

Chapter 3

Developing Your Interpersonal Skills

Careers

These careers relate to the topics in this chapter:

- ▼ reading tutor
- ▼ youth services worker
- ▼ consumer services representative
- ▼ editor

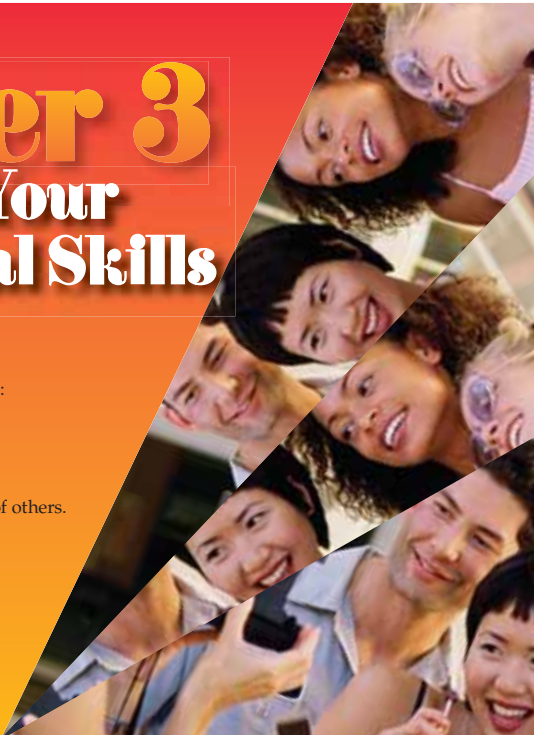
As you study the chapter, see if you can think of others.

Topics

3-1 The Communication Process

3-2 Communication in Relationships

3-3 Conflict Resolution



Topic 3-1

The Communication Process

Objectives

After studying this topic, you will be able to

- ▼ improve your listening and speaking skills.
- ▼ begin and develop conversations more easily.
- ▼ use several forms of nonverbal communication to communicate more effectively.
- ▼ describe the use of several types of electronic communication.

Topic Terms

communication
verbal communication
nonverbal communication
active listener
feedback
passive listener
reflection
manners
body language
personal space
technology
Internet
online

To develop good relationships with other people, you have to be able to communicate. **Communication** is the process of conveying information in such a way that the message is received and understood. Through communication, you can share ideas, opinions, and facts

with others. In close relationships, you can also discuss and share your problems and feelings. See 3-1.

Good communication is a skill you will use throughout your life. It is based on a mutual effort between people to understand one another. Speakers must try to make their messages relevant to the listeners. At the same time, listeners must open their minds to the messages being sent.

All forms of communication—speaking, listening, reading, writing, and body language—can be grouped into two different categories. The first is **verbal communication**, which involves the use of words. **Nonverbal communication** is the second category; this involves sending messages without words. In this topic, you will learn more about these two forms of communication.

Verbal Communication

Communication skills are just like word processing skills or baseball skills. You can learn them, practice them, and improve them. The first steps in improving your verbal communication skills are learning to listen and to speak well.

Listening

Listening plays an important role in communication. A spoken message is worthless unless someone hears it and listens to it. *Hearing* and *listening*, however, have two different meanings. You hear many sounds all day long. Radios, kitchen appliances, cars, and airplanes are just a few examples. If you really listened to all these sounds, you would not have time to think about anything else. Instead,





3-1

How much time do you spend every day communicating with family, friends, classmates, and teachers?

you have developed the habit of ignoring unimportant sounds. This is usually a good and helpful habit. If you aren't careful, however, you may find yourself slipping into this habit more often than you should. You may be ignoring spoken messages that people are trying to send to you.

Barriers to Good Listening

Recognizing what gets in the way of good listening can help you learn to overcome these barriers. The habit of ignoring sounds is just one barrier to good listening. Forgetting all or part of the message is a common communication barrier. Even if you listen to what is being said, there is a chance for a communication failure. Studies show that people remember as little as 25 percent of the information they receive through listening. People remember more when they see, read, or verbally repeat the message they hear.

Listening by itself does not always ensure good communication.

Another barrier to good listening is not understanding the message being sent. The message a person sends to you may not be the same message you receive. The speaker may pronounce words differently if he or she is from a different part of the country. The speaker may use slang expressions or words that are unfamiliar to you. You may think the speaker is joking when he or she is serious. Even the tone of voice can change the meaning of what is said. These are just a few of the factors that can interfere with good listening.

Become an Active Listener

Listening is important to good communication because you listen more often than you speak. With practice, you can develop good listening skills.

A good listener is an **active listener**. This means the listener gives the speaker some form of feedback. **Feedback** lets the speaker know the message is getting through to the listener and how it is being received. The feedback can be a nod, a smile, or even a comment that lets the speaker know the message is received.

A **passive listener** may hear the spoken words, but not the meaning of the words. A passive listener does not respond to the speaker in any way. The speaker doesn't know if the message is being received or not. Have you ever spoken to someone who didn't seem to really be listening to you?

By using active listening, you improve the entire communication process. The following are some tips to help you:

- ▼ **Ask questions to clarify the message.** This shows you are not only hearing what the speaker is saying, but also processing it. You are trying to understand the speaker and preparing to act on the message. Speakers should try to present information clearly. Listeners have the responsibility of seeking clarification if the information is confusing. Receiving the right message is a two-way process. As you listen, ask for added details. Ask the speaker to go over any points you have not clearly understood.
- ▼ **Pay attention.** Focus your attention on the speaker. Use eye contact. Do not let your mind race ahead of what is being said. Avoid daydreaming or letting your mind wander to other topics. See 3-2.
- ▼ **Be interested.** You will listen better if you have a sincere desire to know what the other person is saying and feeling. With genuine interest in the speaker, it becomes easier to focus attention on him or her.
- ▼ **Be patient.** Give the speaker time to present his or her message. Do



3-2

A good listener shows sincere interest in what the speaker is saying.

not interrupt and take over the speaking role.

