

SECTION 4.
INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS

Interpreting Body Language

Objective

To increase your understanding of body language in order to improve your communication with others.

You Should Know

You might think strong communication skills involve expressing yourself clearly and listening attentively to others. This is true, but sometimes what you say does not always indicate what you actually mean or feel. It is the non-verbal communication, through body language, that provides the most accurate information about thoughts and emotions.

Facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice offer important clues. The signals you send with your own body language can help others understand your mood and intentions. When you pay attention to physical signals, you are less likely to project your own emotions onto another person, or to misinterpret the other person's feelings. This is especially helpful during conflict or challenging interactions when you might experience overwhelming thoughts and emotions.

What to Do

By understanding body language – both your own and the other person's – you will be able to communicate more clearly and respond appropriately to difficult conversations and interactions. Here are some common physical cues and the emotions they convey.

BODY LANGUAGE	EMOTIONS
Eye contact or gazing into the eyes.	Attention, caring, affection
Smiling, talkative, clapping hands, singing, jumping up and down or dancing, laughing.	Joy, excitement, happiness
Red flushed face and neck, clenched hands, pursed lips, crossed arms, hands on hips, looking down or away, clenched teeth, frowning, staring.	Anger, dislike, annoyance, aggression
Frowning, looking down or away, slumped posture; low, quiet, or monotone voice.	sadness, hurt
Talking quickly and nervously, inability to sit still, shaking, pacing, speechlessness, crossed arms, frozen in place, sweating.	Anxiety, nervousness, fear
Covering face, hiding, slumping, looking down or away.	Shame, embarrassment, guilt

Can you think of others? Describe.

Think of a time when you realized someone was angry, sad, happy, or anxious, based on their facial expressions, posture, or gestures. Describe the physical signals you noticed.

Think of a time when you realized someone was not paying attention as you spoke to them, based on their facial expressions, posture, or gestures. Describe the physical signals you noticed.

When a person's non-verbal communication seems confusing or is difficult to interpret, there are some questions you can ask to get more clarity:

- "You look upset. Is everything all right?"
- "I notice that you seem nervous. Am I correct?"
- "How are you feeling?"
- "Are things okay between us?"

List other clarifying questions here.

Now, focus on your own body language and what it conveys to others about your moods and feelings. Have you ever been told your words did not match your body language? Explain.

Has a person ever understood you were mad, sad, anxious, etc., in spite of what you said or did not say? Explain.

Next, think of a recent challenging interaction you had with someone.
Describe the interaction. What happened? Who were you with? What was said?

Describe your emotions.

Describe the physical sensations you experienced.

Describe facial expressions, posture, and movements you remember expressing.

Describe the other person's facial expressions, posture, and movements.

Try this exercise again with someone you trust, using a recent or imaginary scenario of a difficult conversation. Take turns observing each other's body language as you role play.

Describe the interaction. What happened? Who were you with? What was said?

Describe how you interpreted the other person's emotions.

Describe the person's body language.

Did the person's body language make it easier to understand what they were thinking and feeling? Explain.

Did the person's body language impact the way you responded? Explain.

Ask the other person to describe your facial expressions, posture, and movements, and to interpret your emotions.

Did the person correctly interpret your emotions? If not, what was incorrect? How could you increase your awareness of your body language in the future?

Reflections on This Exercise

Think of an upcoming situation where increasing your awareness of body language – your own and others’ – will be helpful in communicating effectively. Describe.

What body language would you most like to increase or improve, for future interactions? Why?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identifying Relationships That Reflect Your Values

Objective

To identify relationships that reflect your values so you can make healthy changes and meet your goals.

You Should Know

Your values – your morals and beliefs – shape your actions and decisions, including how you interact in your relationships. They determine how you treat, and are treated by, others, as well as how you view and respect yourself. There are times you may compromise your values in order to be loved, accepted, or get your needs met. Such conflicts between your values and relationships can negatively impact the actions and choices you make in your life, including intentions to change or improve your behavior.

When your relationships reflect your values, you can make healthier decisions and receive support around your goals for change. You also may experience increases in self-esteem and self-respect.

What to Do

First, identify and circle the values most important to you in your relationships, including how you wish to be treated and how you wish to treat others.

Authenticity	Determination	Kindness	Respect
Adventure	Fairness	Knowledge	Responsibility
Balance	Freedom	Leadership	Security
Bravery	Friendships	Learning	Self-Respect
Compassion	Fun	Love	Social
Community	Generosity	Loyalty	Spirituality
Creativity	Growth	Openness	Stability
Curiosity	Honesty	Optimism	Wealth
			Wisdom

Write down other values you would like to add:

Next, of the values you circled, write down five you feel are most essential in relationships that are caring, supportive, or inspiring.

Value #1 _____

Value #2 _____

Value #3 _____

Value #4 _____

Value #5 _____

Have you experienced any relationships (family, romantic, friendships, work-related) in which you compromised your values? Describe.

Name one or more decisions or choices you have made that did not reflect your values.

What did you experience in that relationship which led you to act against your values?

Did your feelings about yourself and/or your relationship change after you acted against your values? Explain.

Can you engage in that relationship differently in order to better support your values and intentions? For example, setting boundaries, expressing your feelings, asking for what you need, or spending less time with that person.

Next, think about one of your relationships in which you practiced or strengthened those five values. Describe the relationship and include how the other person's actions or beliefs upheld your values.

Name one or more values-based decisions or actions you have taken as a result of this relationship.

