WE NEED TO TALK: UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN EMS

Developed for the 2015 Virginia EMS Conference
Who am I?
Why are you here?

- To share your communications nightmares
- To learn more about effective communication
- To identify various methods of communication
- To recognize barriers that can impede effective communication
- To learn how to navigate around those barriers
What is communication?

- Communication:
  - The art of transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another.
  - The process of meaningful interaction among human beings.

  - Webster's Dictionary, 2009
What is communication?

- Effective communication means:
  - conveying messages clearly and unambiguously.
  - receiving information with as little distortion as possible.
Effective communicating requires...

- Trust
- Maturity
- Perspective
- Ability to escalate and de-escalate
Who we communicate with

If you are doing it badly, potential for negative impact exists on multiple levels
What we are taught

- Reminiscent of grade school
  - Kindergarten – the focus is on sending and receiving messages, sharing experiences, learning about emotions, translating nonverbal messages, and practicing good listening skills.
What we are taught

1st Grade

- awareness of language choices and demonstrating more vocal quality (tone, pitch, rate, and volume).
What we are taught

- 2nd Grade
  - identify relationships between language choices and roles, orally summarize a story, maintain conversations with other children and adults, and respond to another’s emotions.
What we are taught

- 3rd Grade
  - understanding of the role communication plays in various cultural settings and small groups.
The essence of communication

- Personal process
- Occurs between people
- Used as a means to influence others
- Expression of thoughts/emotions through words/actions
- Tool for controlling/motivating people
- A social and emotional process
Communication process simplified

- Messenger with a message
- Encoding
- Channel for communication
- Receive receives the message and decodes
Communication process simplified

- This process works as follows:
  - The messenger has something to communicate, a message.
  - The messenger will encode his message with words, behavior and body language that he senses will help him to best communicate this message according to his intent.
  - The message will go through a channel, a means of communication such as e-mail, face to face or phone conversation, letter, presentation.
  - The receiver will then decode the message using conventions, cultural or contextual background, and language skills.
  - The message he receives might or might not meet the intent of the messenger.
General communication issues

- Problems with communication can pop up at every stage of the communication process.

- At each stage, there is the potential for misunderstanding and confusion based on multiple variables.
Your opinion please

What stands in the way of effective communications?
Barsriers

- Language Barriers
  - Different languages / accent / dialect
  - Vocabulary
  - Semantic gaps
Barriers

• Cultural Barriers
  ▫ Age
  ▫ Education
  ▫ Gender
  ▫ Social Status
  ▫ Cultural Background
  ▫ Temperament
  ▫ Health
  ▫ Beauty / Popularity

▪ Religion
▪ Political Belief
▪ Ethics
▪ Values
▪ Motives
▪ Assumptions
▪ Aspirations
▪ Rules/Regulations
▪ Priorities
Barriers

- Organizational Barriers
  - Poor Organizational Culture /Climate
  - Stringent Rules/Regulations
  - Status / Relationship Complexities
  - Inadequate Facilities / Outdated Equipment
  - Opportunities Of Growth /Improvement
  - Poor Lighting / Noise
  - Staff Shortages
Barriers

- Interpersonal Barriers
  - Employers
    - Lack of trust in employees/volunteers
    - Lack of knowledge of non-verbal clues
    - Different experiences
    - No consideration for employee/volunteer needs
    - Wish to capture authority
    - Fear of losing power or control
Barriers

- Interpersonal Barriers
  - Employees/volunteers
    - Lack of motivation
    - Lack of cooperation / trust
    - Fear of penalty
    - Poor relationship with the employer.
Most common forms of communication

- Spoken Word
- Written Word
- Visual Images
- Body Language
It's not what you say...

- Be professional
  - You are always being judged by what you say and how you say it
  - You can be a great EMS provider and yet you can be a total jerk (offensive, aggressive, uncaring, overly lighthearted, etc.)
  - You need to be able to read the patient, the family and the overall situation
Its Greek to me

- Terms / Language
  - Challenges when people are new and you assume that they know what you are talking about
  - Challenges when communicating with folks from other organizations (they don’t speak your language)
  - Challenges when communicating with patients and families (they don’t read your textbooks)
Hearing vs. listening

- **Hearing**
  - Physical process, natural, passive

- **Listening**
  - Physical as well as mental process, active, learned process, a skill
Can you hear me now?
Active listening

- Listening
  - One of the most important skills you can have.
  - Has a major impact on your job effectiveness
  - Has a major impact on the quality of your relationships with others.
Active listening

- Active listening:
  - Don’t just wait for your turn to talk
  - You should be able to repeat back the message in your own words
  - You don’t have to agree with it, just understand it
Face to face

- There are three basic elements in any face-to-face communication:
  - words
  - tone of voice, pitch and emphasis
  - body language
Face to face

- These three elements account differently for the meaning of the message:
  - Words account for 7%
  - Voice tone, pitch, and emphasis accounts for 38%
  - Body language accounts for 55% of the message.
What are you looking at?

- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
  - smile
  - raised eyebrows
  - furrowed forehead
- Posture/body language
Non-verbal communications

- **Eye contact:**
  - signals interest in others.
  - eye contact with audiences increases the speaker's credibility.
  - making eye contact opens the flow of communication and conveys interest, concern, warmth and credibility.
Non-verbal communications

- Facial expressions
Non-verbal communications

- Smiling transmits:
  - Happiness
  - Friendliness
  - Warmth
  - Liking

- If you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm and approachable.

- Smiling is often contagious.
Non-verbal communications

- Posture and body orientation:
  - You communicate numerous messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive and friendly.
  - Furthermore, interpersonal closeness results when you face each another person. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided.
Non-verbal communications

- Personal space:
  - An approximate area surrounding an individual in which other people should not physically violate in order for them to feel comfortable and secure.
  - This space is highly variable and subjective.
Texting

- Recipe for disaster when it comes to effective communication
- Instant communication/gratification
- No social boundaries
Email

- The average office worker now sends or receives 121 emails a day (2015)
- E-mail remains the most common form of communication in the business space
The email reality

- We misunderstand the tone of an email almost 50% of the time

  - *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
Email

- Easy yet challenging - why?
  - Emails are official correspondence
  - Re-read prior to sending
  - Make sure there is a pathway for questions
Telephone

- Be clear as to who you are and what your message is
- Wait for your turn to speak
- Never, ever hang up on anyone
Written communications

- Supervisors/managers usually have to document:
  - Adverse/unusual situations
  - Employee actions/disciplinary actions
  - Reference proper sections of agency – or State – policy
  - Watch “little things” – such as spelling, grammar, and
Verbal Communication Don'ts

- **Do not:**
  - instantly react and mutter something in anger.
  - use technical terms and verbiage not understood by majority of people.
  - speak too fast or too slow.
  - speak in inaudible surroundings, as you won’t be heard.
Verbal Communication Don'ts

Do not:

- assume that everybody understands you.
- interrupt the speaker.
- jump to the conclusion that you have understood every thing.
Recipe for effective communications

- Focus on language and pronunciation.
- Work on voice tone, pitch, and emphasis.
- Work on body language.
Recipe for effective communications

- Think, then speak.
- Do not speak too fast.
- Use simple vocabulary.
- Do not speak only to impress someone.
- Look presentable and confident.
Recipe for effective communications

- Listen more
- Look at the way others communicate – emulate when you see something that works
Take home message

- Communication isn’t easy but it does not have to be difficult
- Practice effectively communicating with those around you and you will become better at it.
Thank you...

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