- ▼ **Keep the speaker in mind.** Expect the information to come from the speaker's background of experiences or point of view. To listen, you have to put aside your previous thoughts and biases for the moment. Concentrate on the person who is speaking to you.
- ▼ **Stay focused.** Some people are too busy thinking about what they will say in response to a speaker. As a result, they fail to listen to what is said. When someone is speaking, listen. When the person stops, you can collect your thoughts and then respond. The speaker will respect you for listening, thinking about what was said, and making a thoughtful response.

- ▼ **Use reflection.** When you use **reflection**, you repeat in your own words what you think was said. The speaker sees in a “mirror” the message that was sent, but in words reflected back by the listener. The receiver might say, “If I understand you correctly, you are saying...” With reflection, the speaker can easily see if a message was misinterpreted.
- ▼ **Listen to the speaker’s tone of voice.** Sometimes the way something is said is just as important as what is said. For instance, a comment such as “You look sad” might be judged as sarcastic, critical, or sympathetic, depending on how it was stated.



3-3

Good communication skills are important in both personal and business relationships.

If your skills need improvement, try using some of these techniques:

- ▼ **Keep the listener in mind.** Use words the listener will understand. This is especially important if the listener has a different cultural or educational background from you or if the listener is a child. To communicate clearly, you need to be aware of the meanings others may attach to the words you use.
- ▼ **Keep messages short and simple.** Use simple language and proper grammar. Explain your message clearly. Leave no room for confusion and you are more likely to be understood.
- ▼ **Be considerate of others’ feelings.** Think before you speak. Avoid making comments that may hurt someone. If criticism is needed, try to make it constructive. Try to suggest ways to improve or change a behavior that is bothering you. Sometimes praise works better than criticism. Praise what you do like, and that action will probably be repeated. Ignore what you do not like, and that action will probably be stopped.

Speaking

Speaking is the most widely used form of verbal communication. Speaking and listening are equally important in the two-way communication process.

You spend much of your day speaking with others. The way you speak affects your life in many ways. It affects your relationships with your family members and your friends. It affects your daily interactions with teachers, classmates, coworkers, and employers, 3-3. Speaking clearly will help you express your thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others.

Have you noticed that some people have better speaking skills than others? You could listen to them for hours and not lose interest. With practice, you too can develop your speaking skills.

Developing Speaking Skills

How good are your speaking skills? Do you send clear messages when you speak to others? Do others interpret your messages correctly? The way you speak affects the impressions people form of you.

- ▼ **Be open and honest.** This is especially true when you are talking to your close friends, 3-4. Don’t expect them to read your mind. They can’t. If you want them to know what you want or how you feel, you will have to tell them.
- ▼ **Respect the listener.** Good rapport between a speaker and a listener aids good communication. Good rapport is built on respect and sincerity. Talking down to a person or showing disrespect will cut off communication lines.
- ▼ **Be positive.** People enjoy listening to someone who has a positive outlook on life. On the other hand, people become bored listening to someone who complains all the time. Using a

pleasant tone of voice and maintaining eye contact are ways of conveying a positive attitude. This encourages others to listen and respond positively to the speaker.

- ▼ **Check to see whether your message is being received accurately.** Questions such as “What do you think?” or “How do you feel about this?” will draw your listener into a speaking role. He or she will then reflect on what you have said and give you some feedback. This will tell you if your message has been understood. You will know if you should go back and explain something again or go ahead with new information. Concentrate on one communication skill at a time. Listening and speaking skills improve with practice.

How to Start a Conversation

Another way to develop your speaking skills is to practice starting a conversation. Good conversation skills are useful in many situations. For instance, you notice an interesting-looking person standing alone at a party. You would like to talk to the person, but you don’t know what to say. Does this situation sound familiar? To be prepared, have a few conversation openers in mind, such as the following:

- ▼ **Ask questions.** Questions work in almost any situation, 3-5. When you use questions to start conversations, ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Examples are, “What do you think about...?” “How do you feel about...?” “What do you think would happen if...?” Ask the person a key question about himself or herself. Ask about his or her work, hobbies, or family. Almost everyone has a good personal story to tell. Most people enjoy talking about themselves.



3-4

Open and honest communication is especially important among friends.



3-5

Asking a question that requires an explanation is a good conversation starter.

▼ Make a sincere compliment.

Another good conversation starter is to compliment the person about something—appearance, clothing, possessions, or accomplishments. Compliments make people feel good about themselves. When they feel good, they are likely to relax and begin talking.

▼ Mention something you have in common with the other person.

If you know the person, mention a subject you know the person thinks is interesting. Discussions of current events, movies, books, and sports events can keep a conversation going.

If you and the person to whom you are talking both know some of the same people, you can talk about them. However, this type of conversation can be risky. Be sure to say only positive things. Don't begin by criticizing someone who may be this person's neighbor, cousin, or best friend!

▼ **Discuss one topic.** A personal conversation is more likely to be successful if you explore just one key point of common interest. Look for an interesting depth in that topic rather than trying to cover many topics. A constant change of subjects may drive the other person away.

Practice will help you feel more comfortable talking with people. Try not to be shy. Chances are the person you want to meet would like to meet you, too. Try not to be afraid of saying the wrong words. Just relax and be yourself. Concentrate on enjoying the conversation and the other person's company.