Did your feelings about yourself and your relationship change when you embraced your values? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

What goals and intentions would you like to set within your relationships that will allow you to embrace your values?

Name a relationship in your life that can support you around your goals and intentions, including making healthy changes.

Has this exercise changed the way you express your needs and values within your relationships? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Exercising Your Rights to Your Needs and Feelings

Objective

To exercise your rights to your needs and feelings, and identify others who will validate them.

You Should Know

As human beings, we all need to communicate our feelings, desires, and opinions, and we all deserve to be heard, respected, and validated. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. You may have been told your feelings are unimportant or undeserving of others' time or attention. You may avoid asking for help or expressing your emotions, so that you do not upset, disappoint, or challenge other people.

Check off the statements that best describe you:

- Others have told me my feelings are weird, wrong, or bad.
- When I have an emotional reaction, I have been told to "get over it" or "stop being so dramatic," or I am overreacting.
- I am afraid to ask for help from others because I am fearful I will be judged.
- I am afraid to ask for help from others because I am sure I will be rejected.
- I annoy other people when I share my needs and feelings.
- I am often ignored or disrespected when I express my needs and feelings.
- I am constantly misunderstood.
- I don't deserve to ask for, or receive, what I need.
- I would rather not get my needs met than "push back" or assert myself, out of fear of being mistreated.

Add your own statements here:

Regardless of the number of statements you checked off, one thing is true: your needs and feelings are worthy of acknowledgment and validation by others.

What to Do

First, recognize that you have a right to your own feelings, needs, and opinions, even if they differ from others' beliefs, feelings, and needs. Here are some statements you can post on a mirror or carry with you as a reminder:

- I have a right to put myself first sometimes.
- I have a right to inconvenience or disappoint others sometimes.
- I have a right to need things from others.
- I have a right to express my emotions in ways that are not harmful to myself or others.
- I have a right to my beliefs and opinions.
- I have a right to experience things differently than others.
- I have a right to ask for help or support.
- I have a right to say “no” without being a selfish or bad person.
- I have a right to speak out against mistreatment from others.

Circle the statements you find most challenging to believe. Explain.

Next, answer the following questions to identify people in your life who can help remind you of those rights – and can support you in receiving acknowledgment and validation.

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person with whom you can share your experiences and emotions, and from whom you can receive validation and support.

Why did you select this person?

How does this person make you feel about yourself?

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person who can help you practice asking for help, expressing yourself, or communicating your needs to others.

Why did you select this person?

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person who can help you practice disagreeing with others, or saying “no.”

Why did you select this person?

Where can you meet other trustworthy, supportive people (work, church, volunteer group, etc.)?

Reflections on This Exercise

Has this exercise changed how you regard your own feelings, needs, and opinions? Explain.

Has this exercise improved your ability to express your feelings, needs, and opinions? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Communicating Your Wants and Needs to Others

Objective

To become more effective in communicating your wants and needs to others.

You Should Know

When your emotions are overwhelming, it can be challenging to express yourself calmly and clearly, or to convey your needs to others. There are tools you can use to resolve conflicts and make requests to others in a respectful and effective way.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) uses the acronym DEAR MAN to explain the steps for improving communication and expressing what you want. This skill can be used to make nearly any difficult conversation a little easier. You will find that implementing this tool can help improve communication in your relationships, including reducing conflict and increasing your understanding of the other person.

DEAR MAN stands for:

DESCRIBE the situation.

EXPRESS your feelings.

ASSERT yourself by asking.

REINFORCE through reward.

(Stay) **MINDFUL**.

APPEAR Confident.

NEGOTIATE.

What to Do

Each letter of the DEAR MAN acronym is explained in more detail below. Think of a recent situation where you had difficulty communicating your thoughts and needs to another person. After each brief description, write down your ideas about how, and with whom, you could have used the skill.

DESCRIBE refers to stating the facts (not the feelings) in a situation. (*"I'm working late tonight and I won't be home for dinner."*)

EXPRESS refers to talking about your feelings and opinions directly and openly. (*"I'm under a lot of pressure at work. I'm stressed out that I need to work late again to meet my deadlines."*)

ASSERT means to say precisely what you want, rather than hinting around or hoping the person will figure it out. Asserting might involve saying "no." (*"Could you please leave work a little earlier so you can make dinner or grab some takeout on the way home?"*)

REINFORCE means telling the other person how they will benefit when you get what you want. (*"It would really help me out so I can get this project done. I might even be able to leave the office early on Friday if I am productive enough."*)

MINDFUL refers to being present and focused in the moment. Try to avoid getting distracted with old arguments or personal attacks. Being clear and calm will enable you to be heard better and accepted more openly. (*"I know I've been working late a lot this week, but it can't be helped."*)

APPEAR CONFIDENT even when you might not feel sure of yourself. Be aware of your tone of voice – is it calm or agitated? Make eye contact. Hold your body erect and be aware of your breath. Repeat your request, if necessary.

NEGOTIATE refers to being flexible and open-minded. Talk about what options are possible. Listen without judging or interrupting. Think of mutually beneficial ways to compromise if necessary. You have to give to get. (*"I'll make your favorite dinner and dessert next week as a thank you."*)

In the next week or so, keep track of situations when you used DEAR MAN to help improve your communication skills to get your wants and needs met.

Situation	With whom?	What you wanted/ needed	What DEAR MAN skills did you use?

Reflections on This Exercise

Which DEAR MAN skills did you find the most effective? Explain.

Which DEAR MAN skills did you find challenging? Explain.

