

**“WE NEED TO TALK” - UNDERSTANDING  
THE PROCESS OF EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS FOR EMS PROVIDERS AND  
MANAGERS**



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*Developed for the 2012 Virginia EMS Symposium*

# 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

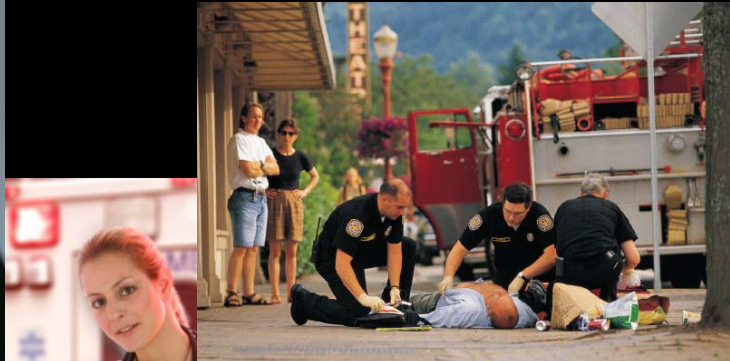
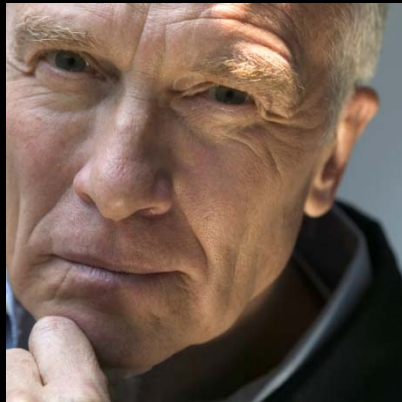
# What is communication?

- 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

## 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

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





# What we are taught

- 2<sup>nd</sup> 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

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
  - understanding of the role communication plays in various cultural settings and small groups.



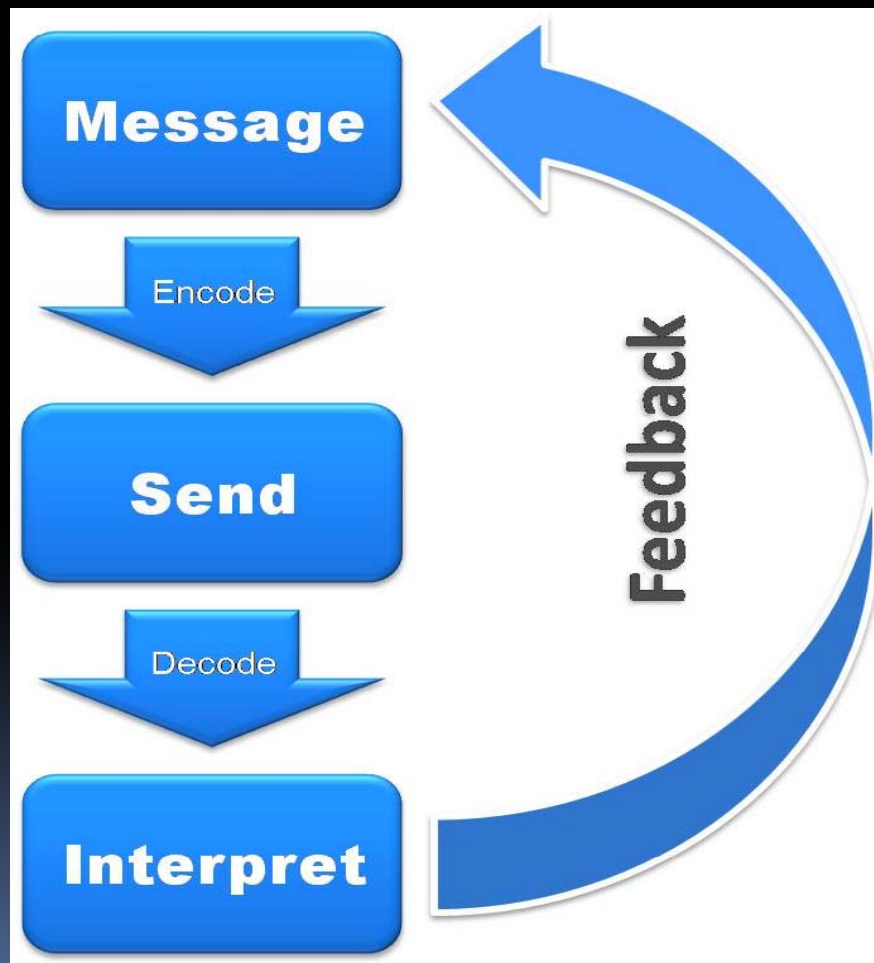
# The essence of communication

- 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 networks

- Formal Network:
  - Virtually vertical
  - Per chain of command within the hierarchy
- Informal Network:
  - Freedom to move in any direction
  - Ability to skip formal chain of command
  - Likely to satisfy social and emotional needs
  - Can facilitate task accomplishment

# Communication process simplified



- Messenger with a message
- Encoding
- Channel for communication
- Receiver 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 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?