Nonverbal Communication

People communicate in many ways other than the spoken or written word. Communication that does not involve

**Setting the Scene:
Communicate
Without a Word**

You hear footsteps coming closer. You turn and see your best friend walk into the room. His shoulders are slumped and his arms are folded. One of his hands is clenched in a fist. He is frowning, and he avoids making eye contact with you.

Analyze It: What nonverbal messages are being sent? What would be your response to these messages?

words is called nonverbal communication. The way a person looks, dresses, acts, and reacts are forms of nonverbal expression.

Your Appearance

Does your appearance send the message you want it to send? When people meet you, what is their first impression? People form their impressions of you based on the way you look. Often these judgments are made quickly. Before you say anything, your appearance is sending a message to them. Are you communicating a positive message about yourself? See 3-6.

Good grooming is one way to send a positive message. It shows you care about yourself and the way you look. The clothes you wear communicate a message about you, too. They are clues to your lifestyle and personality. Neat, clean clothes that fit well help create a positive image. Studies show people generally respond more favorably to those who are well groomed and well dressed.



3-6

Being well-groomed and neatly dressed sends a positive nonverbal message.

Your Actions

The actions you take can send messages to others. For instance, **manners** are rules to follow for proper conduct. Using good manners sends the message that you want others to feel comfortable. In most cases, having good manners is as simple as being kind to others and using common sense.

Other actions will send the message that you care about people's feelings. Using the words *please*, *thank you*, and *excuse me* shows courtesy and respect to others. Sending a note of thanks or a card to cheer someone up reflects thoughtfulness, 3-7. Giving a gift on a special occasion tells people you are considerate. Using a pleasant tone of voice lets others know you want them to feel at ease.



3-7

A card can help you communicate your feelings of concern for another.

Body Language

When you nod your head, shake your fist, or point your finger, you are communicating without words. With **body language**, you are using body movements, such as facial expressions, gestures, and posture, to send messages to others.

Although you are not using words, your messages can be crystal clear. The expression on your face can convey your mood before you even begin to talk. Direct eye contact with someone can convey honesty and straightforwardness. When you walk into the kitchen and find that someone has prepared your favorite dinner, a kiss and a hug can help you say thank you. With a smile and a shake of your head, you can let someone know that you agree. With a wink, you can say “I like you.” Some people use hand gestures to make their spoken messages clearer.

People from different cultures have developed certain body language that is unique to their culture. Because we live in a multicultural society, it is important to be aware of possible differences in body language. In some cultures, the way a message is delivered is more important than the actual content of the message.

Personal Space

Your **personal space** is the area around you. When others enter this space, your reaction is a form of nonverbal communication. The way you allow people to use your personal space depends on the way you feel about these people. You may enjoy the closeness of a hug from a special person, or a whisper in your ear from another. A quick handshake may be as close as you wish to be with others. When a person enters your personal space you feel either comfortable or uncomfortable. Your behaviors reveal the way you feel. See 3-8.

The More You Know: Body Language Around the World

Some communications are influenced by cultural diversity, so being aware of cultural differences is important. For example, in some cultures people are taught to never make eye contact with someone in authority. A friendly hug may also be off-limits. In large U.S. cities, people avoid making eye contact with anyone on the streets. While some specific body language does vary, a person from any culture is likely to understand gestures meaning *yes*, *no*, *come*, *stop*, *up*, *down*, and *thank you*.

Have you ever hugged family members or friends you hadn't seen for a while? You knew they didn't feel you were invading their space. Conversely, have you ever touched a person who quickly withdrew from you? This reaction said you were getting too close for their comfort.

The place or situation you are in also affects the use of your personal space. For example, when your date puts an arm around you, you may respond by snuggling a little closer. You may like the warmth of the touch. If he or she tries the same hug at school, you may respond by withdrawing. Perhaps you feel this behavior is inappropriate in public. You may also respond positively to a friendly hug, but negatively to a forceful hug.

Most Americans like to stay about an arm's length from each other when they



3-8

You would probably be comfortable letting a close friend or dating partner enter your personal space.

speak. This is not the case in other cultures. People from some cultures like to stand closer when they speak. This closeness makes some Americans feel uncomfortable. An awareness of this cultural difference can help you avoid any misinterpretation of another's actions.

Technology and Communication

Technology, the use of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, has led to many new ways for people to communicate with each other. No longer do you have to wait a week or more to receive a written response for a letter you sent. You can send a message around the world in an instant. It is possible to receive a reply equally fast.

These communication devices are popular because they are time-savers for those who use them properly. On the other hand, their prevalence in people's lives can make them time-wasters as well. Their impact has been significant

both in the home and in the workplace. Though most people see many benefits to these methods of communication, others see some drawbacks. The following are some popular electronic devices used for communication.

Cellular Phones

Cellular telephones provide two-way voice communication without the direct wire connections required of standard telephones, 3-9. Voice transmissions are sent by radio waves to towers and switching centers that relay the messages to their destinations. Cell phones and monthly rate plans can be purchased from a provider. If you use more minutes than are included in your rate plan, the costs can be high.

Pay-as-you-go phones are another option. You purchase the phone and a certain number of minutes. The minutes can be used at any time until you have used all you purchased. Then, you can buy more minutes. This option can be more cost-effective than monthly rate plans for people who do not use their cell phones often.



3-9

Many people enjoy the convenience of cell phones.

The portability and small size of cell phones have made them very popular. They can be carried easily in a pocket, briefcase, or backpack and used practically anywhere. This allows instant communication from wherever you are, which is particularly beneficial in emergency situations. Cell phones are also being paired with global positioning devices to provide emergency assistance and information to travelers.

The use of cell phones can be disturbing to other people if used in public places. Though popular with students, many schools ban their use. If you use a cell phone, have consideration for the people around you when at school or in a public place. Phones should be turned off when ringing will disturb others. Conversations on cell phones should not take place where other people can hear them. It is inconsiderate to talk on your cell phone in movie theaters or restaurants. Other people are trying to watch the movie or are having their own conversations. They should not have to listen to yours.