Did anything surprise you about how others responded to your requests using DEAR MAN? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Listening Skills

Objective

To improve your listening skills to better understand another person's needs and feelings.

You Should Know

Sometimes it is easy to be distracted by your thoughts, feelings, and opinions while someone else is talking. When you are not fully engaged in listening, you may miss important elements being expressed by that person, including their needs, emotions, and opinions. Your understanding of what is being said, as well as your ability to respond effectively and appropriately, is negatively impacted.

Review the list below and check off any of the following you have noticed yourself doing during conversations:

- Mind Reading** - Assuming you know what the other person is thinking and feeling.
- Preparing** - Planning how you will respond while the other person is still talking, so you miss what is being said.
- Filtering** - Listening only to the things you find important or that directly affect you.
- Judging** - Forming opinions of the other person and what they say, instead of trying to understand their point of view.
- Daydreaming** - Getting distracted by memories, worries, or your imagination while the other person is talking.
- Advising** - Offering suggestions and answers instead of listening and showing support.
- Arguing** - Disputing, challenging, or debating what the other person says.
- Being Right** - Denying or rejecting anything the other person says that implies you are wrong or need to change.
- Derailing** - Changing the subject when the other person says something that threatens or upsets you.
- Placating** - Agreeing with the other person before hearing their feelings or concerns, in an attempt to avoid confrontation or discussion.

Think of a recent situation when you used one of those listening devices in a conversation. Describe the situation, your relationship to the speaker, and which device you used.

What was the outcome of that conversation? What was your level of understanding of what the speaker said and implied? Did you respond or react the way the speaker expected? What feedback, if any, did you receive from the speaker?

What to Do

When you actively listen to someone, you are fully engaged in the conversation. You are able to process what is being said and validate that person's needs and feelings. Here are some suggested techniques for improving your listening skills that can be used in any relationship.

- **Pay attention.** Shut off your cell phone, television, or other form of distraction. Look the speaker in the eye. Avoid multitasking.
- **Observe.** Pay attention to the speaker's body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, especially if it contradicts what is being said.
- **Reflect back.** Repeat what the speaker said to make sure you understand. Avoid using judgmental language or tone.
- **Get clarification.** If you are not sure what the speaker wants and needs after you reflect back, ask for more information: "I'm not sure I understand your standpoint about this situation. Could you say more about it?"
- **Empathize.** Try to understand the other person's perspective. Imagine what it might feel like for them to have these concerns, thoughts, and emotions.
- **Acknowledge.** Acknowledge that you have heard and understood the other person's perspective and emotions. Validate the speaker's experience without trying to "fix" anything: "I heard you say that you are feeling really overwhelmed at work."

- **Ask questions.** Gather more information so you can offer solutions, compromises, or support to the other person. This is also helpful to determine whether the speaker is looking for suggestions, or if they just want someone to listen to them.

Some examples:

- What is your main concern about this issue?
- How does this situation make you feel?
- What do you think needs to change?
- What solutions have you tried?
- What can I do that will be helpful?
- Would it be helpful for me to offer a suggestion or resource?

Think back to the situation you described previously. Which of the above listening techniques would have been helpful in that situation? What could you have said or done differently? In what way could that have changed the outcome?

Think of an important conversation you plan to have over the next week. Which listening techniques will be most effective for you during that conversation?

Practice your selected listening techniques by role playing that conversation with a friend or family member you trust. Then describe what the experience was like for you. What was easy? What was difficult? How did you feel afterward?

Ask your role play partner to describe how they experienced your listening techniques. Did they feel heard or understood? Did they notice how much attention you were paying to them?

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe how this exercise has improved your listening skills? Explain.

Has this exercise improved how you communicate in your relationships? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Ability to Say No

Objective

To improve your ability and confidence to say “no” to others in order to reflect your own needs and values.

You Should Know

Saying “no” is a necessary component in asserting yourself, setting limits, and respecting your own opinions and emotions. Although saying “no” is essential in all kinds of relationships, you may feel uncomfortable asserting yourself, or worry about making the other person angry or upset.

There are physical consequences when you submit to others’ demands while ignoring your own needs and feelings. It can reduce your body’s immune system, increasing your chance of infection, of developing ulcers, or placing you at greater risk for heart disease. Saying “yes” when you mean “no” can also make you feel helpless, which can contribute to depression and anxiety.

The exercise below can help you develop the skills and confidence to say “no” in order to reflect and honor your needs and values.

What to Do

When you consider saying “no” to a request from another person, first examine how the request affects you: your emotions, values, needs, and desires. Think of a current situation where you are being asked to do something you prefer not to do, or do not feel comfortable doing. Answer the following questions by circling “yes” or “no,” and provide explanations.

Am I emotionally and physically able to give the person what they want? Yes or No

Am I willing to give the person what they want? Yes or No

Will I feel bad about myself for saying “no”? Yes or No

Am I saying “yes” because I am afraid to say “no”? Yes or No

Am I being asked to do something that opposes my rights or values? Yes or No

Will I regret saying “no” in the long term? Yes or No

Do I fully understand what I am being asked? Yes or No

Do I need more time to think about it before making a decision? Yes or No

How to Say “No”

There are two simple steps for saying “no.” You will notice they are respectful both to your feelings and to the person making the request.

1. Validate the other person's request. Show you are paying attention to what they are saying, and repeat back what you heard. This helps you focus on the substance of the request, instead of making assumptions about its context.

