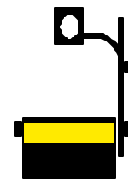
them mad. If you have a hard time getting a

word in, lift your finger  to show that you want to say something.

- Most people in the meeting are not there for fun. They are there because they care about what happens to you and your life! Hard to believe, eh? So, when someone says something that makes you really mad, it might be because they don't understand something. Ask people why they said something or why they think something should happen. Most of the time they will have a good reason, and you can explain why you disagree.

- Don't "fight" dirty. If you and another team member do have a disagreement, don't bring up something that is not related to the meeting. For example, don't tell someone that their hair looks like Ronald McDonald's hair just because you disagree with them. Sometimes the whole team will disagree with you. Then you really have your work cut out to convince them you are right. Or, maybe you need to think about changing your mind, too!

Next session you will learn more about advocating for yourself.



Okay. Let's look at what you've covered this session.


- ☒ You learned that using b\_\_\_\_\_ language



is an important part of communicating

- ☑ You sometimes send m\_\_\_\_\_ using body language that you don't want or don't mean to send.

- ☑ You saw that it is important to l\_\_\_\_ at

people  when you are speaking to them and when they are speaking to you.

- ☑ You learned that being *assertive*



means s\_\_\_\_\_ up for yourself, being confident, and making sure that your ideas and opinions are heard.



- ☑ You learned that being aggressive



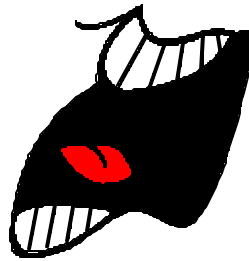
is not a good idea if you want things to go w\_\_\_\_\_ at you IEP meeting.



Before the next session, you should have:

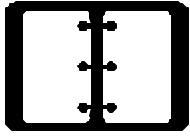
-  Thought about whether you were assertive or aggressive at your last meeting.
-  Talked to an adult about ways to be assertive without offending people.

Okay. So that's it for now.



Later.





## **Session 26 Summary Sheet - Body language and assertiveness**

**WHOSE FUTURE GOAL 20:** You will learn to communicate effectively in small group settings.

- ☒ You learned that using body language is an important part of communicating
- ☒ You sometimes send messages using body language that you don't want or don't mean to send.
- ☒ You saw that it is important to look at people when you are speaking to them and when they are speaking to you.
- ☒ You learned that being assertive means standing up for yourself, being confident, and making sure that your ideas and opinions are heard.
- ☒ You learned that being aggressive is not a good idea if you want things to go well at you IEP meeting.