Voice Mail

Voice mail is an electronic version of a telephone answering machine. If no one answers the phone, the caller leaves a recorded message for the recipient to listen to later. The message can be played back or accessed from another telephone.

Voice mail has several advantages. Family members can eat meals together undisturbed and allow their voice mail to record messages. Family members who need to communicate with other family members can also leave messages. For example, if parents are at work, children can leave messages about where they will be and when.

When leaving a voice mail message, there are certain courtesies you should follow.

- ▼ Speak clearly and distinctly.
- ▼ Give your name and telephone number.
- ▼ Keep your message brief (30 seconds is ideal), but explain the reason for your call.
- ▼ Minimize the need for a call back if possible. For instance, if a meeting date has changed, give the date for the postponed meeting.
- ▼ Give the date and time.
- ▼ Let the person know the best time to reach you.

Computers

The **Internet** is an international network of computers that are linked to share information. It is available to anyone who has a computer, an Internet service provider, and a means of connection. Types of connection include dialup service using a phone and modem; DSL (digital subscriber line); and high-speed cable. When you access the Internet, you are **online**.

The Internet allows instant communication to anywhere in the world through e-mail. E-mail is an important method of communication in the workplace. It often replaces in-house office memos or written correspondence to customers or clients. See 3-10 for some points to keep in mind when using e-mail at work.

Extended family members who live distances apart have found e-mail to be an excellent way to stay in touch. Grandparents can e-mail their grandchildren in their homes or college dorm rooms. Parents can e-mail important messages to their school-age children at home or spouses in other workplaces.

E-Mail Etiquette

- Grammar, spelling, and punctuation must be accurate, as in any written form of communication.
- Use a single-subject line so the receiver can easily decide the importance of the message.
- Begin with a friendly and appropriate greeting. Use a first name only if you know the person.
- Do not yell (using all uppercase letters is considered YELLING). It is not appropriate in business reports or letters.
- Avoid using emoticons in business communications. *Emoticons* are keyboard characters that are typed in configurations to indicate body language, such as :-) for a smile. Use them in personal e-mail messages only.
- Do not use e-mail to deliver extremely sensitive information. A face-to-face message or telephone conversation is better to prevent misunderstandings.
- Be aware that e-mail is not secure. If using e-mail at work, your employer can read your mail.

3-10

If you use e-mail to communicate at work, follow these guidelines.

The Internet is a popular source of knowledge and entertainment. *Web sites* can be used to find all kinds of information. These sites are maintained by educational institutions, companies, organizations, government agencies, and individuals. You can locate information needed for research assignments without leaving your home. Online resources also allow you to

access current news, weather, or your own bank account. Online shopping is another possibility for the Internet user. From your computer, you can purchase almost anything from grocery items to airline tickets.

Though access to the Internet can lead you to vast amounts of information, there are some precautions. The Internet is not owned or controlled by any one organization. Anyone can place any type of information on the Internet, whether accurate or not. Therefore, if you are using it for research, you should focus on using reliable sources. Check the accuracy of information provided by unfamiliar sources. The government currently does not regulate the Internet, and little information is censored. Children can accidentally wander into sites that are meant for adults only.

Check It Out!

1. Name two barriers to good listening skills.
2. True or false. People are more likely to remember a message they hear if they do not repeat it verbally.
3. Briefly describe five techniques for improving speaking skills.
4. List four suggestions for starting a conversation.
5. Explain how nonverbal communication is related to your appearance.
6. List three electronic means of communication. Give an example of how each can be used to benefit communication.

Topic 3-2

Communication in Relationships

Objectives

- After studying this topic, you will be able to
- ▼ state the importance of open communication in relationships.
 - ▼ list ways to communicate positive feelings.
 - ▼ describe barriers to communication.
 - ▼ suggest methods for handling negative feelings.
 - ▼ give tips for communicating in the workplace.

Topic Terms

open communication
stereotypes
prejudices
coded messages
role expectations
diverse

People often speak of **open communication**. This means a free flow of ideas, opinions, and facts among the people involved. They may not agree on everything, but they respect one another's point of view. They can have intelligent discussions about views that differ from their own. All ideas are treated with interest, curiosity, and respect.

Clearly communicating your thoughts and feelings is part of open communication. In this topic, you will learn more about skills you can use to develop open communication in your relationships. These include communicating positive feelings, overcoming barriers, and handling negative feelings.

The Importance of Communication in Relationships

Open communication has many benefits, especially in personal relationships. It allows people to learn more about themselves and other people. It helps people express their feelings to their friends and family. Using it helps strengthen relationships. Overall, it can lead to richer, more satisfying relationships. See 3-11.

Communicating Positive Feelings

Each person is responsible for his or her own happiness. Do you want to be happy? If so, you must work toward that goal. Thinking positively about most situations in life will help you be happy. Your positive attitude encourages open communication.

Good feelings are contagious. If you are a positive person and communicate this to others, they will feel happier, too. See 3-12.



3-11

Open communication allows people to express their ideas and feelings freely.



3-12

People who communicate their positive feelings enrich the lives of others.

The following list suggests ways to communicate positive feelings. Decide which suggestions would be most helpful to you.

- ▼ Whenever you meet someone, be the first one to say hello.
- ▼ Offer praise and compliments when they are deserved.
- ▼ Defend people who are the object of harmful gossip.
- ▼ Smile and look happy. Show your positive personality traits.
- ▼ Look others in the eye when you talk to them and speak clearly.
- ▼ Show concern for others by asking them about matters that are important to them.