2. State your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked, or state your discomfort in doing what was asked. For example: "I agree that the neighbor's dog barks too much, but I don't feel comfortable confronting them in a way that would hurt our friendship." Or, "I know you'd like us to go out together with your friends tonight, but I'm tired. I'd prefer that you join them while I stay home and rest."

Can you think of a recent situation where it would have been helpful to use these two steps to say "no"? Describe the situation.

What do you think would have been different in that situation if you had used those steps?

Next, think of some recent situations where you wanted to say "no" but felt unable to do so. Consider the statements you would have used to say "no" if you had used the two steps. Complete the following chart.

Request That Was Made	How You Felt About the Request (<i>uncomfortable, disrespected, unwilling, angry</i>)	The Statement You Would Have Used to Say "No"

Now, return to the *current* situation you identified at the beginning of this exercise. Practice using the two steps in your response to this person.

What can you say to validate the person's request?

What can you say to explain your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked, or to describe your discomfort in doing what was asked?

Reflections on This Exercise

Can you think of any upcoming situations at home, work, or with friends or partners, where using the two steps will be helpful? Describe.

List people who can help you practice the two steps to prepare for those situations.

After you have practiced using the two steps to say “no,” describe your experience. Include information such as how you felt, the other person’s response, and the outcome.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identifying People Who Are Trustworthy to Give You Support

Objective

To identify the characteristics of trustworthy people and explore resources when you need support.

You Should Know

It is important to have people in your life you can trust when you have to work through difficult problems, or when you need support in stressful situations.

Do you have people in your life you trust with your personal problems? The following checklist can help you identify people in your life you can trust to give you support.

What to Do

Below is a list of the characteristics of a trustworthy person. Make a copy of this list for each person you think might be trustworthy. As you consider the people in your life you feel you can trust, check off the statements you agree with. You should be able to check off all these statements when evaluating whether or not a person is trustworthy.

Name of the person you think you can trust: _____

I believe this person is caring and concerned about me.

I believe this person won't gossip or share what I have told them with others.

I believe this person is honest and tells me the truth.

I believe this person treats me and my feelings with respect.

I believe this person won't intentionally hurt me, either emotionally or physically.

I believe this person considers my best interests.

I believe this person is reliable and dependable.

I believe this person is consistent and predictable in their actions and reactions.

Other people I know trust and respect this person.

What other traits does this person have that make them trustworthy? _____

Are there other people in your life you don't know that well who may be people who can give you support, such as a clergy member or health care professional? Write their names down below.

Are you having trouble thinking of anyone you can trust to give you support? There are still ways to find help.

Here is a list of hotlines, for both emergencies and non-emergency support. <https://www.healthyplace.com/other-info/resources/mental-health-hotline-numbers-and-referral-resources#Clearinghouse>

After reviewing this list, write down a list of organizations, websites, and phone numbers you might want to contact.

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the first step you need to take to find people in your life you can trust?

What are some ways you can determine if a person is trustworthy?

Can you be specific about what kind of support you need from a person? For example, do you need someone to talk to on a regular basis? Do you need someone to help you with specific situations? Are you looking for specific advice? Write down what kind of support you need below. The more specific you are about the support you need, the more likely you are to get it.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Seeing Someone Else's Perspective

Objective

To improve your relationships through seeing other peoples' perspectives.

You Should Know

You might find it especially challenging to see someone else's perspective during a situation that is emotionally overwhelming for you. In the heat of the moment, you might act out or say things you will regret later, without considering the other person's point of view. Even if you are able to express your own wants and needs, you might not be aware of how your expectations affect others, and how those wants and needs might be in opposition to their own.

To see another's perspective means letting go of "black and white" thinking, where one side is right, good, or fair, while the other side is wrong, bad, or unfair.

In healthy relationships, both parties clearly express themselves, listen, and respect the other's point of view – even if they don't necessarily agree with each other. Here are a few more suggestions:

- Regard the other person as a human being like you: with their own strengths, weaknesses, fears, and worries. Notice what you have in common, as well as shared experiences.
- Avoid assuming what the other person may be thinking or feeling, or what they are thinking or feeling *about you*.
- Instead of focusing on yourself and your feelings, try to shift your attention to the other person. Listen and watch with curiosity instead of judgment. Be open to new thoughts and ideas you might discover about that person – or yourself.
- Try shifting from "always" and "never" statements to "sometimes" ones.
- Before you act or react to a situation, consider: "How do I want the other person to feel about me after our interaction?"

Now, put these ideas into practice. Think about a time when someone shared a perspective you did not agree with. For example, maybe you have a coworker whose political views are the opposite of yours, or a family member whose ideas about parenting contradict yours.

Next, think about the thoughts, feelings, or motivations that might be behind that person's point of view. For example, the parenting ideas might be based on their own experiences as overwhelmed new parents, or based on their own negative childhood memories.

Lastly, identify a fact or statement in that person's perspective which might be true or helpful, regardless of your own point of view.

What to Do

Describe the conflicting point of view you have with someone.

How does this perspective differ from yours?

What might be true or helpful within this point of view?

Does this change the way you think or feel about either the person or their perspective?
Explain.

Now, take a moment to think about a recent stressful situation involving another person. This can be a person from any relationship: partner, friend, family member, or coworker. Answer the following questions as objectively as you can.

Describe the situation, including your thoughts and feelings.

Did you make any assumptions about the other person during this situation? Describe.

Now, examine the situation from the other person's point of view. How did they act and react to the situation? How did those actions and reactions differ from yours? How were they similar?

