

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication consists of all those messages we send without words. These wordless messages make up over 90% of the meaning in communication. The importance of understanding and appropriately using nonverbal communication is well documented in literature and research.

Researchers found that adolescents value social perspective-taking skills, including nonverbal language, that focus on another person more than skills that focus on a speaker's ideas or linguistics (Henry et al., 1995). Students may find that understanding another's perspective increases positive social interactions. People with social language deficits often miss nonverbal signals that are important for discerning others' viewpoints, leading to difficulty relating to peers, limited friendships, and even social isolation.

In order to relate to other people, a student must be able to make inferences based on an understanding of nonverbal messages. In this chapter, your students will identify and interpret facial expressions, gestures, posture, proximity, and wordless vocalizations (e.g., hmm, ah-ha, uh-huh, ahem, duh). For teaching purposes, the tasks in this unit isolate these components and then bring students back to interpreting them together. Ultimately, we interpret nonverbal messages in a holistic fashion rather than in a specific sequence.

Beyond observing and interpreting nonverbal communication, the goal of this unit is to help your students use nonverbal communication effectively. Many students with social language deficits don't have a clue about how their nonverbal language affects their listeners. These students can learn to communicate warmth, concern, and interest in their peers by appropriately using nonverbal communication. It's up to us to teach them. This unit provides many opportunities and includes scenarios for friends, acquaintances, family, and authority figures.

Before beginning this unit, determine what nonverbal communication your student habitually misses and in what context. Ask yourself the following:

- Does the student observe and interpret context clues available in a social situation?
- Can he scan a situation and make a logical guess about how others are behaving, and consequently, how he should behave and communicate?
- How does he interact with peers in the classroom as compared to at a football game or school dance?
- How well does he interpret nonverbal cues in a noisy, crowded cafeteria, and does that differ from one-on-one communication?
- Does the student communicate better with adults, peers, or with younger people?

Answering questions such as these will help you understand how your student responds in different situations, which will help guide therapy.

Interpreting Perspectives: Activity 1

- What do other people know or think about you? List at least 10 things you think your friends know about you. You may include achievements, opinions, hobbies, favorite music groups or sports teams, food preferences, etc.

After you make your list, ask at least five friends if they already knew what you listed. Their answers may surprise you!

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

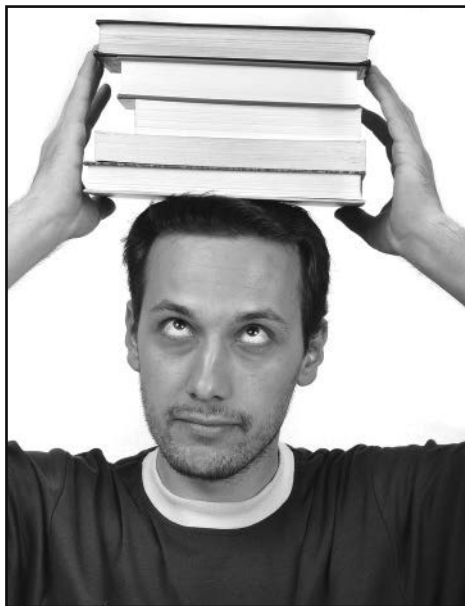
10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Interpreting Idioms and Sarcasm: Activity 10

- Look at the picture. Circle the words in the box that describe how this young man looks. Then read the sentences under the box aloud with the inflection you think is appropriate.



bored

happy

concerned

hopeful

sad

reluctant

wondering

gleeful

resigned

tired

spiteful

anxious

1. Look at all this studying I have to do.
2. Yeah, I can really relax tonight.
3. Let's see . . . If I can balance these books, maybe I won't have to read them!
4. Hmm, kindling for the fire pit?
5. How am I ever going to get all this homework done?
6. This assignment is over my head!

Interpersonal Negotiation: Activity 10

Playing soccer can be physically and emotionally challenging because of its fast pace, physical contact, and competitiveness. These players are on different teams, but they're from the same school. They practice together, changing teams and positions, but when it comes time for a game, they each play for their team.



Photo courtesy of Shutterstock.com © muzzy

- Read the game commentary below. The Rangers are wearing the shirts with the black stripe. Then answer the questions.

"The Rangers are having trouble, folks, and they've been the dominant team all year. If they lose this game, it'll be their first loss of the season. They're down a point and the Wolverines are hunting for a win. Rabbit has the ball. He's heading downfield. He goes in for the kick but, OH, he misses and the ball bounces off the goal post. Now it's the Ranger's ball. Techez is running for his life, zig-zagging upfield. The Wolverines are on his tail but can't quite reach him. And it's a goal! The game clock has run out. It's a tie between the Rangers and the Wolverines!"

1. How do the Rangers feel? _____

2. How do the Wolverines feel? _____

3. What might Rabbit say to Techez? _____

4. What should Rabbit say to Techez? _____

5. What might Techez say to Rabbit? _____

6. What should Techez say to Rabbit? _____