Barriers to Open Communication

Communicating with others is not always easy. Many barriers stand in the way of open communication. A few of the

barriers are physical in nature, such as speech and hearing disabilities. However, most barriers to open communication are social or psychological. Understanding these differences can help you avoid them. Some of the most common ones are described on the following pages.

Stereotypes

One barrier to open communication is stereotyping. A person who **stereotypes** others has a set belief that all members of a group will behave in the same ways. Stereotypes put labels on groups of people. These labels may be based on a group's age, sex, race, or religion. For instance, some people may believe that all young men should participate in sports or all older people are forgetful.

Because every person is different, neither of the above statements can be true for all people within these groups. If you pay attention to stereotypes like these instead of accepting individual differences,

you may misinterpret messages. To be a good listener, you must have an open mind. You must ignore stereotypes and give people the chance to communicate as individuals.

Prejudices

Another barrier to open communication results from prejudices. **Prejudices** are opinions that people form without complete knowledge. They are usually based on a lack of facts and a lack of understanding. People with prejudices do not accept that others' beliefs can be different from theirs. Prejudices might include negative attitudes toward religions, races, cultures, nationalities, socio-economic groups, cities, geographic regions, or foods.

Many prejudices lead to negative behaviors such as name-calling. Prejudiced people may choose to avoid certain groups or individuals. They usually do not seek understanding or new meanings. They have already made up their minds. It's as if they are saying "I already know about that" or "I already know about your kind." These actions set up barriers and prevent good communication from taking place.

Here is an example of a man who had a prejudice toward certain foods. When the man took his date out to dinner, she ordered roast lamb. She soon realized he was embarrassed to be seen with a date who ate lamb. He did not eat meat and thought of it as unwholesome. He also felt prejudice toward her because she ate a food that he didn't consider acceptable. Because of his prejudice, the couple never dated again. Such a prejudice toward people and objects—in this case food—hampers good communication.

Some prejudices come in the form of love. For example, parents are naturally proud of their children. They may think

their son or daughter is the best looking, most talented, and most personable individual. This may be true, but such an attitude is usually padded with a little pride and prejudice. Loving people is important. However, maintaining an ability to be rational about all people and objects is important, too.

Coded Messages

When people try to communicate without saying what they really mean, they are using **coded messages**. Listeners are forced to make assumptions as they decode the speakers' messages. Although coded messages hinder good communication, some people continue to use them. See 3-13.

One tricky statement to decode is "Give me your honest opinion." Some people may really want your opinion. Others say this when they really mean "Tell me I am right. Support me in what I have done." You must decode the message according to the situation. Your clues may be the person's tone of voice and facial expression.

Another example of coding is when a young man asks a young woman "What are you doing Saturday?" His message is a coded one. He doesn't really want to know what she is planning to do. This is his way of saying "Will you be free on Saturday? I would like to see you then." He hopes the girl will recognize the coded message and interpret it correctly. However, she may respond with another coded message. Then he must decode her message. Does she have time to see him on Saturday? Is she too busy to see him or doesn't she want to see him? As you can see, communicating with coded messages is risky.

Teasing is a type of coded message. The way a person teases is the key to decoding the real meaning of the message. Teasing is a means of getting someone's attention.



3-13

Good friends know their friendship depends on open communication. They avoid using coded messages to express their thoughts and feelings.

It's usually a way of saying "I like you." Teasing can almost always be decoded as a type of compliment. However, some forms of teasing and joking can cause problems in personal relationships. Some people say harsh things in a joking manner when they really mean what they are saying. They don't have the nerve to say it otherwise. This type of joke is cruel and can easily hurt someone's feelings.

Gender Differences

Sometimes, differences between males and females create some barriers to communication. These barriers may be related to role expectations. **Role expectations** are patterns of socially

expected behavior. In other words, people learn to behave the way they think society expects them to behave. They also expect certain role behaviors from others.

Certain roles are associated with being male or female. For males, some of these roles include brother, son, boyfriend, husband, and father. Female roles include sister, daughter, girlfriend, wife, and mother. Both men and women also have expectations as to how the opposite sex should fulfill their roles. For instance, some husbands may expect their wives to cook and do household chores. A girlfriend may expect her boyfriend to pay for every date.

Role expectations can create confusion. This is because people don't always agree on the behavior for certain roles. See 3-14.



3-14

In the past, men may have considered cleaning and child care a female role. Today, however, those views are quite different.

Today, some of the barriers created by gender differences are diminishing. As society's view of male and female roles continues to change, people's views of role expectations will change, too.

When Negative Feelings Occur

Every person has negative feelings at times. When you hold back negative feelings, they may become stronger and more frustrating. You need to know how to vent your emotions. Even negative feelings can be communicated in a useful, constructive way.

Handling Negative Feelings

There are many ways you can resolve negative feelings. You must first wish to communicate effectively and be willing to take the first steps to resolving these feelings. As you read the following suggestions, think about yourself. Which of these guidelines would be most helpful for you?

- ▼ Discuss your negative feelings with the person whose behavior is bothering you. Don't complain to others until you have spoken with that person. People who are not involved in a problem usually can't do anything about it.
- ▼ Keep a simple issue simple. Don't add other issues to it, building it up until it becomes a major problem.
- ▼ Do not reopen old issues that have already been settled.
- ▼ Discuss the problem without making nasty comments and accusations that would hurt the other person. Recognize your own faults and accept them. Don't blame them on others. Try to be pleasant rather than grouchy. Help people see that you like them, even though you don't like their behavior.
- ▼ Say what must be said and stop. Don't continue talking about one issue and repeating yourself.
- ▼ Try to end on a positive note. Make a positive comment about the person or the situation.

