Student Workshop:
Learning Relationship Skills
Grades 5-9
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Introduction

One of the most demanding tasks for the pre-adolescent—and one that many fail to master even in adulthood—is learning the basic skills necessary to nurture and sustain healthy relationships. During childhood, most social relationships are closely monitored by parents and teachers. The middle school-aged child, though, often faces social challenges that must be negotiated without input from parents or other adults. The ability to evaluate relationships, to assert one’s interests while respecting the rights of others, to resist peer pressure when necessary, to communicate feelings and needs effectively, and to resolve conflicts peacefully are all skills that contribute toward helping young adolescents meet those social challenges successfully. Furthermore, mastering these skills at an early age will put into place behavior patterns and social attitudes useful in building healthy, rewarding social relationships throughout life.

Student Workshop: LEARNING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS is a skill-building program designed specifically to teach young adolescents the techniques for maintaining positive relationships with their peers, siblings, parents, and authority figures. Students learn how to evaluate their friendships, be assertive without being aggressive, communicate effectively and with respect, and avoid and resolve conflicts peacefully.

Learning important relationship skills at an early age, before destructive or self-defeating habits have become established, can help a youngster avoid serious problems that can have far-reaching consequences, while promoting the development of constructive behavior patterns that will provide positive dividends at each stage of life.
Learning Objectives

Viewing the video and completing the accompanying handouts will help students to:

- assess their relationships.
- understand that respect is essential for healthy relationships.
- learn a three-step technique for being assertive.
- recognize the difference between being assertive and being aggressive.
- learn the “3 C’s” of good communication: being clear, concise, and complete.
- understand the effect of body language and tone of voice on communication.
- learn a four-step strategy for negotiation.
- identify and avoid Communication Roadblocks.
- learn some simple ways to avoid and resolve conflicts.
- learn how to brainstorm to resolve conflict.
Using This Program

This program is designed as a workshop to teach relationship skills to middle school students. The material is presented as middle school-age youngsters enact realistic situations that the target audience can readily identify with. Information is presented by a narrator who interacts with the youngsters and comments on their situations. The video is supplemented by exercises and activities that help reinforce the concepts presented and allow students to practice relationship skills.

The video is divided into four separate segments:
Part 1: Looking At Relationships
Part 2: Assertiveness Skills
Part 3: Communication Skills
Part 4: Conflict Resolution Skills

It is suggested that each part of the program occupy a separate class period.

The program is designed to be stopped after each part, so the accompanying handouts can be distributed to the class. These handouts include information sheets, exercises, activities, and directed role-plays that elaborate and reinforce each concept. The handouts provide opportunities for students to reflect on the material and relate it to their own experiences.

An extensive annotated bibliography and resource section lists background materials that can be rich sources for further reading and additional activities.
Summary

The video introduces 13-year-old Zachary Walsh, who appears to be enjoying the height of social success. We soon realize that he’s been dreaming, however. As he awakens, we meet the Narrator, who invites us to follow Zachary and his classmates through a typical day of school. As we join them on the school bus, the Narrator introduces the subject of relationships and the importance they play in our lives.

Part One: Looking At Relationships
The Narrator and Zachary observe some brief scenes demonstrating positive and negative relationships. After commenting on each scene, they agree that in a healthy relationship people treat each other with respect and can discuss disagreements freely and openly. Checking our relationships—even the good ones—can sometimes point up aspects that need to be improved.

Part Two: Assertiveness Skills
As Marc shoots some baskets, Noah comes by and reminds him that they need to practice for the opening of the football season. But Marc can’t admit to Noah that he doesn’t want to play football.

Meanwhile, in the school cafeteria, Katie tries to coerce Asia into stealing a bag of chips. Asia doesn’t want to, but is unable to assert herself and say no.

At this point, the Narrator steps in to help Marc and Asia. After watching Marc get knocked around at football practice, the Narrator helps him assert his decision to not play football. She coaches Marc through three steps to healthy assertiveness: Step 1: State your position clearly and firmly; if necessary, Step 2: Repeat your position firmly; and if the first two steps don’t work, Step 3: End the conversation. Marc follows the steps and finally gets his point across to Zachary.

The next day, back in the cafeteria, Katie again urges Asia to steal some snacks. Asia, having done so once, wonders if she has no choice but to steal again. The Narrator takes her through the steps of assertiveness, and adds “Step 2A”: Going on the offensive. Asia firmly tells Katie
that she is not going to steal again. When Katie continues to pressure her, Asia counters by asking why Katie is having so much trouble getting her message. Then she gets up and leaves. Although she has successfully asserted her position, she is afraid that she may lose Katie’s and Marlena’s friendship. The Narrator acknowledges that asserting oneself against group pressure can be difficult, but acting against one’s values is worse. And while we can’t control the actions of others, we can control our own.

Next, Zachary gets into an argument with his neighbor, Mr. Alexander. Zachary mows Mr. Alexander’s lawn on Saturdays, but wants to switch to Sundays. When Mr. Alexander tells Zachary that Sunday isn’t good for him, Zachary becomes disrespectful. Annoyed, Mr. Alexander fires him. At this point, the Narrator steps in to tell Zachary that he has confused aggressiveness with assertiveness by behaving as if Mr. Alexander didn’t have a right to his own preference. She explains that being assertive means 1) stating your own beliefs and preferences, but also respecting the thoughts and feelings of others; and 2) taking responsibility for yourself and accepting the consequences. Asserting yourself respectfully is not easy, the Narrator tells Zachary, but by learning how to do it you boost your self-esteem and improve your relationships.

Part Three: Communication Skills
As Marlena and Katie walk home from school, Marlena mentions to Katie that she cannot go with her to the dance, because her mother has made other plans. Marlena says she’ll meet Katie at the dance later. It’s a minor matter to Marlena, but Katie is outraged and runs off, leaving Marlena upset and confused.

Next, Reggie has trouble communicating with Brittany as they work together in the library, preparing for a debate. Reggie is frustrated because he thinks Brittany won’t listen to him. The Narrator enters the scene and suggests that Reggie may need some help communicating—sending and receiving messages. She explains that good communication skills are another means of improving relationships.

Back in the study hall, Marlena and Katie glower at each other from separate tables. The Narrator asks Katie why she’s angry. She explains that she will feel “like a jerk” arriving alone at the dance. Although she didn’t exactly state this to Marlena, she expected her to “know” it. The Narrator points out that Katie was expecting Marlena to “read her mind.”
Katie goes over to Marlena, apologizes for yesterday’s outburst, and explains how she feels about arriving at the dance alone. Together, they try to find a way to solve the problem.

The Narrator then moves on to help Reggie. She briefs him on the “3 C’s” of good communication—be clear, concise, and complete. But when Brittany begins to talk to him, he is still unable to state his position clearly. Once again, she walks away, completely unaware, leaving Reggie bewildered. The Narrator explains to him that he needs to reinforce his words with body language and a tone of voice that convey he expects to be taken seriously. So, speaking with a firm tone of voice and looking Brittany in the eye, Reggie explains what he wants. Brittany agrees immediately, wondering why he hadn’t said so before.

Back at Marlena’s house, the Narrator introduces Marlena to a four-step negotiation process called Straight Talk. Step 1: Find an opportunity when the listener is free and able to pay attention. Step 2: Be positive. Step 3: Focus on the situation, not the person. Step 4: Look for a compromise solution. With the Narrator’s coaching, Marlena tries Straight Talk with her mother, and they are able to arrive at a compromise that allows her to walk in to the dance with Katie.

