

RBHS VPVA

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences
Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance Newsletter



COMMUNICATION IS KEY OUR ISSUE ON MASTERING MESSAGES

Non-verbal Communication

The Power In How We Say Things

Communication requires a combination of explicit meanings through spoken words/messages and implicit messages expressed through non-verbal behaviors. Non-verbal communication focuses on the delivery of our messages through our voice and body rather than the direct content. When we become mindful of our own non-verbal expressions and that of others, we can create a safer environment.

Whether we're talking with a survivor of violence as they share their story, or scan the room after a harmful comment has been made, non-verbal communication can give us valuable information on how to proceed. When we are getting indications that someone is uncomfortable, we can think about ways to bring calm and care into the space.

Some key components of thoughtful non-verbal communication to keep in mind when interacting with others include: eye contact, physical distance, posture, gestures and body movement, volume, facial expression, and tone and pitch of voice. Our limbic system sets us up to respond with a fight-flight-freeze reaction depending on our instincts and our histories.

STAY IN TOUCH

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Signs A Person Might Be Having A Difficult Time in Conversation

- ↳ **Physically withdrawing:** leaning or rotating away from other people; looking away or avoiding eye contact; pointing chin down to throat.
- ↳ **Protecting the body:** Crossing arms across the chest; blocking the body with an item (e.g. bookbag, jacket).
- ↳ **Self-soothing:** fidgeting with nearby items (e.g. a pen, phone, jewelry, etc.); comforting the body (i.e. twisting hair in hands, rubbing arms).
- ↳ **Showing tension:** legs bouncing; nervous laughter; raised shoulders; speech accelerated; tightness in body movement or face.

(CP Journal, 2020)

Many of these responses on the list above show a flight instinct, indicating that a person is uncomfortable and has been activated to perceive harm. By noticing these non-verbal messages, we then have the power to use our verbal and non-verbal skills to show that we're focused on their safety and support.

How to Have Difficult Conversations

Setting ground rules to reach a better space

There are dreaded conversations we all seem to have at some point in our lives, whether it's talking about relationship concerns with our partner, calling in our relatives, educating our younger siblings on consent or addressing conflicting views with our friends.

The moments leading up to these conversations can fill us with anxiety, distracting us from other tasks that require our attention. It's completely natural to want to avoid having them altogether but putting these conversations off only allows it to continue and potentially get worse.

Preparation and ground rules are key in reducing the negative emotions that come with having difficult conversations. Giving people a head's up is good idea; a simple "Hey! I'd like to talk to you about..." offers both parties time to approach the situation in a better mindset.

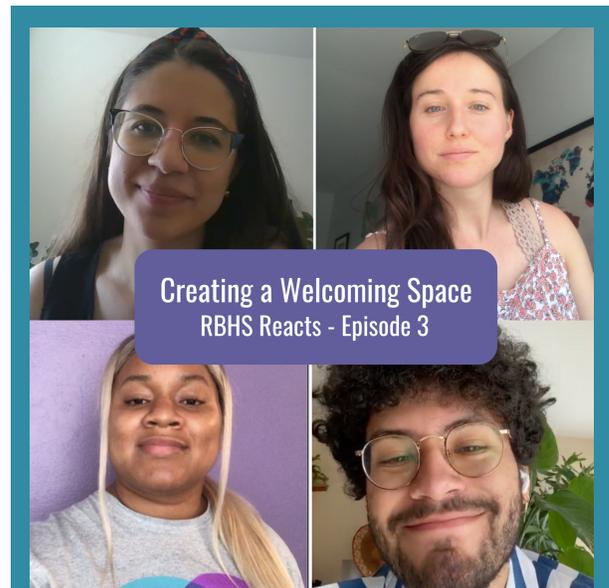
When the conversations begins, setting limits and basic checkpoints ensures that everyone involved has a role in the discussion and deserves to have their boundaries respected. On the next page, we'll talk about some basic tips to help get through an uncomfortable chat.

Preparation:

- Introduce the plan to have the conversation with the other person(s).
- Come up with a time and place that works for both you and the other party/parties.
- Discuss topics as soon as they come up to reduce the chance of built up frustration, anger, or resentment.

During Conversation:

- Speak directly to the other person(s).
- Speak as calmly and clearly as possible.
- Avoid literal finger pointing or verbal finger pointing (blaming).
- Avoid emotional or physical threats, name-calling, cursing, or put downs.
- Try not interrupt the other person.
- Aim to understand first before responding.
- Approach the conversation with openness rather than needing to be “right.”
- Drop any assumptions about how the other person is feeling or what they are thinking.
- Use “I” statements when expressing how you are feeling.
- Take time-outs if needed.
- Focus on the present topic.



Spotlight: RBHS Reacts

"RBHS Reacts" is our video series where VPVA works with different RBHS schools to gauge student reactions on specific topics. For our [3rd episode](#), we asked RBHS graduate students from RWJMS, NJMS, & SPH for their thoughts on how to create a space where someone might feel comfortable sharing they're a part of the LGBTQA+ community. Stay tuned for more episodes to come!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

What would you do if you saw a patient harassing a colleague? How would you respond if a peer was making obscene jokes? Who would you go to if faculty member was making inappropriate comments to a classmate?

If you are looking to learn concrete skills to better address these and similar situations, we can help you! Our virtual *Be A Better Bystander* training provides education on problematic situations that contribute to violence while empowering our students to use their voices, effectively intervene, and change the culture on campus to one of respect. Become a better advocate for yourself, friends, patients, partners, and the community at large. [Host a session](#) with your student organization, class, or cohort, by emailing us at vpva@rbhs.rutgers.edu and take the lead in speaking up to end violence!

