

Overview

How Can My Parents Understand Me?

Intention

To explore ways to successfully communicate with parents and better understand each other.

Principle 5

Through thoughts, words and actions, we live the Truth we know.

Getting Connected

Activity: “Constructive” Listening

- Blocks, Legos®, or other building materials

Opening

Exploration

Story: A communication between twelve-year-old Jesus and his parents, Luke 2:41-52

- Copies of Bible passage (See lesson.)

Option 1, Speak, Ask and Listen & Role-Play

- Copies of communication cue cards, 2 per teen (See end of lesson.)
- Pens or pencils
- Flip chart or wipe off board, markers
- Prepare Ahead:** On a flip chart or board, write out the four, fill-in-the-blank statements from the communication cue cards twice. Title one: “Mary’s script.” Title the other: “Jesus’ script.” Copy cue cards on pages 41-42, back-to-back.

Option 2, Appreciation Letter

- Paper
- Pens or pencils

Closing

Additional Lesson Ideas

Alternate Story: “Unspoken Years”

□ *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul III*, p. 150

For the Facilitator

The main story in today’s lesson is about Jesus at the temple when he is twelve years old with a focus on the breakdown in communication between Jesus and his parents. Teens may wonder why Mary and Joseph did not miss Jesus for an entire day after he left for the temple. You may want to offer them the following information.

Passover is a seven-day Jewish festival that celebrates the escape of the Jews from Egypt. Back when Jesus lived, all Jewish males thirteen and older were required to go to Jerusalem to attend the Passover celebration. Because of this requirement, it would be common for friends and family from the same city to mingle and watch out for each other as all were traveling at the same time.

Unlike other lessons in which the teacher is mainly a facilitator, the first option in this lesson invites you to teach teens a process called Nonviolent CommunicationSM, developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, and then to facilitate the process in role-play situations. Because teens will need guidance as they learn and practice the process, it is critical that this activity be sponsor-led. Although it is a fairly simple, four-step process, it’s important for you to feel comfortable with it yourself before teaching it. You may want to peruse the CNVC website (see below), create your own communication statements using the cue cards at the end of the lesson and practice them with a family member prior to Sunday.

Learning and practicing Nonviolent CommunicationSM can be a very rich and rewarding experience. We strongly recommend offering this lesson as a two-week session.

Other Resources

For more information on Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent CommunicationSM, go to: www.cnvc.org or order his book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

From the CNVC website: “Nonviolent CommunicationSM (NVC) is sometimes referred to as compassionate communication. Its purpose is to strengthen our ability to inspire compassion from others and to respond compassionately to others and to ourselves. NVC guides us to reframe how we express ourselves and hear others by focusing our consciousness on what we are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting.”

Lesson
4

How Can My Parents Understand Me?



Supplies

Blocks, Legos® or other building materials

Intention

To explore ways to successfully communicate with parents and better understand each other.

Getting Connected

(Pre-session)

Activity: “Constructive” Listening

Invite teens to build something with blocks, working in teams of up to five people. One teen is the “contractor” and gives instructions to the “carpenters” as to what they want to build. The carpenters cannot make a move without getting instructions. The goal is for team members to communicate in a way that builds the structure that is in the contractor’s mind.

Opening

(10-12 minutes)

Check-In

Say: Let’s go around the circle, say your name and share one thing you appreciate about one of your parents or a guardian that you also appreciate about yourself.

Centering Meditation

Say: As we come together today, let’s prepare for a time of meditation. For this meditation, I invite you to lay on your backs with your head towards the center of the circle, and join hands with the person on either side of you. Relax and find your own rhythm of breathing. Feel the energy moving around the circle from hand to hand...*Pause...*

Say: In Unity, we know that the presence of God dwells within each person. We know that the love of God dwells within each of us, too...*Pause...* Mother-Father love dwells within me now. You may say that to yourself silently. Mother-Father love dwells within me now. Feel that love warming your heart. Feel that love lighting up all the dark places within you...*Pause...* Mother-Father love dwells within me now...*Pause...*

Say: As you feel that divine love filling your heart with warmth and light, imagine it radiating out from your heart, down your arms and into your hands...flowing into the hand of the person on your right and moving

through them to the person on their right...and around the circle it flows...*Pause*...Feel the love that you are receiving through your left hand. Notice how it flows up through your arm, into your heart, and continues its journey out your other hand and around the circle...warming and lightening everyone's heart as it goes...Mother-Father love flows through me now...*Pause*...Let's say that together: Mother-Father love flows through me now...*Pause*...I am that love. Let's say that together. I am that love...*Pause*...and now one more time silently to yourself...Amen.