Back at school, the Narrator discusses Communication Roadblocks—common pitfalls that derail effective communication—with several of the kids. As the camera pans around the cafeteria to various conversations taking place, Communication Roadblocks are identified—first sarcasm, then globalizing, insulting, interrupting, name-calling, blaming, and finally, mind-reading.

Part Four: Conflict Resolution Skills
As this part opens, Noah enters the locker room and overhears his teammates say he’s benched for today’s game. Without asking for an explanation, Noah shouts at the coach that he is quitting the team, and storms out. Down the hall, he bumps into the Narrator. She assures him that such conflicts are normal, but adds that there are ways to both avoid and resolve them.

A series of brief vignettes illustrates six ways to avoid minor conflicts: Leave it To Chance, Split the Difference, Laugh It Off, Skip It, Walk Away, Apologize.

But Noah is already involved in a fairly serious conflict. He needs help. As Noah sadly watches his teammates practice without him, the Narrator reminds him he never even heard the coach’s reason for benching
him. She suggests Noah apologize to the coach for yelling and then listen to what he has to say. The coach accepts his apology, then explains that Noah’s frequent lateness and missed practices show disrespect for his teammates. With the Narrator’s help, Noah acknowledges the coach’s point and asks to be allowed back on the team. The coach agrees to reinstate him if he agrees to the consequence—miss one game for each missed practice.

In the next scene, Asia walks into her bedroom to find her little sister playing with her jewelry. Asia blows up at her sister, whose crying brings their mother into the room. Asia vents her anger at both her sister and her mother. The Narrator appears and observes that throwing a tantrum did nothing to improve the situation that provoked Asia in the first place. She adds that if Asia expresses her feelings and needs in a respectful way, she is more likely to be taken seriously and treated as an adult.

Later on, Asia applies these ideas, apologizing to her mother for her outburst, but also expressing the wish for more privacy. The Narrator suggests they brainstorm. Asia and her mom give it a try, and together arrive at a reasonable solution.

The next day the Narrator catches up with Zachary as he walks to school. Together they review the relationship skills covered in the video: being assertive, checking the facts, avoiding conflicts or working together to resolve them, looking for a compromise, and communicating respectfully. As the video comes to an end, we observe Zachary’s dream of healthy relationships coming true.
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General


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Related Material from Sunburst:
“Student Workshop: Conflict Resolution Skills”
35-minute video for Grades 5-9

“Conflict at School: Dealing with Adults”
20-minute video for Grades 5-9

“Taking Charge of Me: Emotional I.Q.”
24-minute video for Grades 5-9

“Student Workshop: Handling Your Anger”
33-minute video for Grades 5-9

“Student Workshop: All About Respect”
28-minute video for Grades 5-9

“Between You and Me: Learning to Communicate”
20-minute video for Grades 5-9
Zachary:
I finally have it all—respect… envy… popularity… and girls…
Oh man! It was just a dream. But then again, it had to mean something.

• • • •

Narrator:
Welcome to the life of your average thirteen-year-old, Zachary Durant.
He wants it all—respect, popularity… and, you know, although he has his doubts, he’s feeling pretty good—ready to conquer another day of school and life. Let’s see how he’s doing.

Zachary:
Hey, I’m busy in here!

Narrator:
We’ll just wait for Zachary outside. Come on.

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Narrator:
Do you know what I remember most about being thirteen? My relationships. Relationships with my friends, teachers, siblings, neighbors, and my parents.

Zachary:
Wait! Wait!

• • • •

Student Workshop: Learning Relationship Skills

Zachary:
Good job on that test, man. You are the math wizard, my friend. Thanks a lot for helping me study.

Narrator:
Healthy relationships can give us support, encouragement, and confidence. They can also give us a positive outlook.

Marlena:
Hey, Brittany, check out my new shoes. I could not believe it when my Mom said I could get them.
Brittany:
I can’t believe it either. I mean, personally Marlena, I wouldn’t be caught dead wearing those things! What were you thinking?

Narrator:
Unhealthy relationships can be destructive and leave us feeling bad, hurt, or confused. They can even stop us from getting involved in good relationships. Sometimes people stay in bad relationships because they’re afraid to stand up for themselves. Or they just want to stay in with the group—like Marlena putting up with Brittany so that she can be in with the popular crowd and invited to all the cool parties.

All relationships, even the good ones, hit some bumps sometimes. Some of them make us squeal with excitement, others just leave us hurting.

Basically, I’m here to help Zachary and some of his classmates with their relationships. My job is to give them the skills to work on having healthy relationships, and to avoid and deal with the unhealthy ones.

Stick with me. You’ll see what I mean.

Part 1: Looking At Relationships

Zachary:
And you are?

Narrator:
I’m just like that little voice in your head. And I’m here to help you and your friends with your relationships.

Zachary:
Oh, that’s cool.

Narrator:
Good. Then the first thing we need to do is look at different relationships—to tell if they seem healthy or have problems.

Zachary:
Hey, no problem. See, I’m the master when it comes to relationships.

Narrator:
Okay, Master. Then rate them. Give us thumbs up or thumbs down.

Marc:
Man, I’ll never make the team.
Reggie:
Hey man, let me show you how to nail that shot. My dad taught me this great technique. Here, watch.

Narrator:
So? What do you think?

Zachary:
Well, definitely a thumbs up. Instead of putting Marc down, Reggie was helping him out!

Narrator:
Okay, that one’s a keeper. What about this one?

Katie:
I can’t believe you, Jessica. You’re not even trying.

Jessica:
I am trying.

Katie:
We were supposed to memorize these for homework. You keep looking at them.

Ms. Phillips:
Girls, is there a problem here?

Katie:
I can’t do this scene with Jessica. She can never remember her lines—and even when she does, she’s terrible.

Jessica:
Well, you think you’re so much better than everyone else.

Ms. Phillips:
Okay, now, Katie, this is a drama club. We all get a chance to participate. And we’re all here to work on our acting skills.

Katie:
Please. Like you know anything about acting. You’re just a teacher.

Ms. Phillips:
All right, young lady. That’s detention for you.
Zachary:
Whoa, Katie was way out of line. You know, like my mom would say, “That’s so disrespectful.”

Narrator:
You got that straight. Respect is essential for a good relationship. You may not agree with a particular classmate or teacher. You may not even like them, but everybody deserves respect.

Zachary:
Exactly. See, I told you. I’m the master of relationships.

Narrator:
Okay, hot shot, try this one.

Noah:
Asia… Asia… Reggie always gets A’s on these quizzes and he never covers his paper. You copy his answers and then I’ll copy them off you.

Narrator:
What kind of relationship are you in when you’re asked to take risks, like cheating?

Zachary:
Yeah, well, Noah’s not a bad guy. He’s not trying to get Asia in trouble. They’ve been friends forever. I know that doesn’t give him the right to ask her to cheat, but…

Narrator:
Not an easy case, huh, Zach? But here’s a perfect example that shows how even good relationships need fixing every so often. And that’s okay.

Zachary:
So it’s good to look at your own relationships and know that the good ones need work, too?

Narrator:
Right. In a good relationship, you can be yourself, you can talk things out, there’s a supportive give and take.

Zachary:
And there’s respect.

Narrator:
Respect is key. So, if you find yourself in a relationship with someone who disrespects you, or puts you down, or asks you to act in ways that are against your values then…
Zachary:
...time to say so long!

Narrator:
Not necessarily. See, some friends you might not want to ditch. And other relationships, like those with your parents, teachers, or teammates—you can’t just walk away from. But the good news is you can take action to make that relationship better.

Zachary:
Well, I guess that’s all there is to it. See you!