Communication in the Workplace

The communication skills you have learned to use in your personal life can help you communicate at work. The circumstances differ, however. You have known your family and close friends for a long time, and you have learned how to

communicate with them. When you begin a job, you will meet many new people. In today's world, the workforce is likely to be very **diverse** (differing from one another). Workers differ by age, ethnicity, and gender. Increasing numbers of workers have disabilities. Due to the diverse nature of the workforce, communication can be more challenging. See 3-15.

The goals of communication at work are to pass along information and to build effective work relationships. Different styles of communicating and different interpretations of communications can interfere with attaining both of these goals. People from different backgrounds may define problems differently. They bring their personal goals, priorities, and standards to their jobs. When diverse people form team-based work groups, disagreements may occur. It is important to remember that every person is different. That does not mean they are difficult. By thinking of someone as just different, you become less judgmental. You can be more open to their opinions and ideas.



3-15

Clear communication in the workforce can be challenging, but it is necessary for a team to function well.

Many of the effective communication techniques that you use in other settings can also be used on the job. In addition, the following points can be helpful:

- ▼ Keep conversations unrelated to work to a minimum. These prevent you and other employees from doing your work. Your personal life should be kept private. Workplace gossip should be avoided. Professionalism is expected of employees.
- ▼ Show courtesy to customers and clients, 3-16. Do not keep them waiting while you finish a conversation with a fellow employee.
- ▼ Use good listening skills. Listen carefully when directions are given. Ask questions to prevent any misunderstandings.
- ▼ Use standard English at work, not slang. For example, say *yes* rather than *yeah*.



3-16

When communicating with customers, their needs always come first.

- ▼ Avoid telling jokes at work. Because of the diverse nature of the workforce, some people may be offended by an innocent joke.
- ▼ If misunderstandings occur, discuss them with the person involved. It is possible to respectfully disagree.

Check It Out!

1. True or false. In open communication, people know each other so well that they agree about everything.
2. Give five examples of ways to communicate positive feelings.
3. A communication barrier based on opinions that people form without complete knowledge is known as _____.
4. Identify five ways to communicate negative feelings.
5. What makes communication in today's workplace challenging?

Topic 3-3 Conflict Resolution

Objectives

After studying this topic, you will be able to

- ▼ identify some types and causes of conflict.
- ▼ explain possible negative and positive reactions to conflict.
- ▼ describe constructive and destructive methods of conflict resolution.
- ▼ list the steps in the conflict resolution process.
- ▼ explain the use of mediation.

Topic Terms

conflict
scapegoating
negotiation
compromise
conflict resolution process
mediation
peer mediators

Each person has a unique way of viewing and reacting to every situation. When people live and work closely, as they do in families, in friendships, and on the job, conflicts are bound to arise. A **conflict** is a struggle between two people or groups who have opposing views. The ability to resolve a conflict is an important skill in good communication.

Types of Conflicts

There are all types of conflicts. Some are small, such as a disagreement between two people over a trivial matter, 3-17. You



3-17

Even good friends can have conflicts because they are together so much of the time. What's important is to choose a method of resolving the conflict that is fair to all.

and a friend may disagree over where to go after school. Disagreements can grow into larger conflicts if the two people are not willing to reach an agreement peacefully.

Conflicts can also occur within families—between husbands and wives, parents and children, or among siblings. Again, the conflicts can be small and easily resolved. They can also be over important issues. Maybe you and your parents disagree about how late you should be able to stay out on weekend nights. Bringing up an issue that is causing a conflict is a good way to begin to deal with the problem. Listening to each other's views and talking about them can usually lead to good solutions.

Conflicts are not confined to interpersonal relationships. They can occur between larger groups—even entire nations. Throughout the world, there are nations that are at war with other nations. These, too, are conflicts, but on a much larger scale. Many times the conflicts between nations are based on some of the same differences that cause conflicts between individuals. Differences

in religious beliefs and practices are often at the core of many national conflicts. Disagreements over government policies can also lead to major disputes.

Causes of Conflict

Causes of conflict can be trivial or significant. It is important to take an objective look at the conflict and try to determine the cause. Knowing why the conflict occurred will likely help in resolving it. Many conflicts occur because of poor communication. Have you ever made arrangements to meet some friends, and they never showed up? You may have been really angry until you found out they never received your message, or they misunderstood where you were to meet. Many times a failure to communicate can be more serious. Has anyone ever said to you "If you had told me, all this could have been avoided"? If a parent or your boss said this to you, you may have been in real trouble!

Some conflicts result from specific situations. For instance, perhaps you and your friend both like the same boy. He starts paying more attention to you than to your friend. She starts acting weird, complaining about everything. She never used to be like that. Suddenly you're arguing all the time, and then you have a really big fight. The situation has led to a conflict between the two of you.

If people have very different personalities, they could be on a collision course. For instance, consider this couple. She is neat and organized, likes to be on time, and always seems to be in control. He is completely disorganized, can never find anything, and is always running late. These two people could be very happy together, each benefiting from the other's strengths. On the other hand, they could be miserable

together. Their very different personalities could lead to some major conflicts.

Conflicts often occur between parents and their children during the teenage years. The role of parents is to guide their children as they grow toward adulthood. Parents are responsible for their well-being until they are adults. The role of teens is to develop independence. They are anxious to be able to make decisions for themselves. Finding a happy medium between these opposing roles is often difficult. Parents and children often pull in opposite directions. Conflicts frequently occur during these tumultuous years. See 3-18.

Differences in values can lead to conflicts, as you learned in Chapter 1. Your values are important to you. If someone else does not have the same values as you, conflicts can arise. The degree of conflict depends on the importance of the value to you. For instance, your parents may think good grades are most important, while you think your performance on the volleyball team is most important. You want to spend

time practicing when they want you to study more. This difference in values can lead to disagreements. A friend may value having a good time, while you may value getting into a good college. This could lead to disagreements about how you spend your free time together.