If possible, describe the other person's emotions during that situation. How were those feelings similar to yours? How were they different?

Consider the possible reasons for the other person's actions and reactions. What were they trying to accomplish? What might this person have done differently during that situation?

Consider how your own actions and reactions to the situation might have affected the other person. What might you have done differently during that situation?

Next, use the following chart when stressful or uncomfortable situations arise to see the other person's perspective. Being as objective as possible, consider the other person's thoughts and feelings about each situation.

Situation	Your Thoughts and Feelings	How the Other Person Might Have Felt	What the Other Person Might Have Thought

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you think seeing others’ perspectives might change the way you act and react to distressing situations? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using “I” Statements to Communicate Effectively

Objective

To use “I” statements to express your wants, needs, and feelings in your relationships.

You Should Know

You might have trouble communicating what you want and need to those who are important to you. If you are not communicating clearly, you may blame the person you are talking to for the problem, saying things like:

“You never pay attention to me when I talk.”

“You just don’t understand me.”

These “you” statements blame the communication problem on the other person. Unfortunately, “you” statements probably make the listener feel defensive and your communication breaks down further. What if you take responsibility for your communication by making “I” statements? This exercise is designed to show you how to do this.

What to Do

It is possible to express yourself, resolve conflicts, and get what you want in your relationships by using “I” statements. When you use “I” statements, you are speaking assertively from your own experience and taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings.

When you revise your “you” statements into “I” statements, you can accurately describe what you want, or how the other person’s behavior affects you.

For example:

Instead of: “You’re always yelling at me!”

You could say: “I feel upset when you yell at me. Can we talk calmly, please?”

Instead of: “You’re always spending time with your friends – don’t you care about me?”

You could say: “I’m concerned that we don’t spend any time together anymore. I miss you.”

Instead of: “You make me so mad!”

You could say: “I’m frustrated that you won’t take the doctor’s advice. I want you to be healthy.”

Write down some “you” statements that you frequently make when talking to others.

Now, change these into "I" statements.

Next, keep track of situations or conflicts where you normally use a "you" statement to express yourself or ask for what you need. Instead, use an "I" statement, and then record the outcomes. Pay particular attention to how the other person responded.

Situation/ With whom?	What were your thoughts and feelings?	What "I" statement did you use?	What was the outcome? (How did the other person respond?)

Reflections on This Exercise

Did you find your communication improved when you shifted from “you” statements to “I” statements? Give an example.

Did anyone notice you were communicating in a different way? What did they say or do?

What can you do to remind yourself to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are You Difficult to Get Along With?

Objective

To identify ways to respect others and improve your relationships.

You Should Know

Relationships can be hard work, and ideally each person is capable of compromising, communicating clearly, listening attentively, trusting fully, and being kind. Unfortunately, not everyone is capable of healthy, balanced relating. You may find it difficult to trust others, or you might withdraw when you find yourself getting too emotionally involved. Maybe you have a hard time understanding and listening to the needs and feelings of others.

Which of the following statements describes you? Check all that apply.

- People use what I say against me.
- I have difficulty considering other peoples' points of view.
- People have told me I am self-absorbed or selfish.
- Most people are untrustworthy.
- I never feel like I am good enough.
- I often consider revenge when I have been treated unfairly.
- People have told me I am argumentative and confrontational.
- I am much more interesting and important than other people.
- I sometimes use passive-aggressive behavior to get my needs met (for example, I use "the silent treatment" or frequently blame others for my mistakes).
- I sometimes use attention-seeking behavior to get my needs met (for example, threatening to harm or kill myself or exaggerating stories to gain sympathy).
- I feel threatened when my partner/friend/family member spends time with others and gives them attention.
- I have a difficult time listening when other people talk unless it somehow affects me.

Review the statements you checked off, and describe how these behaviors might negatively impact your relationships.

Are there any behaviors you might consider changing? If yes, which ones? If no, why not?

What to Do

In healthy relationships, your feelings – and those of others – are equally respected. You are comfortable saying “no” to each other, and you are able to ask for what you want and need. You treat each other with respect and dignity. You are able to see other peoples’ points of view and to understand their feelings.

The letters G – I – V – E are an easy way to remember steps you can take to improve your relationships:

G: Be **Gentle** in your interactions with others. Avoid critical comments, attacks, and threats when you are angry or uncomfortable.

I: Show **Interest** in others. Be attentive and listen to others. Do not interrupt or change the subject.

V: Validation. Show a nonjudgmental understanding of what the other person is feeling, thinking, or experiencing. You might say, “I understand how you must feel,” or “I can see this is very important to you.”

E: Use an **Easy** manner with others. Try to be easy-going and use humor. Avoid bullying others or making them feel guilty.

Now, try incorporating one or more of the GIVE techniques next time you are with someone who frustrates, upsets, or annoys you. Use the chart below to track what happens.

Situation	The GIVE Technique You Used	How You Used the Technique (what you said/did)	How the Person Reacted	How it Made You Feel

Which of the GIVE techniques was most difficult for you? Explain.

What can you do the next time you are faced with a challenging situation? Which GIVE technique(s) will you most likely use?

Describe other situations where the GIVE method could be useful (for example, the workplace, a family gathering, or a phone conversation with a friend)?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Rely on Your Problem-Solving Ability Even When You Feel Hopeless

Objective

To identify one or more strategies to solve specific problems in your life and to develop a “problem-solving attitude” as a way to cope with life’s difficulties.