Narrator:
There’s a lot more to relationships than that. Stick with me, there’s plenty to learn. We’ll catch up with Zachary... oh, I mean, the master... later. Come on.

Pause for Handouts

Part 2: Assertiveness Skills

Marc:
Sandberg has the ball, he’s the king of the court, the Michael Jordan of middle school... Okay, so maybe the Michael Jordan thing was a little too much.

Noah:
Come on, we’ve got to go practice football. First game’s in a few weeks. We are going to kick Piedmont’s you know what. I’m going to get my things, all right?

Marc:
Man, I wish I hadn’t joined that team.

Narrator:
We’ve all been in your shoes at least once, Marc. You’re afraid to tell Noah how you feel and what you want. You don’t want to play, do you?

Marc:
I don’t want broken bones, but I don’t want to look like a wimp, either.

Narrator:
One of the hardest relationship skills we have to learn in life is how to be Assertive. That means letting others know how we feel and what we want—and acting in our own best interest.
Katie:  
Hey, guys, see the basket with all the chips in it over there, at the edge of the counter? Well, the lunch lady can’t see it from where she’s sitting, so we could just cruise on over there and help ourselves—free of charge.

Marlena:  
We’ll get caught for sure.

Katie:  
No way. Come on, Asia. We’ll show her. Let’s go…  
Here you go, Marlena.

Asia (to herself):  
Wow. I can’t believe I did that. What was I thinking?

Narrator:  
I didn’t think you were one to steal, Asia.

Asia:  
I’m not! I mean… I know I did, but what was I supposed to do? My friends would have tortured me if I said no.

Narrator:  
Sometimes, it’s tough to take a stand and say no. You could have just made an excuse and left. By doing something you didn’t want to do, something you know is wrong, you were being Unassertive—and hurting yourself.

Marlena:  
I feel so guilty.

Narrator:  
Both Asia and Marc are allowing other people to talk them into doing things they don’t want to do.

Marc:  
I can’t believe this is my life. Is there such a thing as disability insurance for kids?

Narrator:  
Ouch. I hurt just looking at you. You know, Marc, I think it’s time to be assertive with Noah. You know, you have a right to say “No.”

Marc:  
Are you kidding? I’m a joke at football and he still wants me to play. Noah will never take no for an answer. Great, here he comes.
Narrator:
I’ve got three steps to being assertive. I’ll coach you through it.

Marc:
I’m not so sure about this.

Narrator:
What’s your alternative? Broken bones?

Noah:
Hey, Marc, you’re looking tight out there today. You’d better loosen up.

Narrator:
Try Step 1: **State your position firmly and clearly**.

Marc:
Look, Noah… the thing is… I don’t want to play football.

Noah:
I know, I know. You're probably sore and aching, but that's an awesome feeling. It's part of football. Hey, I can relate.

Marc:
You don’t get it. I feel like my arms belong to one person and my legs to another.

Narrator:
Stay focused, Marc. You don’t need to make excuses. Use Step 2: **Look him straight in the eye and repeat your position**.

Marc:
Noah, I don’t want to play football.

Noah:
Come on, Marc, don’t wimp out on me now.

Narrator:
You’re right. He doesn’t take no very easily. Okay, okay. You know, sometimes it takes going all the way to Step 3: **End the conversation**. Say your piece, look him in the eye to show him you mean what you say, then leave.

Marc:
Noah, I’m not playing football and that’s my decision. Sorry, but good luck in the season.

Marc:
Did he give up? Is he gone?
Narrator:
Yup, good job. You know, it’s hard to stand up for yourself and say, this is who I am and this is who I want to be. It’s tough to be assertive when you’re up against peer pressure.

Marc:
My bones thank you.

Narrator:
I’m sure they do. Come on.

Zachary:
What did you do? Marc and Noah don’t have a bad relationship. And now you got him to stop playing.

Narrator:
No, I didn’t. That was Marc’s decision. He has a right to his own decisions, and to act in his own best interest. And I’m not saying Marc and Noah have a bad relationship. But in any relationship, you need to be able to say how you feel and what you want without being pressured.

Zachary:
Yeah, I guess you’re right. I mean, I’d want that for myself. Well, I guess you have taught the master a few things.

Narrator:
That's right.

Katie:
Hey, Asia. Go snag us some munchies.

Asia:
No, I can’t.

Katie:
Come on, just do it.

Asia:
All right.

Asia:
Now my friends want me to steal again. How can I say no? I did it before.
Narrator:
Just because you were wrong once doesn’t mean you can’t stand up and do the right thing now. Try Step 1: **State your position**.

Asia:
I know and Step 2: **Keep repeating it**. But what if Katie won’t lay off?

Narrator:
Then you can try Step 2A: **Take the offensive**.

Asia:
What’s that?

Narrator:
Make her answer to you. Try it. Come on.

Katie:
What happened?

Asia:
I’m not going to take the chips.

Katie:
You did it yesterday.

Narrator:
Step 2, Asia. **Repeat your position**.

Asia:
Well, I’m not going to do it now.

Katie:
Come on, it’s just a bag of chips. Just do it.

Asia:
No.

Katie:
I don’t get why you did it once and you won’t do it again.

Narrator:
Okay, time to take the offensive. Firmly but politely—no attitude—throw it back at her. It usually puts the brakes on.

Asia:
I don’t get why you can’t understand what I’m saying.
Narrator:
Nice going, Asia. How do you feel?

Asia:
Good... I guess. But now I’m afraid that Katie and Marlena are going to be mad at me.

Narrator:
Well, standing apart from the crowd isn’t a fun place to be. But neither is acting in ways that are self-destructive or against your values, like cheating or stealing. And remember, the best assertiveness skill when someone’s trying to get you to do something dangerous is split—walk away. Maybe you can’t change other people, but you do have control over what you do.

Mr. Alexander:
Thanks, Zachary. Good job.

Zachary:
Thanks. Mr. Alexander, I can’t work on Saturday. I have something to do so I’ll have to mow your lawn on Sunday.

Mr. Alexander:
I don’t understand, Zachary. We had an agreement. You mow my lawn every Saturday morning.

Zachary:
Yeah. You see, I know, but this soccer league that I joined... practices are on Saturday. So, I’ll see you on Sunday.

Mr. Alexander
Wait a minute. Sunday isn’t good for me. If you can’t do it on Saturday, I’ll have to find someone else for the job.

Zachary:
What’s the big deal? Why can’t I do it on Sunday?

Mr. Alexander
Because it isn’t convenient. And I don’t like the tone of your voice. You know, Zachary, you’re fired.

Zachary:
What? You’re being totally unfair! I don’t want to work for you anyway!

Narrator:
Well, that relationship seems to have gone down the tubes!
Zachary:
Yeah, yeah. Well it’s his fault. He went crazy on me!

Narrator:
Probably because you were being unfair and rude.

Zachary:
Me?! I’m not going to sit there and let him boss me around! Saturday, Sunday, I mean, what’s the difference?

Narrator:
Well, you could have asked him that nicely. But instead you confused assertiveness with aggressiveness. Instead of stating your position—talking to him in a respectful way to let him know where you’re coming from—you argued and were plain rude. You completely disregarded Mr. Alexander’s right to say no.

Zachary:
What do I do now?

Narrator:
Start looking for a new job. Remember, being assertive means staying true to your values and feelings, but not ignoring how others feel.

Zachary:
It means taking responsibility for your actions and living with the consequences. But you need to watch out. There’s a big difference between being assertive and aggressive. Right?