Some conflicts can be traced to cultural differences. For example, the American culture encourages quick decision making. This is not characteristic of all cultures. The American culture is one where people are always busy and active. People from many other cultures do not believe in this active lifestyle. They prefer a more relaxed pace. The concept of time also varies among cultures. Americans follow daily schedules timed to the minute. They expect punctuality, 3-19. Other cultures place more emphasis on relationships than on schedules. Being late is not a problem for them. These are just a few examples of cultural differences that can lead to conflict if people are unaware of them.

Reactions to Conflict

Conflict is normal. There will always be disagreements between people. It is how people react or respond to these disagreements that determines whether they ignite into major conflicts or just go away. Negative reactions can escalate conflicts and lead to hostility and personal attacks. Some even end in violence. Positive reactions can lead to solutions that both parties can accept. Many actually lead to personal growth.

Negative Reactions

Avoidance is a common reaction to conflict. Some people just walk away. This might be a good response if a person is concerned that an argument could escalate



3-18

When teens are learning to drive, it is an especially stressful time for them and their parents.



3-19

Many Americans become frustrated if they cannot keep to their planned schedules.

into violence. A cooling-down period might be good for everyone involved. In most cases, however, avoidance simply puts off resolution. It does not solve the problem. Instead, resentment builds up as the person tries to suppress hurt feelings. If this continues over a period of time, it can lead to an explosion of emotions when the person finally reaches a breaking point.

Some people attempt to resolve conflicts by blaming others. This is called **scapegoating**. The person blamed for the problem is the scapegoat. Everyone else is freed of the responsibility for the problem because they can blame this other person. This is not a resolution because no one tries to solve the conflict. The conflict goes on with both parties feeling it is "not my problem."

Some responses to conflict include arguing, becoming angry, and name-calling. When one person becomes angry

and begins yelling, the other person is likely to become angry as well. Verbal attacks fly back and forth. People say hurtful things they often regret later. They feel belittled when their self-esteem is under attack. It is sometimes hard to forgive people when such outbreaks occur. An atmosphere of hostility prevails.

The most destructive reaction to conflict is violence. If tempers flare out of control, shoving, hitting, or pushing can result. Some people first experience hitting as children. They think this is an acceptable form of reaction because their parents hit them. They also see more violence portrayed in the media—on television and in movies. As they become older, they may use this same form of behavior. A violent reaction to conflict is never the answer. It can lead to child abuse, spouse abuse, or elder abuse. It can also lead to violence outside the home.

Positive Reactions

There are ways people can react to conflict that will help the situation. First, you can learn to control your emotions. Lashing out in anger usually solves nothing. You can also ask the other person to remain calm. Both people need to stop, take a deep breath, and quiet their emotions. See 3-20.

It is also important to listen. Instead of shouting, stop and listen to what each person is saying. Focus on the real problem as you exchange views. Don't bring up other issues. Focus on the current conflict.



3-20

Being calm and using humor are ways to soothe the heated emotions of a conflict.

Try to remain neutral. Do not jump to a judgment before everyone has his or her say. Then you are ready to find a real solution to the conflict.

Learning to react positively when a conflict occurs is an important life skill that can lead to personal growth. It is a sign of maturity when you can control your emotions, listen to other viewpoints, and avoid jumping to conclusions. These skills will help you in your personal relationships as well as in work situations. Teamwork is stressed in today's workplace. You might someday be working closely with other employees in a work setting. Because conflicts will arise, reacting positively can lead to constructive resolution of these conflicts. An employer will recognize and appreciate your ability to handle conflict in a mature manner.

Constructive Methods for Handling Conflict

To resolve a conflict, each person has to assume responsibility for his or her feelings. The emotions you feel may be caused by others, but they belong to you. If you wish to lessen stress that occurs in conflict, you must be willing to resolve the conflict. Try these techniques for starters.

Use "I" Messages

Use "I" messages instead of "you" messages. This means you take ownership for your feelings. You state what you feel or think instead of criticizing the other person. Say "I think you are ignoring me" rather than "You are ignoring me". You might further say, "When I think you are ignoring me, I feel hurt. I don't like being ignored." As you express your feelings, you are taking credit for them.

"You" messages, on the other hand, come across as accusations. "You are ignoring me" places blame on the other person and may aggravate the situation. When taking ownership and saying "I think" or "I feel" you avoid accusing the other person of negative behaviors.

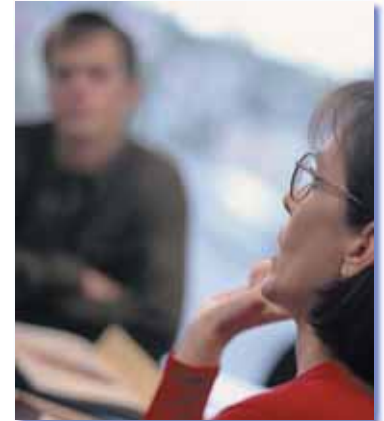
Learn to send "I" messages. For example, "When you tell so-called funny stories about me to my professional friends, I am embarrassed." Can you see in this example that you are assuming responsibility for your feelings of embarrassment? A "you" message sounds like an accusation. "You embarrass me when you tell your so-called funny stories about me to my professional friends." The "you" message places the blame on the other person.

Decide Who Owns the Problem

Whose problem is it? When a problem exists between two people, both own the problem. Even when one person creates the problem, he or she makes it a problem for the other. State your point of view in a way that will not create an argument. Seek feedback to determine how the other person is receiving your message. To avoid misunderstandings, use clarifying messages periodically, 3-21. Try comments such as: "If I am hearing you correctly, you are saying that..." or "I think I heard you say..."