You Should Know

You might feel so hopeless about your current problems that you feel there is nothing you can do about them. But is that really true? In fact, there are very few problems that cannot be made better. You simply have to be creative about finding solutions. Solutions may not always be simple, nor do they always address the whole problem that is causing you distress. However, even small changes can make a big difference in your life. Having a problem-solving *attitude* is the most important part of getting over your depression and hopelessness. This assignment is intended to help you develop a problem-solving attitude toward your life, rather than just dwelling on your problems and feeling hopeless.

Finding solutions to the problems weighing you down requires a different way of thinking. Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” In other words, to solve your problems, you need to change the way you think.

There are many different approaches to solving problems. Cognitive psychologists tell us there are at least 60 different problem-solving strategies. This worksheet reviews five popular ones.

To understand how you can take different approaches to the same problem, consider an example, John, who described himself as being “hopelessly stuck” in his life. John was depressed because his wife had just left him, taking their two small children. He had a low-paying job and was deep in debt. He could barely afford to pay his rent and buy food. He could not see any way to make his life better, until he decided to try some new problem-solving strategies. Here are the different strategies John used to get “unstuck.” These may help you, too.

Break your problem into small solvable steps.

John knew there are two ways to get out of debt – make more money and spend less money. He decided to look for small ways to do both. He was able to save over \$100/month by getting rid of his cable TV and just watching shows on Netflix. He also found he could make money by selling things on eBay. This seemed too easy, so he began to look at other simple ways to change his finances.

Can you think of two or three small things you can do that might impact your problem? Write them below.

Ask for help.

When people are depressed, they tend to isolate themselves, forgetting that there are many people who can help with their problems. John was a veteran and found free counseling advice as well as free financial advice at veteranscrisisline.net, a service of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Other free advice and support can be found through places of worship or community service organizations — and remember your network of friends and relatives. Write down several people or organizations that could give you help.

Try a brainstorming session.

Sometimes you have to be really creative to solve a problem. Brainstorming is best done in a group of four people or more, but it can be done with just one other person. The idea of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions to a problem as possible without worrying about whether they are realistic solutions or not. Make a list of all the possible solutions, no matter how far-fetched they may be. Then, review the list and find a solution that is most practical and most likely to succeed.

John had a brainstorming session with his brother Matt. They came up with a list of more than 100 ways to make extra money. Eventually, John decided to borrow Matt's lawn mower and he began cutting his neighbors lawns for \$25 a lawn.

Write down a problem you can brainstorm solutions for.

Write down the names of people who can help you brainstorm.

Try brainstorming solutions to this problem for at least 30 minutes *without censoring any solutions*. The purpose of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions as possible, and then choose the ones that seem the most likely to succeed.

Write down all your brainstorming ideas on a separate piece of paper and then write down the two or three best solutions here.

Challenge the assumptions about the nature of your problems.

Often it is hard to see new solutions when you are viewing your problems through false assumptions. Try making a list of all the reasons your problems are unsolvable, and then sit down with a trusted friend or a professional and determine which of your reasons are not based in fact.

John assumed he could not get a better job because he barely finished high school and had no real skills. Over time, he realized neither of these assumptions was true. Through a friend, he found a job salvaging automobile parts, where he was making twice what he made at his previous job. John enrolled in a school to learn to be an auto mechanic, which he felt would be a permanent solution to his money problems.

Write down any assumptions you have about your problem and then ask someone you trust to help decide if they are true or false.

Root Cause Analysis.

You might only view a problem as it exists in the present. However, serious problems usually go far back in your life. Identifying the root causes means going back to where the problem might have originated. Understanding the root cause can give you deeper insight into what is the underlying cause of a problem.

During therapy, John talked about when he started to feel hopeless and powerless. It was not when his wife left him. It was not when he left the military. He remembered having these feelings when he was just nine years old, and his parents were getting a divorce. He remembered that his mother was very depressed, and his father was distant and always drinking. John felt perhaps his own divorce triggered memories about this time and made him identify with his parents. He eventually realized he did not have to relive his parents' mistakes, but instead could make his own choices and certainly be a more active parent with his own children.

Write down your thoughts on what could be some of the root causes of your current problems.

Secret of Success: When you practice problem solving, you are working your survival muscle and getting mentally stronger, much like working out in the gym makes you stronger. Try focusing on solutions throughout the day. Even when faced with small problems, be aware that you are always finding solutions.

What to Do

What are the problem-solving strategies you think could be most helpful to you?

On the chart below, see how often you can use problem-solving strategies, noting the situation and the outcome.

Situation	Problem to Solve	Strategy	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

What obstacles did you encounter in trying to solve problems?

Are there any problems in your life you think are unsolvable? What are other ways to cope with these issues? Describe.

Do you know anyone who could be a mentor in helping you develop better coping skills? Is there anything preventing you from talking to this person on a regular basis?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Healthy Personal Boundaries

Objective

To identify ways to establish and maintain healthy boundaries.

You Should Know

Personal boundaries are defined by the physical and emotional limits you establish with other people. They are the unspoken rules you have about personal closeness in every relationship, whether it is with your boss, your friends, or your loved ones. Boundaries exist to define how you are separate from others so you can be in healthy contact with other people without becoming enmeshed or disconnected. You can have meaningful relationships without taking on others' distress and problems – and without being isolated and alone.

Boundaries vary based on family, culture, personality, situation, values, and priorities – among other factors. When you do not have *clear* personal boundaries, you may feel you are controlled by another person. When your personal boundaries are too *rigid*, you may feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. When you have healthy personal boundaries, you recognize each individual is unique, with distinct emotions, needs, and values. You are able to communicate what you need from other people, while respecting their own point of view.