Exploration

(35-45 minutes)



Note: Teens may wonder why Mary and Joseph did not miss Jesus for an entire day. See “For the Facilitator,” page 33, for information that explains this.

Story: A communication between twelve-year-old Jesus and his parents, Luke 2:41-52

Read or invite a teen to read the Bible passage to the group.

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. When he was twelve years old, they went to the feast as they always did. After the feast days were over, they started home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that Jesus was with them in the group, they traveled for a whole day. Then they began to look for him among their family and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him there. After three days they found Jesus sitting in the Temple with the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers. When Jesus' parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I were very worried about you and have been looking for you.”


Jesus said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?” But they did not understand the meaning of what he said.

Jesus went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. But his mother kept in her mind all that had happened. Jesus became wiser and grew physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.

—Luke 2:41-52



Tip

Questions serve as discussion starters. Not all questions need to be asked. More advanced questions are indicated by a shovel for “digging deeper.” 

Discussion

- What is happening in the story?
- What did Jesus do without telling his parents?
- What did his parents do when they discovered that he was gone?
- Where did they find him?
- What did Mary say? What feeling does she express?
- How did Jesus respond?
- What do you think Jesus’ parents wanted or needed from Jesus?
- How did Jesus act towards his parents after the temple incident?
- What did Jesus *assume* about his parents? Was his assumption correct?
- How do you think Jesus felt when his parents didn’t understand where he was? What do you think he needed?
- How has this story happened in your own life? Who will share about a time when you assumed that your parents understood where you were going or what you were doing when they didn’t? What happened?
- Who can share about a time when your parents did not clearly communicate what they expected of you? What happened?
- How does communication or lack of it impact the relationship you have with your parents?
- What are some of the different ways you can more effectively communicate with your parents besides face-to-face?



Think of someone you can communicate with quite well. What are the qualities that make that work so well? How can you apply those qualities to communication with your parents?

- Our fifth Unity principle says: Through thoughts, words and actions, we live the Truth we know. This is why communication is so important. Our words reflect our truth. What is one small thing that you can tell your parents this week that is a truth about you that is important for them to know?

Principle 5

Through thoughts, words and actions, we live the Truth we know.



Supplies

Copies of communication cue cards, 2 per teen (See end of lesson.)
Pens or pencils
Flip chart or wipe off board, markers

Creative Experience

Option 1, Part One: Speak, Ask and Listen

Prepare ahead: On a flip chart or board, write out the four, fill-in-the-blank statements on cue cards *twice*. Title one: Mary’s script. Title the other: Jesus’ script. Copy cue cards on pages 41-42 back-to-back for part two.

Say: In today’s story, Jesus and his parents had some challenges with communication, just like everyone does with their parents from time to time. Jesus made some assumptions that led to his parents not understanding him. In order for us to be understood, we need to be able to communicate what we need or want in a way that allows people to really hear us. That is something we are going to practice today, using a process called “Nonviolent CommunicationSM,” developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg.

Resource: For more information on Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent CommunicationSM, go to: www.cnvc.org.

Say: Nonviolent CommunicationSM establishes a heart to heart connection between people that allows each person to communicate feelings, needs and desires in a positive, non-judgmental way. Nonviolent CommunicationSM inspires us to express what is alive in us with empathy and compassion for ourselves and the other person.

Say: Right now, we’re going to try this technique together. Let’s pretend that we are Jesus’ mother. As a group, we are going to create four clear statements about how we feel when Jesus acts a certain way and what we want and need from him in the future. Let’s fill in these blanks.

Say: The first step is to observe and express what it is that the other does or says that concerns you. So, as Mary, what does Jesus do that concerns you? Simply state the action without using judgmental or defensive language.

1. When you (do or say...) _____,

Say: The second step in this process is to identify and express how you feel (your emotion or body sensation) when the other does or says this. It’s okay to identify more than one feeling. As his mother, what do you feel when Jesus leaves without telling you?