Narrator:
Right. Being assertive—saying what you think, feel, and want—can really give a big-time boost to your relationships and to your self-esteem. Hey, pay attention! You’re going to need to be a little bit older and work a lot harder on your relationship skills before you’re ready for her!

Pause for Handouts

Part 3: Communication Skills

Marlena:
Oh, I almost forgot. My mom is making me visit my grandma before the dance tomorrow night. So, instead of us picking you up and making you late, why don’t I just meet you there when I’m done?

Katie:
You mean, not go together?
Marlena:
Well, yeah. I mean there’s no sense in us both being late.

Katie:
I can’t believe you! Now you’re telling me this? Thanks for nothing!

Marlena:
What’s her problem? I was trying to be nice and she gets all bent. Thanks for nothing is right!

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Brittany:
I’ll do the outline for the debate. Then you do the research.

Reggie:
Um, maybe I could help with the outline, too.

Brittany:
I’ll have it done on Friday, no problem. See you!

Reggie:
I can’t stand working with Brittany. How did I get stuck with her? She just doesn’t listen. I’ll never be able to survive this!

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Narrator:
Reggie thinks the problem is that Brittany’s not listening, but Reggie’s not communicating clearly either.

Reggie:
Yes I am. I told her I wanted to do part of the outline.

Narrator:
You said, “Maybe I could help with the outline.” She didn’t listen to you, you’re right. But you didn’t state clearly, “I want us both to work on the outline and the research.”

Reggie:
Well, I don’t see why she just can’t get what I mean the first time.

Narrator:
Communication—it’s all about sending and receiving messages. Your message didn’t get through and that’s your responsibility. But, hey, don’t feel so bad. Most of us need help with our communication skills.

Reggie:
What difference will it make?
**Narrator:**
If you improve your communication skills, you’re more likely to achieve your goals and you’ll have better relationships with your classmates, teachers, even your parents!

**Reggie:**
You talking about my parents? Sign me up for a crash course!

**Narrator:**
I’m confused, Katie. Why are you so angry with Marlena?

**Katie:**
She said she’d go to the dance with me and then she just bailed out. Some friend.

**Narrator:**
But she is meeting you there, isn’t she?

**Katie:**
That’s not the same as going with me. I don’t want to walk into the dance by myself! I’m going to look like a jerk.

**Narrator:**
Did you tell Marlena that?

**Katie:**
She knew I didn’t want to walk into the dance alone.

**Narrator:**
Did she? I think you and Marlena hit a Communication Roadblock because you expected her to be a mind reader. Maybe she has no idea how you feel. And there’s only one way to find out. Go communicate.

**Katie:**
Marlena? I’m sorry I got so mad yesterday. The thing is—I didn’t want to walk into the dance alone. I wanted us to go together.

**Marlena:**
I know. Me too. But my mother says I have to go visit my grandmother. I don’t know what to do.

**Katie:**
Maybe you should try asking her again.

**Marlena:**
Okay, I’ll try.
Narrator:
Here comes Brittany!

Reggie:
You made it just in time! What do I do? I have to make her pay attention to me.

Narrator:
Okay, a good communicator uses the “3 C’s”—be clear, concise, and complete. Tell her what you want—and what you don’t want. And remember—Do it with respect.

Brittany:
Did you finish the research?

Reggie:
Yeah, but I think…

Brittany:
Good. There’s another point I want to add.

Narrator:
Be clear, Reggie. Say what you mean.

Reggie:
There’s some things that I wanted to add, too.

Brittany:
I’ll give them to you later!

Reggie:
I told you she wouldn’t listen. She never even heard me!

Narrator:
Because your words, tone, and body language didn’t send the same message. Your words said one thing, but your tone and body language gave Brittany the impression you didn’t really mean it.

Reggie:
But I do mean it! Hey, Brittany, I need to talk to you! Listen, I have my own ideas about the debate outline. I think we should both work on the outline and the research. I think that’s fair.

Brittany:
I didn’t know that’s what you wanted to do. Why didn’t you just say so?

Reggie:
I don’t know, but I’m saying so now. Can you meet me in the library at 3:00?
Brittany:
Sure. Oh, I’ve got to meet Mr. Stern at 3:00. Can I meet you at 3:15?

Reggie:
Sure. See you later.

Marlena:
How can I get my mom to let me go to the dance with Katie?

Narrator:
Well, there’s a four-step process called Straight Talk that can help you negotiate with your parents and solve problems.

Marlena:
Let’s do it. I think now is a good time to try.

Narrator:
Well, you’ve already completed Step 1: Choose a right time. If your listener is relaxed and can pay attention, you’re much more likely to get what you want. Now go in there and try Step 2: Be positive.

Marlena:
Mom, I really want to go to the dance with Katie. Her mother offered to drive me.

Marlena’s Mom:
And I told you that you have to see your grandmother first. You can meet Katie at the dance.

Narrator:
Okay, now Step 3: Focus on the situation and not the person. Even though you may want to yell at your mom and call her unfair, she’s much more likely to listen and not get defensive if you’re not whiny, demanding, or disrespectful.

Marlena:
Katie and I really wanted to walk into the dance together. I mean, I want to see Grandma, but can’t I do it some other day? The dance is really important to me, Mom.

Narrator:
Good job, Marlena. Now remember, negotiation is a give and take. That’s Step 4: Try to work out a compromise solution.

Marlena’s Mom:
Well, Grandma really wants to see you.
Marlena:
How about I go to Grandma’s Saturday morning and spend the day helping her out. And then I can go to the dance with Katie Friday night.

Marlena’s Mom:
That sounds good. But you have to go call Grandma first and see if it’s okay with her. If it is, then it’s okay with me.

Marlena:
Thanks, Mom, you’re the best.

Narrator:
Okay, so now that you guys know a lot more about communication, maybe you can help me name some common Communication Roadblocks—those things people say or do that can get in the way of good communication and sometimes stop it all together. Definitely a bad idea for good relationships.

Zachary:
I just aced my test, man. Science is so easy. Look, there’s nothing to it.

Marc:
Hey, Zach, NASA’s on the phone. They need some help with their space shuttle.

Zachary:
Ha, ha…

Marlena:
That’s being sarcastic. Marc’s always sarcastic.

Narrator:
Sarcasm is a roadblock, you’re right. But so is globalizing.

Marlena:
What’s that?

Narrator:
Like saying, Marc’s always sarcastic. Is he really always sarcastic? Or when your parents say, “You’re never on time.” Is that really true?

Marlena:
No.
Brittany:
Asia, you dress like my mom!

Reggie:
That’s insulting. Brittany just insulted Asia.

Zachary:
We planned this trip to Florida...

Noah:
We’re going to Arizona. It’s so great out there!

Katie:
Noah just interrupted Zach. He’s always interrupting. I know, I know… Globalizing again, right?

Narrator:
You got it.

Marc:
You’re such a loser. If you’d caught that ball, we would’ve won the game.

Reggie:
That’s name-calling,

Marlena:
And blaming.

Narrator:
Yeah. Insults, sarcasm, interrupting, name-calling, blaming, and globalizing—they can all lead to disaster.

Katie:
And I know one more… mind reading. Expecting Marlena to read my mind about going to the dance really got us into a big fight.

Narrator:
Wow, you guys are good.

Zachary:
So communication takes work.

Narrator:
That’s right.
Zachary:
You have to be clear about what you say, but make sure your body language and tone of voice send the message across.

Narrator:
And you have to listen. Remember, communication is a two-way street.

Zachary:
And steer clear of the Communication Roadblocks. Bottom line is better communication, better relationships.

Narrator:
That's right! You’re getting the hang of this!