As you develop insight about your personal boundaries, you will develop healthy and mutually rewarding relationships. Use this worksheet to help you think about your personal boundaries and the things you can do differently in your relationships to maintain healthy boundaries.

What to Do

The following are statements that reflect healthy approaches to personal boundaries. Rate each statement from 1 to 3, where 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = always.

_____ My behavior appropriately fits situations and my relationships with others.

_____ I look to myself first to fulfill my personal needs.

_____ I reveal my personal thoughts and feelings to people I trust.

_____ I seek physical and/or emotional intimacy with people who care about me.

_____ Others share with me in healthy and respectful ways.

_____ I make my own decisions.

_____ I focus on my needs and goals without being influenced by others.

_____ I consider the consequences of my decisions and how they affect others.

- _____ I do not allow people to take advantage of me.
- _____ I maintain my integrity no matter what other people say or believe.
- _____ I am able to take care of myself when I feel emotionally vulnerable.
- _____ I am aware when someone infringes on my rights.
- _____ I am able to say 'no' if I feel someone is asking for something I do not wish to give.
- _____ I am aware of the personal boundaries of others and respect them.
- _____ I avoid taking advantage of others.
- _____ When appropriate I am flexible with my limits.
- _____ My boundaries are grounded in my priorities, goals, and values.
- _____ I avoid situations that can harm me emotionally, physically, psychologically, or in other ways.
- _____ I don't change my opinions or do something against my values in order to get someone to like me.
- _____ I don't allow people to take advantage of my time or money.
- _____ I trust myself and the decisions I make about my relationships.
- _____ When in doubt, I seek advice from people I trust, but I still make up my own mind.
- _____ I have a clear idea about who I am and what I want from life.
- _____ I recognize that people are not "mind readers" and I clearly communicate my needs, desires, and feelings.
- _____ I am assertive and still consider the rights and needs of others.

Total Score: _____

If you scored 25 – 40 points, you have established clear healthy personal boundaries.

If you scored 41 – 58 points, you might have to address some issues with personal boundaries.

If you scored 59 or more points, you have significant challenges around establishing healthy personal boundaries.

Review your answers and choose an area where you experience challenges. Describe an incident that illustrates a problem you have experienced.

How will your life be different if you establish and maintain healthy boundaries?

Describe what boundaries may be flexible or negotiable in some situations.

Describe what boundaries are non-negotiable.

Describe how establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries can build your self-respect.

Reflection on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

I Feel Disrespected in My Relationships

Objective

To identify ways to increase your self-respect and improve your relationships.

You Should Know

Sometimes relationships feel one-sided, like you are doing all the work, or you are the only one who cares. You may hang on too tightly to your partner, afraid you will be abandoned. People in your life might criticize or humiliate you. You might frequently reach out to friends for validation, reassurance, or praise. Or you might stop talking to a family member after your feelings are hurt.

Which of the following statements describes you? Check all that apply.

- Other people often take me for granted.
- I worry constantly that my partner/friend/family member doesn't care about me.
- I feel threatened when my partner/friend/family member spends time with other people.
- It is difficult for me to express myself.
- I am afraid to make other people angry at me.
- People I care about do not listen to me; I rarely feel "heard."
- I will do almost anything to avoid a confrontation.
- It is very important for me to get approval from others.
- I sometimes act "fake" so other people will like me.
- People describe me as overly sensitive or dramatic, or as taking things out of context.
- When I am alone, I feel empty and worthless.
- I never think I am good enough.
- I would rather be in a bad relationship than be alone.
- I tend to push people away when they get too close.
- I am terrified of being hurt.

Review the statements you have checked off and write down your thoughts about the ones that concern you the most.

What to Do

In order to have healthy relationships, you first need to respect yourself. This means that you value your own feelings and opinions. You ask for what you want, need, and deserve. You are honest with yourself and others, and you are comfortable being authentic. You treat yourself with respect and dignity. You make yourself heard and understood.

The letters F – A – S – T are an easy way to remember the rules for respecting yourself:

F: Be **f**air in your interactions with others to get your needs met. Avoid taking advantage of other people.

A: **A**pologize when necessary, but avoid apologizing for the way you feel. No need to say sorry when there is nothing to apologize for!

S: **S**tick to your values. Do not compromise your morals and values in order to be accepted by other people, or to gain affection.

T: Be **T**ruthful. Avoid lying, acting helpless, or exaggerating.

Now, ask someone you trust to role play with you. Think of situations when you felt uncomfortable or disrespected, and then incorporate one or more of the **FAST** techniques. Use the following chart to track what happens.

Which of the FAST techniques was most difficult for you? Explain.

What can you do the next time you are faced with a challenging situation? Which FAST technique(s) will you most likely use?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Asking for something from someone else can be hard, especially if you fear rejection or anger in response. Or, you might feel unworthy of attention or assistance. Self-respect is knowing you have the right to make requests of others. Simple requests are just that – asking someone else to do something or provide you with something simple in response to a problem you might be having, or to fulfill something you need.

Do you have difficulty asking for directions if you are lost? Do you have trouble requesting an appointment change at work? Do you struggle to ask for a favor, a ride, or assistance with a task? You can learn to make simple requests using a few steps, making it more likely you will experience a positive outcome.