2. I feel _____,

Say: The third step is to acknowledge that you feel this way because you have a universal human need. As Mary, you feel this way because you have a basic need for something. What is that need? (Try not to use “you statements,” as in “I need *you* to...” Stay with the universal need—what *anyone* might need in this situation, i.e. peace, understanding.)

3. because I need _____.

Say: The fourth step is to ask specifically for what you want in a way that does not demand, but rather allows the other person to make a free and thoughtful choice. What does Mary want to specifically request of Jesus in



Tip

Listen to all suggestions and then write out the essence of their responses as simply as possible, using non-evaluative language.

order for her needs to be met? This must be something the person can do now, requested in positive language.

4. Would you be willing to _____?

One example from Mary's point of view:

When you leave without telling us where you are going or asking our permission,

I feel scared and confused...

because I need the inner peace that comes from knowing the people I care about are safe.

Would you be willing to agree to ask for our permission whenever you want to go somewhere on your own?

Say: Now let's try the same technique with Jesus. What does he want to say to his mother? (Follow the same format as above.)

One example from Jesus' point of view:

When you question me about what I am doing in the temple,

I feel sad and misunderstood...

because I need understanding and support in my spiritual life.

Would you be willing to tell me how you feel after hearing that? or

Would you be willing to agree to take me to the temple from time to time so I can speak with the rabbis?

After the group has completed both statements, ask: Who will read what Mary has to say to her son? The rest of us will pretend to be Jesus as we listen to what Mom has to say. Remember that listening is just as important as speaking. And so when Mary is speaking, Jesus needs to listen and receive what she is saying with an open mind and heart. Sometimes, this isn't easy, but communication doesn't happen until someone is *heard*. One of the best ways to make sure this happens is to repeat back to the speaker what we have heard. Let's see if we can listen well enough to do that. Mary: Let's hear what you have to say!

After "Mary" has spoken, ask: What Jesus in the group can repeat back what you heard? **Then ask Mary:** Is that what you said? Do you feel heard?

Repeat the same process with the statement by Jesus.

Part Two: Communication Role-Play

Hand out a cue card and pencil to each teen and say: Now think about a specific situation in your relationship with your parents that has happened recently in which you felt misunderstood or where they said or did something that bothered you. Using your cue cards, write down what you would like to communicate to your parents using the four steps we just learned. You'll have about 3-5 minutes to complete this. Afterwards, we'll have a chance to practice our Nonviolent CommunicationSM through role-plays.

When everyone is finished, say: Who will volunteer to try out your communication in a role-play? Who would like to play the parent? As the parent, listen to your son or daughter and then respond. You may want to repeat back what you just heard, before you answer the request. Let's see what happens.

Coaching Tips

- Some teens playing parents may be “hard” on their “teens,” and may challenge them by ignoring them, acting angry or simply denying their request. Encourage the “teen” to stay centered and ask the parent to repeat what they heard. The teen also may want to consider making a different request—one that the parent may be more willing to grant, i.e. “Would you be willing to think about what I am asking and then we can talk again later?” Or “What would you need in order to consider my request at another time?”
- If a teen in a role-play gets “stuck” for something to say, invite the other teens in the group to offer suggestions.

Invite anyone who wants to practice to take a turn. Allow 3-5 minutes for each role-play.

After each role-play, ask:

- How did you feel as the teen?
- How did you feel as the parent?
- Audience: What did you notice?

In conclusion, say: I invite you to take these cue cards home to help you remember how to speak and ask for what you want and need. You might want to explain this technique to your parents and ask them to practice it with you. A good way to begin is to choose to speak about a minor issue or concern.



Tip

It is important that teens understand the process above before practicing it in the following real-life scenarios. You may want to offer Part Two of this experience again next week, as this can be a very rich and worthwhile process.



Supplies

Paper
Pens or pencils

Option 2, Appreciation Letter

Say: The road to understanding and trusting each other is paved with appreciation. Today you're going to write a letter of appreciation to your parents. Include the qualities you love about them, things they have said or done or any good times you have shared that are particularly meaningful to you. You may or may not want to share the letter with them when you're done. That is up to you.

Closing

(2-3 minutes)



Tip

If the group has a closing ritual, include it here.

Prayer and Affirmation

Say: Let's go around the circle and take turns speaking today's affirmation, which is: I can ask for what I need. After each person speaks the affirmation, the whole group will respond: I am listening. Let's try it. I'll go first. I can ask for what I need. (Group responds...) I am listening.