Pause for Handouts

Part 4: Conflict Resolution Skills

Reggie:
Noah’s the best player on the team. Why isn’t he starting in the game today?

Zachary:
You know. I mean, Noah doesn’t always show up for practice, he’s late for games. Coach said Thomas is starting now. Yeah, Noah’s definitely riding the bench today.

Noah:
What? Me, benched? That’s crazy! I’m the best player you’ve got. You can’t bench me!

Coach:
Look, Noah, let’s go into my office and we can talk about this.

Noah:
This team is lame! Let’s see how many games you win without me! I quit!

Narrator:
Whoa, Noah! Where’s the fire?

Noah:
The Coach’ll be sorry. You’ll see!

Narrator:
Hey, you quit the team to hurt the Coach, but it looks to me like you’re the one that’s hurting.
Noah:
Well, yeah. I don’t feel so good about that now.

Narrator:
That feeling is the result of **Conflict**. Everybody has conflicts. It’s normal. And they can leave you feeling pretty bad. But the good news is there are ways to avoid conflicts and ways to resolve the ones you’re already in. And that leads to stronger relationships.

Noah:
How do I do that?

Narrator:
Well, come on. Let’s just watch and see how your classmates head off conflict.

• • • •

Reggie:
Zach said he only has one extra ticket to the ball game. He said we should choose which one of us should go.

Marc:
Well, he should take me. I’ve been friends with him longer.

Reggie:
Well, I’m a bigger fan. Look, only one of us can go. How are we going to pick?

Marc:
Let’s flip for it. Heads you go, tails it’s me.

Reggie:
Okay, that’s fair.

Leave It to Chance

• • • •

Marlena:
Come on, we only have twenty more minutes before the test. I really need to study those notes, too.

Katie:
Well, so do I.

Marlena:
Well, how about you get them for the next ten minutes, and I get them for the last ten minutes?
Katie:
All right, deal. Now let me study!

Split The Difference

Brittany:
Where did you get that jacket? The Salvation Army?

Zachary:
Oh man, this is style, right? And I’m the king of retro!

Laugh It Off

Katie:
Leo is so cute!

Asia:
No way, but Will is awesome!

Katie:
Oh please, Asia, you don’t know what you’re talking about.

Asia:
Oh, and you know everything?

Katie:
Hold on. This isn’t worth fighting about. You like Will, and I like Leo.

Skip It

Noah:
Hey, what’s with this? You’re cutting the line, man.

Zachary:
I went to get something to drink. I was here before.

Noah:
Oh, yeah? Well, I didn’t see you here before. So back of the line, loser.

Zachary:
Stop being a jerk, man.

Noah:
What are you going to do about it?
Zachary:
Whatever, Noah.

Walk Away

Marc:
Hey, I sold my bike to Chris yesterday.

Reggie:
What? I thought you weren’t going to sell it.

Marc:
Well, my parents said I could since I was only $20 short of buying a new one.

Reggie:
Remember I told you I was thinking of buying it? What did you sell it to Chris for?

Marc:
Oh, man, that’s right. I forgot. Sorry. I really blew it.

Apologetic

Narrator:
So, those are all quick and easy ways to stop conflicts in your relationships before they take off.

Noah:
Yeah, but I’m already in the middle of a conflict.

Narrator:
Okay. Well, I’m going to help you learn how to resolve it and work on having a better relationship with Coach Johnson.

Narrator:
Now is your chance. You have to talk to the coach.

Noah:
But he’s not being fair. He benched me for no reason at all.

Narrator:
How do you know that? You started yelling before you checked the facts. You didn’t even get the coach’s side of it. First, you need to apologize for mouthing off. Then just listen.
Noah: Hey, Coach, can we talk?

Coach: Okay, Noah.

Noah: Listen I’m really sorry for talking to you the way that I did. I was just so angry.

Coach: All right, Noah. Apology accepted.

Noah: But why did you bench me? I’m the best player you’ve got!

Coach: Noah, a good team player has the respect for the team to show up and to show up on time. If you’re not going to be a team player, then you’re useless to us.

Narrator: Okay, Noah. You’ve listened to his point of view. Now give him your point of view and start negotiating.

Noah: You’re right. I guess I thought when things came up, I could skip practice. I didn’t think it would really matter.

Narrator: Now tell him what you really want and work on settling the problem.

Noah: I really want to get back on the team, Coach.

Coach: How are you going to show us that you’re ready to respect the team and its rules?

Noah: Well, the rule is you miss one practice, you miss one game, right?

Coach: Right.

Noah: So, if I take the punishment, can I play?

Coach: I’ll see you at practice tomorrow—on time—and you’re benched for one game.
Noah:
Okay. Thanks.

Coach:
I’m glad you came to talk to me, Noah. It took a big man.

Zachary:
Noah’s happy and so am I. We really need him on the team.

Narrator:
Well, when Noah got the facts, he realized Coach Johnson wasn’t being unfair or mean. See, just getting the facts before you go off can save you from getting into a lot of fights in your relationships.

Asia:
Delilah! You brat! Get out of my jewelry!

Delilah:
Mom!

Asia:
Stop!

Asia’s Mom:
What’s going on in here?

Delilah:
She hit me and knocked me down! That’s what’s going on!

Asia’s Mom:
Asia, you know there’s no hitting in this family.

Asia:
Mom, she’s always in my things! I hate her! I hate sharing my room. And I hate you for making me do it!

Asia’s Mom:
That’s enough! You watch your mouth, young lady! I don’t want to hear another word. Come on, Delilah.

Narrator:
Well, that was a disaster! You didn’t solve anything and your little sister will still get into your things.

Asia:
My mom doesn’t listen to me.
Narrator:
Maybe because all you’re doing is throwing a tantrum. When you act like a little kid, you’re going to get treated like a little kid. But if you talk to your mom in a reasonable way you’ll have a much better chance of being treated as a grown up. And that means saying how you feel and what you want in a respectful way. Okay?

Asia:
Mom, I’m sorry I yelled at you and that I pushed Delilah. I know it was wrong. I was just so mad. Can we talk?

Asia’s Mom:
All right.

Asia:
It gets me so mad when Delilah takes my things, especially my jewelry. Mom, I need some privacy.

Narrator:
Good, Asia. You told her how you feel. Now you and your mom can discuss the problem calmly and work toward resolving the conflict. How about Brainstorming? Do you know what that is?

Asia:
Sure. We learned it in school.

Narrator:
Does your mom know?

Asia:
I don’t think so.

Narrator:
So, explain it to her.

Asia:
Mom, we learned this thing in school called Brainstorming. It’s when you have a problem, and you think of as many ideas as you can to solve it. And then you come up with a solution that works for both people. Can we try that?

Asia’s Mom:
Sure, honey. I like that. So how do we start?

Asia:
Okay, first we have to say what the problem is.
Asia’s Mom:
Well, the way I see it the problem is how can you share a room with your sister peacefully and make sure she respects your things.

Asia:
How about we split the room down the middle, and Delilah can’t go on my side?

Asia’s Mom:
That’s an interesting idea. We could also rearrange the furniture to give you more privacy.

Asia:
Yeah, and Delilah gets into trouble if she touches my stuff.

Asia’s Mom:
Yes, but you can’t push or hit her.

Asia:
Okay, I won’t.

Asia’s Mom:
We could also give you shelves in the closet for personal space.

Asia:
Yeah.

Narrator:
So, you listened to each other, brainstormed together, and came up with a solution you both could live with. Conflict resolved.

Asia:
Yeah, and my mom didn’t even yell once.