For example, imagine your neighbors play loud music at night when you are trying to sleep. You are tired of it but you are unclear how to ask them to stop. Here is a three-step approach to solving the problem:

- 1. Identify the problem:** “I can hear your music and it is keeping me up at night.”
- 2. Use a kind statement:** “Would you mind lowering the volume after 11 PM, please?” (Other options: “I would appreciate it if you would . . .” or “It would be helpful if you could . . .” or “I was wondering if you would . . .”)
- 3. Use a grateful statement:** “I would be so grateful,” “It would really mean a lot to me,” “Thank you for listening to me,” “I really appreciate your help,” and so on.

Now, list interpersonal problems you are having and write down how you would like to make simple requests in the coming week or so to resolve or minimize the problem. Be specific about what you would say, using the three-step model above.

1. Problem statement: _____

Kind statement: _____

Grateful statement: _____

2. Problem statement: _____

Kind statement: _____

Grateful statement: _____

3. Problem statement: _____

Kind statement: _____

Grateful statement: _____

In the next week or so, keep track of any situations when you used the Simple Request skill to help you improve your interpersonal effectiveness.

Situation/ With whom?	What was the conflict about?	What was your simple request?	What was the outcome?

Reflections on This Exercise

What parts of using the Simple Request skill worked well for you?

How did it feel when you used this skill?

Did you experience challenges using a Simple Request skill? If you struggled, whom can you talk with to review what went well and what did not go so well? How would you like to go about asking them for help? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Using the Repeat Technique to Make Communication More Effective

Objective

To help you lower your reactivity and assert yourself calmly with the Repeat Technique.

What to Do

Do you find it difficult to get what you want and need from other people? Do you expend a lot of energy blaming others or trying to get them to change? Do you frequently get into arguments and feel frustrated when you are not being heard?

The Repeat Technique is a simple strategy you can use when another person is not responding to what you are saying. You can use this technique to lower your “reactivity,” or tendency to argue or debate. Instead of engaging in the conversation, you simply pick a short phrase that makes your point, then repeat that phrase over and over in response to the other person.

Instead of getting pulled into an argument or becoming angry or accusatory, you can use this technique to acknowledge the other person’s needs and wants and then state what you want in a calm, strong, clear voice.

Example #1: *Your mother insists you attend a holiday dinner with the family. But you need emotional space from them right now and have made other plans. Your Repeat Technique phrase might go something like this:*

“Thanks, Mom, for the invitation. I know you’d like me to attend but I have made other plans this year.”

Then, when Mom attempts to argue or make you feel guilty or ashamed, you just calmly return to that phrase and repeat it. There is no benefit to getting into an argument or discussion. Just say the same phrase over and over again.

Example #2: *Your child is whining and about to throw a tantrum because you have told him to stop playing a video game and start his homework. Rather than getting engaged in a battle, try the Repeat Technique with a statement like this:*

“I know you want to keep playing your game, but playtime is over for today. Turn off the game now and get out your homework.” No matter what your child says or does, just repeat this phrase until your child performs the requested behavior.

Now, write down five examples of conflicts you have had where the Repeat Technique might have been appropriate.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In the next week or so, keep track of any situations when you used the Repeat Technique.

Situation/ With whom?	What was the conflict about?	What Repeat Technique phrase(s) did you use?	What was the outcome?

Reflections on This Exercise

What parts of the Repeat Technique worked well for you?

What was the main obstacle you encountered practicing this exercise?

If you struggled with a certain aspect of the Repeat Technique, whom can you talk with to review what went well and what did not go well? How would you like to go about asking them for help?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Loving Kindness Meditation

Objective

To practice the Loving Kindness Meditation to increase your compassion for yourself and other people.

You Should Know

The Loving Kindness Meditation is a simple exercise where you recite positive statements about yourself and others. Practicing this meditation can immediately improve your mood because it allows you to focus on the positive things in your life and your sense of purpose. The effects of this practice can be surprisingly long-lasting. Studies show that the regular practice of this meditation can increase your resiliency and bring you a sense of fulfillment you may have never thought possible.

This meditation has five simple steps. You begin by expressing positive statements for yourself followed by positive statements for someone you care about. Then, you send out positive wishes toward someone you feel neutral about, followed by positive statements toward someone you dislike. Finally, you direct your positive wishes out to the universe.

This meditation takes just a few minutes, but it goes a long way in opening up your positive emotions and letting go of your negative judgments.

What to Do

1. Close your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed throughout the whole visualization and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, relax. Take a deep breath in, then breathe out.

2. Imagine yourself in a place where you feel complete satisfaction and have an all-encompassing sense of well-being. Perhaps you are sitting on a beach at sunset with the warm glow of the sun on your skin. Perhaps you are in your own living room, surrounded by people who love you. Think of a place that makes you very happy.

3. Say the following phrases out loud:

I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for myself.

Now visualize someone you care about and say: **I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.**

Now visualize someone you feel neutral about – someone you neither like nor dislike, and say: **I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.**

Now think of someone you dislike, and say: **I wish you happiness, calm, and peace.**

Finally, direct your loving kindness to the universe, and say: **May all beings everywhere find happiness, calm, and peace.**

Now, practice this meditation daily for the next week. Record on the following chart.

Day	Did You Practice the Meditation? (Y / N)	How Did You Feel Before Meditating?	How Did You Feel After?	Notes
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you find challenging about practicing this exercise? Describe.

Has this exercise changed how you feel about yourself? Explain.

Has this exercise improved your ability to extend loving kindness to others, particularly people you dislike? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