After everyone has spoken the affirmation, say: God, thank you for showing us a way to speak our needs and desires without sounding defensive or making demands. We are open to new understanding, trust, and love for each other as we communicate who we are. We are listening, dear Spirit. We are listening. Amen.



Supplies

Story "Unspoken Years," p. 150, *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul III*

Additional Lesson Ideas


This section offers additional story ideas. They can be used as an alternate to the main story/experience or as a base for creating an additional lesson on this topic.

Alternate Story: "Unspoken Years"

Say: Communication between parents and teens can become staticky. When that happens, the relationship can suffer. Our story today is about a teen who is dealing with a lot of static while trying to communicate with her parents.


Read or ask a teen to read the story to the group.

Discussion

- What is happening in this story?
- What do we know about the daughter?
- What do we know about her parents?
- What happened in the conversation between the mother and the daughter?
- How did the daughter feel?
- Where was she going?
- What happened at the retreat? How does this conversation affect her experience at the retreat?
- What do we know about the letter?
- How did she feel when she read it?
- What difference did the expression of appreciation make in the family?
- According to the daughter, who was responsible for creating the family's reality?
- How are you like this person?
- How does it make you feel when someone expresses appreciation of you?
- Think about a time when you had a breakdown in communication with your parents. What were the circumstances? What happened?
- What are the benefits of trying to communicate better with your parents?
-  What have you learned about communicating with your parents over the last few years? What works? What doesn't work?
- Our fifth Unity principle says: Through thoughts, words and actions, we live the Truth we know. This is why communication is so important. Our words reflect our truth. What is one thing that you appreciate about your parents or a parent that you are willing to tell them this week?



Tip

Questions serve as discussion starters. Not all questions need to be asked. More advanced questions are indicated by a shovel for "digging deeper." 

Principle 5

Through thoughts, words and actions, we live the Truth we know.

Nonviolent CommunicationSM

Cue Cards

1. When you (do or say...) _____,
2. I feel _____,
3. because I need _____.
4. Would you be willing to _____?

1. Identify what it is that the other did or said that concerns you.
2. Express how you feel when the other does or says this.
3. Identify what you need in your relationship with the other person.
4. Ask in a non-demanding way for what you want the other person to do that will help meet your need.

Other hints

- Invite the person to repeat what you said to make sure they really heard you.
- Listen to the other's response respectfully.
- If the other person wants some time to think things over, allow them time to do so.
- Ask for when you can expect a response, if that is what you would like.

Resource: For more information on Dr. Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent CommunicationSM, go to: www.cnvc.org.

Nonviolent CommunicationSM

Cue Cards

1. When you (do or say...) _____,
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3. because I need _____.
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Other hints

- Invite the person to repeat what you said to make sure they really heard you.
- Listen to the other's response respectfully.
- If the other person wants some time to think things over, allow them time to do so.
- Ask for when you can expect a response, if that is what you would like.

Resource: For more information on Dr. Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent CommunicationSM, go to: www.cnvc.org Authentic Relationships

Nonviolent CommunicationSM, developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, establishes a heart-to-heart connection between people that allows each person to communicate feelings, needs and desires in a positive, non-judgmental way. Nonviolent CommunicationSM inspires us to express what is alive in us with empathy and compassion for ourselves and the other person.

Here is further explanation of the four steps.

1. The first step is to observe and express what it is that the other does or says that concerns you without using judgmental or defensive language.
2. The second step is to identify and express how you feel (your emotion or body sensation) when the other does or says this. It's okay to identify more than one feeling.
3. The third step is to acknowledge that you feel this way because you have a universal human need. What is that need? Try not to use "you statements," as in "I need you to..." Stay with the universal need—what anyone might need in this situation, i.e. peace, understanding.
4. The fourth step is to ask specifically for what you want in a way that does not demand, but rather allows the other person to make a free and thoughtful choice. What do you want to specifically request of the other person in order for your need to be met? This must be something the person can do now, requested in positive language.

Nonviolent CommunicationSM, developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, establishes a heart-to-heart connection between people that allows each person to communicate feelings, needs and desires in a positive, non-judgmental way. Nonviolent CommunicationSM inspires us to express what is alive in us with empathy and compassion for ourselves and the other person.

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