# Barriers

- 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
- Lack of knowledge of non-verbal clues
- Different experiences
- No consideration for employee needs
- Wish to capture authority
- Fear of losing power of control
- Bypassing and informational overloading

# Barriers

- Interpersonal Barriers
  - Employees
    - 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



# Its 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, but don't be a jerk about it (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
  - body language

# Face to face

- These three elements account differently for the meaning of the message:
  - Words account for 7%
  - Tone of voice 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

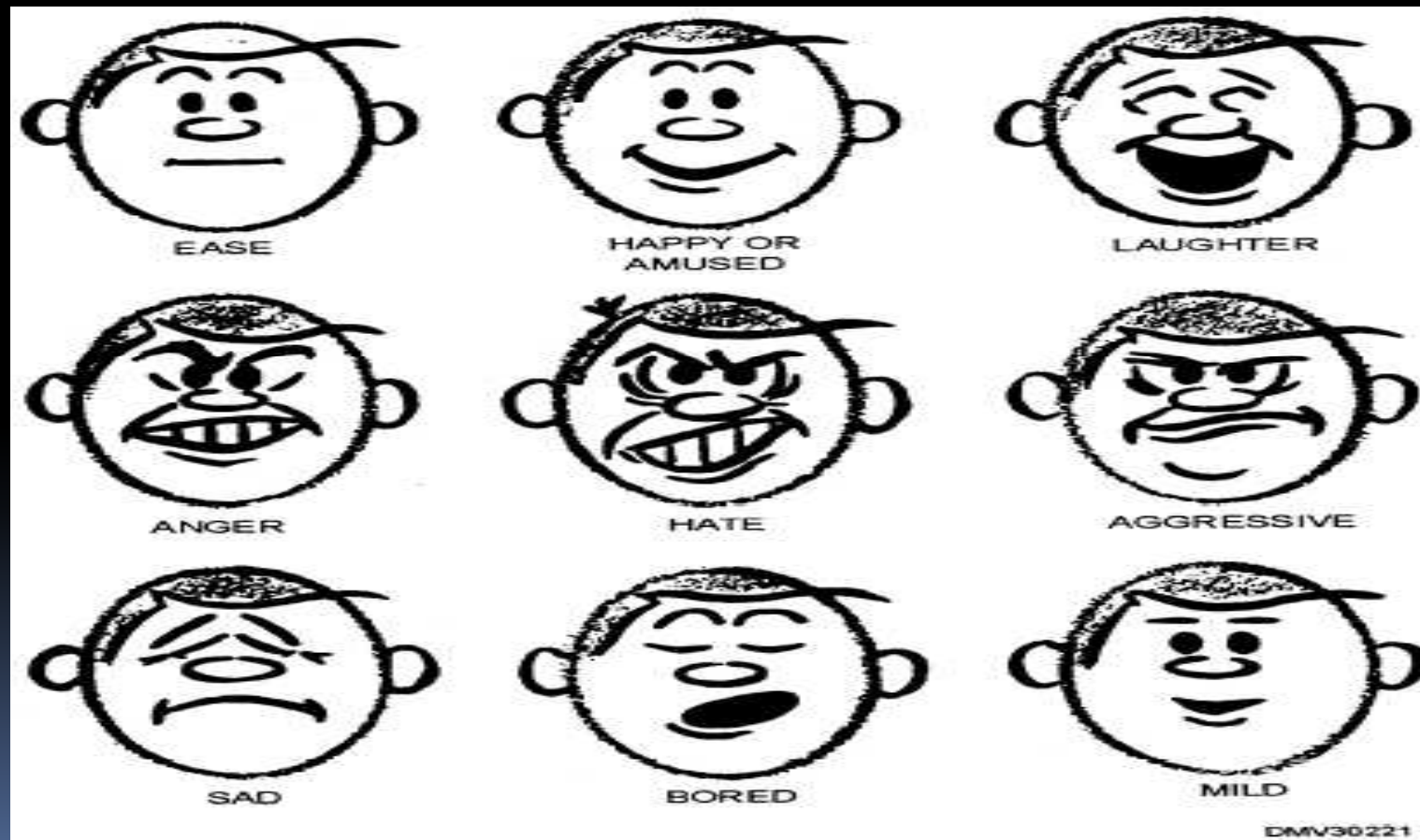
- Eye contact:
  - signals interest in others.
  - eye contact with audiences increases the speaker's credibility.
  - making eye contact opens the flow of communication and conveys interest, concern, warmth and credibility.





# 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



# 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



# Telephone

- Use the appropriate tone of voice
- “If there is anything I can do, just call me back”
- Use the words hello, goodbye, good morning, etc. – don't forget basic etiquette

# Written communications

- Most common – patient care documents
  - Goes much further than “if you didn’t write it down, you didn’t do it”
  - Stop – be clear, concise, readable (today and in the future both by you and by others)
  - Be careful with non-standard abbreviations

# Written communications

- Factual statements only
  - Don't lie
  - No social commentary
  - No opinions (he was drunk, she was high)



# 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 and grammar

# Email

- 90% of all Internet users utilize email
  - *Stanford University*
- The average office workers sends or receives 200 emails a day

# Email

- We misunderstand the tone of an email almost 50% of the time
  - *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*

# Email

- Easy but challenging - why?
  - This is official correspondence
  - Re-read prior to sending
  - Watch spelling, punctuation and grammar
    - DON'T YELL AT PEOPLE
  - Make sure there is a pathway for questions
  - Make sure it's reflective of the position that you hold

# 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 modulation.
- Work on body language.
- Think , then speak.

# Recipe for effective communications

- 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
- Avoid reading or watching or listening unwanted literature, gossip, media presentations, etc.
- Look at the way others communicate – emulate when you see something that works

# Questions

Thank you for listening !!!  
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