Narrator:
That’s because you approached her like an adult, so she treated you like one.

Asia:
Thanks.

Narrator:
That’s what I’m here for. Just doing my job.

Narrator:
Zach!
Zachary:
Oh, hey.

Narrator:
Hey. So, do you get it now—about relationships?

Zachary:
Oh, definitely. I have the right to be assertive and to make decisions in my best interest.

Narrator:
Uh-huh. And what about communication?

Zachary:
Oh, that’s key. Especially for steering clear of conflicts. Y’know, you should know the facts of a situation before you take action because most conflicts are just big misunderstandings.

Narrator:
Exactly. There’s lots of ways to avoid conflict, but sometimes you just can’t.

Zachary:
Then you have to figure out the problem, say how you feel, listen to the other person, and then work together to find a solution.

Narrator:
And compromise is one of the best tools to resolve conflict.

Zachary:
And everyone deserves respect.

Narrator:
You’ve got it down cold.

Zachary:
If only I could work on being on time…

Zachary:
Girls, friends, respect… and no alarm clock! And this time it’s not a dream!

The End
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What Matters in a Relationship?

Read the following statements. In the space preceding each one, write: “V” if you feel that characteristic is very important in a relationship; “S” if you feel that characteristic is somewhat important; “U” if you feel that characteristic is unimportant in a relationship.

_____ 1. A friend should be interested in the things that interest me.

_____ 2. A friend shouldn’t pressure me to do things I don’t want to do.

_____ 3. A friend should be willing to take a risk for something I want or need.

_____ 4. A friend should never criticize me in front of other people.

_____ 5. A friend can be trusted to tell me the truth, no matter what.

_____ 6. A friend should be willing to break rules to help me out.

_____ 7. A friend can say whatever he/she feels, and I won’t get angry.

_____ 8. A friend should never reveal my secrets.

_____ 9. A friend should find ways to show me that I’m important to him/her.

_____ 10. A friend never has to prove anything to me.

_____ 11. A friend should share anything he/she has with me.

_____ 12. With a friend I can behave any way I want, and he/she should understand.

After you’ve finished, exchange your paper with a classmate, and compare your answers. Are your classmate’s answers the same as yours? Break into small groups and discuss the reasons behind your answers. Does the discussion make you feel differently about any of your answers?
Too Hot to Handle

Read the following situations. In each one a friend makes a decision about how to handle a problem. Following each situation, write your opinion of the friend’s behavior. Then discuss your answers with the class.

1. Alexi has just returned home from a vacation overseas where he was visiting his grandparents. He calls his friend Chris and tells him that he’s brought back a switch-blade knife for him, as well as one each for their other two friends, Jorge and Peter. Chris says that he’d have to ask his parents whether he can accept a gift like this. Alexi says okay, but asks him not to mention that he also brought knives for the other two. Chris says okay, but later, when he asks his parents, he decides to add that Alexi also brought knives for Jorge and Peter. Chris’s parents call Jorge and Peter’s parents and Alexi finds out. As a friend, did Chris do the right thing?

__________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________

2. Shakera, a very good student, has a crush on Wynel, who is popular, but not such a good student. One day Wynel asks Shakera to join him for ice cream at the mall after school. Shakera is thrilled and accepts. Later, while they’re eating their ice cream, Wynel asks Shakera if she would like to be his partner on a class research project. Flattered and excited, she agrees. The next day, Shakera’s friend Kenya overhears Wynel telling his buddy Michael what a dork Shakera is, and how he got her to help him out on his research project by pretending to like her. Kenya tells Shakera what she heard, even though she knew it would hurt her. As a friend, did Kenya do the right thing?

__________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________
3. Alicia and Kevin are the same age and live on the same street. They’ve been friends since they were babies, although Alicia attends public school and Kevin goes to private school. Now, starting with seventh grade, Kevin’s parents have decided to send him to public school. But Kevin is used to the way things were in private school, and the kids in public school dress differently and behave somewhat differently. The kids make fun of Kevin for his different ways, and, although Alicia wants to be loyal to her old friend, she’s been getting a hard time from her friends for spending so much time with Kevin and for sticking up for him. So Alicia makes a difficult decision: She tells Kevin she still considers him a best friend, and that she wants to hang around with him at home. But at school, she thinks it would be better if they sort of go their separate ways. **As a friend, did Alicia do the right thing?**
Am I a Good Friend?

Read the following statements that describe the characteristics that make up what many people call “a good friend.” In the space following each statement, write “A” if you think it’s always true for you; “S” if you think it’s sometimes true for you, and “N” if you think it’s never true for you.

1. When we spend time together, I’m happy to do what my friends want about half the time.

2. When a friend tells me a secret, I don’t repeat it.

3. If I make a promise to a friend, I keep it.

4. If a friend tells me something personal, I don’t make fun of him/her for it.

5. I don’t say anything behind a friend’s back that I wouldn’t say directly to him/her.

6. I would not criticize a friend in front of other people.

7. If a friend is about to do something I think is wrong, I would try to stop him/her.

8. If a friend disagrees with my opinion of a song, a music group, or a movie, I don’t put down or make fun of him/her.

9. I wouldn’t try to pressure a friend to do something he/she thinks is wrong.

10. If I’m in a bad mood, I don’t take it out on my friends.
Relationship Bill of Rights

1. I have the right to express my feelings and opinions.

2. I have the right to make my own decisions about my behavior and behave in my own best interest.

3. I have the right to make a mistake.

4. I have the right to make requests and refuse requests.

5. I have the right to expect agreements and promises to be kept.

6. I have the right to change my mind.

7. I have the right to privacy and to my own property.

8. I have the right to my own body.

9. I have the right to be treated fairly and with respect.

10. I have the right to be who I am.
Tips on Being Assertive When Making or Refusing a Request

When making a request

♦ Choose a time when the other person isn’t distracted or busy.

♦ Face the other person and look him/her in the eye.

♦ State your position calmly, clearly, firmly, and respectfully. Avoid excuses.

♦ Be able to accept a refusal.

When refusing a request

♦ Say no, clearly and firmly.

♦ Repeat your position if necessary. It’s not necessary to make excuses or apologize.

♦ Go on the offensive if necessary, but never be rude.

Examples:

“I told you how I feel. You seem to be ignoring what I’m saying.”

“I gave you my answer. Why are you still asking?”

♦ Use “I” Messages.

“I think …” “I feel …” “I want…”

♦ Walk away or change the subject instead of getting stuck in pointless arguments.
You are being **assertive** when you take steps to fulfill your legitimate rights, needs, and wishes, without interfering with the rights of others.

You are being **aggressive** when you take steps to meet your own needs and wishes by overpowering others, without considering their legitimate rights.

You are being **unassertive** when you fail to fulfill your legitimate rights, needs, or wishes.

Read the following situations. In the space preceding each one, write “assertive” if the behavior described is **assertive**, “aggressive” if the behavior described is **aggressive**, and “unassertive” if the behavior described is **unassertive**.

1. Jack walks into the living room, where his sister Becky is watching a program. He takes the remote, changes the channel, and says, “I just have to watch this game.”

2. Becky stands up and says, “I was here first. Please change it back now.”

3. Matt and Ryan want to go to the movies. No matter what Matt suggests, Ryan insists his choice is best. Ryan wants to see a horror movie. Matt hates horror movies but agrees to go to avoid a fight.

4. Lily says to Claudia, “I was wondering whether—if you have it—maybe you could pay me back the $2.00 you borrowed and promised to pay back by last week.”

5. Three friends stop by David’s house and invite him to go bike riding. He answers, “No thanks. I’m watching a video I’d like to finish.”
6. In school, Bill tells Adam that he doesn’t want to play ball with him after school. After school, Adam rings Bill’s doorbell, and says, “Come on, you wimp. Let’s go shoot some hoops. Afraid I’m going to kick your you-know-what?” Bill answers, “I don’t know—it looks like it might rain.”

7. As she walks by, Carla takes a look at the math homework her younger brother is doing and says, “You’re doing that wrong. Let me show you how.”

8. At dinner one evening, Emma says to her parents, “Next week is my birthday, and I thought it might be a good time to ask for a raise in my allowance.”

9. Frank lost his baseball glove, but hasn’t saved enough money to replace it yet. He asks George if he can borrow his for the weekend, but George says, “No, I’m planning on using it.” Frank says, “Come on, George. You want me to let everyone know how selfish you are?”

10. Heather didn’t do well on the last science test, so it’s important to her that she do well on tomorrow’s exam. But this afternoon her friends want to spend some time in town, and are trying to persuade Heather to join them. Finally, Heather says, “Hey, I told you I’m going to stay home and study. Enough, okay?”
Each of the following situations describes either aggressive or unassertive behavior. In the space following each example, rewrite the situation in such a way that the aggressive or unassertive behavior is changed to assertive behavior.

Examples:

(A) Ivy watched TV instead of doing her Spanish homework last night. She asks Joanie if she can borrow her homework before class this morning. Joanie says, “I don’t know. I probably made some mistakes in it myself. Anyway, I’m sort of in a hurry.”

Assertive Response: Joanie says, “Sorry, I don’t lend out my homework.”

(B) Kahlil washes cars to earn extra money. This weekend he has four cars to do and would like some help. He asks Leon if he’d like to help and offers to split the money with him. Leon accepts. At the end of the weekend, Kahlil says he only wants to give Leon one third of the money, because Kahlil got the jobs in the first place. Leon says, “No way. You give me my half or there’ll be trouble.”

Assertive Response: Leon says, “Wait a minute. The deal was, we’d split the money in half, so please give me my half now.”

1. On Monday, Nina invited Mandy to spend Saturday afternoon at her house. On Friday, having forgotten about the date with Mandy, Nina accepts an invitation to visit Olivia the same Saturday. Mandy overhears that conversation. Before going home Friday afternoon, Mandy says to Nina, “So I guess I won’t be seeing you this weekend.”

2. Peter borrowed Rico’s tape recorder so he could rehearse a speech for the student council election campaign. It’s been two weeks since the election. Peter hasn’t returned the tape recorder and Rico wants it back. On the lunch line Rico asks, “Did I lend you my tape recorder?”
3. Steve is sleeping over at Ted’s house. After Ted’s parents are in bed, Steve suggests they turn on a cable channel Ted is not allowed to watch. Ted says, “I’m afraid my parents will hear.” Steve says, “We’ll keep the volume down.” Ted answers, “I don’t know—my mother’s a pretty light sleeper.”

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4. When Ms. Ungar returns the class’s test papers and goes over the answers, Vanna notices that one of her answers she thinks is correct, was marked wrong. She raises her hand and says, “How come you marked me wrong when I got this answer right? You just have it in for me!”

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5. Ben has been having a lot of trouble understanding the math unit his class has been working on for the past few weeks. A test for the unit is scheduled for Friday. First thing Friday morning, Ben says to the teacher, “I was wondering whether maybe I could take the test next week some time, ‘cause my baby sister’s been sick, and last night her crying kept me up all night.”

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6. Xena is offered a free ticket to hear her favorite singer on Saturday night. When she tells her parents, her parents remind her that she had agreed to babysit for her little sister that night so that they could go to a show. Xena gets mad and says, “I never get to do anything I want! Well, tough! I’m going anyway—I’m sick of my stupid sister!”

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7. Angelo comes home with his hair dyed after Bret dares him to do it. When Angelo’s parents see him they are horrified and ground him for three weeks. Angelo says, “You can’t ground me for this! It’s my hair!”

________________________________________________________________
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Assertiveness Journal

In the space below, describe two incidents from your own life—one in which your response was unassertive, and one in which your response was aggressive. After each one, indicate an assertive response that might have worked better for you. Use the back of this page if you need more space.

A. 

________________________________________________________________________

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Communication Roadblocks

Communication Roadblocks are statements that get in the way of effective communication. In fact, once one of these Roadblocks occurs, others tend to follow. Before you know it, communication has ended and conflict has begun. Read the following list. Do they seem familiar to you?

Insulting
Saying something to purposely make the other person feel bad.
“Is that the best you could think of? What a stupid idea!”

Sarcasm
Saying the opposite of what you really mean, in order to achieve an insulting effect.
“I’m really going to take her to the dance—the ugliest girl in the class!”

Name-calling
Addressing someone by an insulting name.
“I can’t believe you told your parents. You’re such a baby!”

Globalizing
Making a complaint seem worse by exaggerating the truth.
“You obviously don’t understand anything!”
“You never say anything nice.”

Interrupting
Cutting in before the other person has finished speaking.
“I’m trying to tell you, I just meant …”
“Don’t try to tell me what you meant!”

Mind-reading
Behaving as if you know what the other person is thinking.
“I thought you’d be happy if I told Kevin how you felt.”

Expecting mind-reading
Failing to express a wish or preference, because you expect the other person to know it.
“Why would you buy me that tape? You should know I wouldn’t like it.”

Blaming
Focusing on whose fault something is, instead of looking for a solution.
“This whole thing is your fault. If you hadn’t told me to do it, none of this would have happened.”

Changing the subject
Failing to stay on the point of an argument or discussion.
“If you keep forgetting, I’m never going to lend you money again.”
“Look, just remember, I’m the one who gave you tickets to the baseball game. Besides, you’re not so perfect.”
Name That Roadblock

Each of the following examples illustrates a Communication Roadblock. In the space provided, indicate the type of Roadblock illustrated in the example.

___________ 1. “Look, when I said that to him, I just wanted him to…”
   “I don’t care what you wanted—when I say…”

___________ 2. “The only reason you did that is because you’re such a teacher’s pet!”

___________ 3. “Every time I try to be nice to you, you do something to ruin it.”

___________ 4. “I would like to know what time I can expect you home tonight.”
   “Tonight’s going to be a really big night. Everyone’s going to be there.”

___________ 5. “It’s obvious you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

___________ 6. “You never let me have any fun.”

___________ 7. “You think that just because you’re the oldest you get to make all the decisions?”

___________ 8. “That was really brilliant—blowing your top at the coach!”

___________ 9. “You have got to be the worst clarinet player in the whole band.”

___________ 10. “Why did you put me on the same team as Joey? You know I’d never want to be on his team.”
Straight Talk

*Straight Talk* is a four-step process to help you negotiate for something you want.

**Step 1: Choose the right time to talk.** Find a time when the listener is relaxed and able to pay attention.

**Step 2: State your point in a positive way.**

*Example:* “I would like to have a later bedtime.” is better than, “My bedtime is too early—no one goes to bed this early.”

**Step 3: Focus on the situation—not the person.** The listener is much more likely to pay attention and not get defensive if you are not whiny, demanding, or disrespectful.

*Example:* “I was wondering whether I can borrow $15 until next week.” is better than, “You have lots of money—you can lend me $15, unless you’re too cheap.”

**Step 4: Look for a compromise solution.** If you can’t get exactly what you want, try to find a way to get *some* of what you want.

Try to put *Straight Talk* into practice. Find a partner and practice making a request. Make up a realistic example and appoint your partner to play the role of a parent, a teacher, or a friend. Here are a couple of examples to get you started:

1. You have a math test coming up. You don’t understand the unit that well, but your friend does, so you’d like her to help you catch on. But she’s got a science project due the same day as your math test.

2. Your parents have made a rule that you can’t watch TV on school nights. But tonight is the final game of the World Series, and even though it probably won’t be over till midnight, you’d love them to make an exception.
Tips for Good Communication

Remember the THREE C’s

♦ Be Clear: Get to the point.
♦ Be Concise: Stay on the point, without adding unnecessary details.
♦ Be Complete: Include all the information necessary to make your point.

Body Language is important, too

♦ Look at the person to whom you’re speaking. Make eye contact.
♦ Turn your body toward the person to whom you’re speaking.
♦ Try not to fidget or pace.

Tone of Voice

♦ Speak in a calm, firm tone of voice—go easy on “like” and “you know,” and try not to mumble.
♦ How you say it can be just as important as what you say.

Listen

♦ Pay attention.
♦ Show that you’re interested in what the person is saying.
♦ Ask questions if there is something you don’t understand.
♦ Repeat what the speaker says to be sure you understand.
♦ Listen for how the speaker feels.
Quick Fixes

*Quick Fixes* are easy ways to stop conflicts before they start. They work best when a problem isn’t too complicated.

When the other person is just as “right” as you:

- **Flip A Coin**
  - Leave it to chance. It’s fast, it’s fair.

- **Split The Difference**
  - Meet each other halfway. Compromise.

When the issue isn’t important enough to get excited about:

- **Laugh It Off** or Shrug it off or **Skip it**
  - Finding humor in a situation can release tension.

When you can see bigger trouble ahead:

- **Walk Away**
  - This is best if you’re being physically threatened. Remember—nobody can make you fight.

If you’re wrong:

- **Say You’re Sorry**
  - Admit it and apologize. It seems harder than it really is.

Can you think of some situations you’ve been in when one of these Quick Fixes would have been useful? Discuss them with the class.
“I” Messages

“I” Messages are a way to say how you feel without blaming or putting the other person down. They can really help you avoid and resolve conflicts, because they can keep you from throwing down a Communication Roadblock. When you tell someone how you feel they’re more likely to be understanding and less likely to get angry. No attack—no counter-attack—no fight!

“I” Messages are built around the phrases, “I feel…” “I want…” or “I need….”

Examples: “I feel like a baby when you check up on me after I do my chores. I want you to trust that I’ll do what I’m supposed to do.”

“I feel embarrassed and angry that you told Steve how I feel about him. When I tell you a secret, I need you to keep it a secret.”

Read the following situations. In the space provided, write an “I” Message that would help with communication during a conflict.

1. Your mother expects you to take care of your little brother every Friday afternoon after school because she has to be out of the house. But this keeps you from participating in any activities scheduled for that time.

   “I” Message: I feel ___________ because ____________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   I want ____________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________.

2. Your Social Studies teacher sometimes teases you in good fun. You know that she likes you and is kidding around because you do well, but it sometimes seems like a little too much.

   “I” Message: I feel ___________ because ____________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   I want ____________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________.
3. Your friend borrowed your Walkman, promising to return it after the weekend. It’s now Thursday, and each time you remind him, he says, “Oh, I’m sorry—I keep forgetting.”

“I” Message: I feel ___________ because _________________. I want __________________________ _________________________________.

Remember

♦ You don’t always have to use the order shown above. Sometimes you can start with “When you…”

“When you call me ‘Deedee’ I feel like a baby. I want you to call me ‘Diane.’”

♦ When talking about something that’s already happened, sometimes it’s not necessary to use the “I want…” part of the message. Just saying how you feel is enough.

“I felt embarrassed when you told all the kids about the operation I have to have.”

♦ A common pitfall to avoid: Don’t disguise an accusation as a feeling.

“When you copy answers off my paper, I feel you’re just a cheater,” or “I feel you’re a lousy friend.”

Remember when you say, “I feel…” the next word has to be a feeling.

♦ “I” Messages do not have to be negative, or something that you use only when you’re disturbed about something. Positive “I” Messages are also useful ways of letting others know how you feel.

“I felt so good when you really liked the dessert I made.”

To give you some ideas, here are some common feelings. But there are many, many more. Your answers don’t need to come from this list.

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Tips for Resolving Conflicts

1. Choose a good time and place to talk.
   It’s best to wait until the situation has calmed down. Try to find a time when the other person isn’t preoccupied.

2. Get the facts.
   Ask questions to make sure you understand the whole story before you react. Pay attention to what the other person is saying and paraphrase it (repeat what you hear using your own words.)

3. Use “I” Messages to express your feelings, wishes, or needs.

4. Listen to the other person’s response and paraphrase again.

5. Brainstorm for ideas and discuss them. Look for a compromise, in which each side gets some of what he/she wants.

6. Choose a solution that works for everyone. Once you’ve reached an agreement, confirm it by clearly stating the terms.
Conflict Resolution: Role Plays

Here are some role-playing exercises to help you practice applying the “Tips for Resolving Conflicts.” For each scenario, choose two people—one to represent the person with the problem, complaint, or request, the other to represent the person hearing the problem, complaint, or request. The first person in each pair is the one trying to apply the “tips.” Each should try to imagine him/herself in the situation and try to behave as realistically as possible.

A. Charlene thinks that her allowance is lower than that of most of her friends, and would like to have more spending money. She decides to approach her father to ask for a raise.

B. Devin was given a surprisingly low grade on an English essay exam. He’s not sure how the teacher arrived at the grade, but he feels he deserves a higher one, so he decides to approach his teacher about it.

C. Eve, Fran, and Georgette are friends. One day Fran mentions to Eve that a special pen of hers, given to her by her favorite uncle, has disappeared, and she can’t seem to find it. The next afternoon, Eve is at Georgette’s house, where the two are studying together for a Spanish test. Eve happens to notice Fran’s special pen on Georgette’s desk. Georgette notices Eve looking at it, and quickly puts it inside the desk. Eve decides to say something to Georgette.

D. Hal, Ike, and Jamal are friends. Hal has one extra ticket for Friday night’s basketball game. He decides to invite Ike, but asks him not to mention it to Jamal, because he doesn’t want Jamal to feel left out. But Ike tells Jamal anyway. Jamal isn’t happy about it and lets Hal know. Hal decides to confront Ike.
E. Ken and Lana have been going out together for a few months. But lately, Ken has been finding himself more interested in Lana’s friend Mina. Ken decides to ask Mina to go rollerblading with him after school and Mina agrees. Lana’s friend Nancy sees them together. That evening Nancy decides to phone Lana and tell her what she saw. Lana feels betrayed by Mina and decides to confront her about it the next day.

F. Malcolm is enjoying himself at a large birthday party for his friend Joey. All of Joey’s friends and family are there. Everyone is having a good time dancing and playing games. Shortly before the party is over, Malcolm’s mom comes to pick him up. But when she arrives, she decides to join in the fun, and asks Malcolm to dance with her. Malcolm dances with her for a minute or two, but he sees a couple of his friends snickering on the side and gets really embarrassed. When they get home, Malcolm decides to confront his mother.
Credits

Executive Producer
Susan Eikov Green

Producer/Script Editor
Susan Simmons

Writer
Karen Grazia

Director
Tony Grazia

Video Production
Deerfield Productions

Teacher’s Guide
Walter Simmons, C.S.W.

Teacher’s Guide Design
Michelle J. Yannes

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