Learn to Negotiate and Compromise

An important method for resolving conflicts is negotiation. **Negotiation** means communicating with others in order to reach a mutually satisfying agreement.



3-21

When resolving a conflict with another person, state your point of view calmly and clearly. Then ask for feedback.

Such an agreement usually involves a compromise. In a **compromise**, both parties agree to give up something. Each person gives up something of importance to obtain something else that also has importance.

Negotiation and compromise must be considered carefully. Some issues may be so important to you that you will be unwilling to negotiate and compromise. For example, you may not wish to compromise your moral views or spiritual views. For this reason, you will not enter into a negotiation that would require you to make a compromise. What is important is that you negotiate and compromise when it is appropriate.

The purpose of negotiation and compromise is to remove conflict. Four methods are commonly used.

- ▼ **You win/I lose.** The person who wins is happy with this compromise. The person achieved what he or she wanted. However, you may feel the person took advantage of you. You may feel like a loser. You are likely to be unhappy about your loss. The conflict is likely to resurface at a future time. A power struggle is likely to persist.
 - ▼ **I win/you lose.** This is the opposite of the above situation. You feel happy because you achieved what you wanted. However, the person who loses may not be happy about being the loser. This conflict is likely to resurface. One person had to compromise too much.
 - ▼ **I loselyou lose.** Negotiations apparently became very difficult this time. Both you and the other person are losers. So many compromises were made that neither person's wishes were met. No one is happy.
 - ▼ **I win/you win.** This is the ideal way to resolve conflicts. Both parties were able to talk through the situation. You were able to negotiate in such a way that each achieved what he or she wanted. Neither person forced his or her ideas on the other. Both parties probably made compromises. Neither was forced to compromise anything that was cherished. Those items that were lost were not highly valued, so there were no losers. Both are now happy winners.
- You must recognize that some conflicts cannot be resolved. There are people who create conflicts and refuse to resolve them. Some people make unfair demands on others. If this happens, you may have to give up your responsibility toward resolution. You may have to recognize that the problem is not yours and leave it with the person who owns it.

In these situations, relations between the people involved will suffer. Perhaps the relationship is already weak. Remember that relationships are between at least two people. Sometimes every person has to be willing to stand alone. When efforts toward negotiation and compromise don't work, you can still feel you tried your best. In spite of the outcome, you have gained some experience from having tried to resolve the issue.

Use the Conflict Resolution Process

In some instances, a more formal process may be needed to resolve the conflict. The **conflict resolution process** is a step-by-step form of communication that allows conflicts to be worked out in a positive manner. The process should be used as soon as possible after a conflict occurs. This prevents anger and tension from building. It should also take place in private with only the individuals or parties involved present. Everyone needs to remain calm and be willing to listen to each other. These are the steps to follow.

1. **State the problem.** All participants must have the opportunity to tell their view of what is causing the problem. Each person must listen carefully and stay focused on the main issue. All must agree on exactly what the problem is.
2. **List possible solutions.** The next step is to suggest all potential solutions. Think of as many solutions as possible even if some seem unworkable. An idea can sometimes spark a better solution. Everyone should be able to speak freely and without criticism.
3. **Evaluate each possible solution.** Take a closer look at the best possible solutions. Which ones do both parties

- like? Which ones seem to solve the problem? Use negotiation skills until a compromise solution can be reached.
4. **Pick the best solution.** Finally, both parties must agree to the best solution. It won't be a solution unless everyone is in agreement.
 5. **Carry out the solution.** A plan should be made to carry out the solution. State what each party will do and when they will do it. Keep it simple. Also, decide what actions the parties will take if a conflict occurs again.
 6. **Evaluate the results.** The process does not end until the solution has been put into action and the results are evaluated. If a conflict is still occurring, the process needs to begin again. Following these steps, where everyone involved is allowed to speak freely, should lead to satisfactory solutions. More serious and escalating conflicts can be avoided.

Mediation

Some efforts to resolve conflicts between parties just do not work without outside help. Mediation may be needed. In **mediation**, a third person is called on to help reconcile differences between the conflicting parties. This person is called a mediator. Through mediation, an attempt is made to settle the dispute and find a peaceful solution to the conflict, 3-22. The opposing parties talk to each other with the help of the mediator. Mediators can assist in school, work, and even international disputes. They are often included in the conflict resolution process.

A mediator is sometimes needed to settle family disputes. Family members live under the same roof, share meals and living space, work together, and play together. Conflicts are bound to occur. The conflict resolution process can be used by

family members to resolve their conflicts. The two family members can talk about the problem and find a solution acceptable to both. Sometimes mediation may be needed. Who becomes the mediator? Anyone who is not emotionally tied to the issue can become the neutral third party. When a mom and daughter have a strong difference of opinion, the dad or son might be the mediator who helps bring about a win/win solution.

Peer Mediation

Many schools use **peer mediators**. These are students who are trained in the conflict resolution process. They listen and act in an unbiased manner to help fellow students settle their differences. Peer mediators are selected for their leadership skills, emotional maturity, and interest in helping others. They are often preferred as mediators because students feel more comfortable with a peer. They may feel another student can understand their problems better than an adult. Hopefully, solutions can be found. When conflicts cannot be resolved, the parties involved may have to agree to disagree, but in a peaceful manner. This necessitates respect for all concerned.

Violence: A Destructive Method of Handling Conflict

You have learned of constructive ways to deal with conflict. Is there such a thing as a destructive method of dealing with conflict? If a conflict is settled, how can it be destructive? The answer is if an act of violence is used. If physical force is used against another person or group that harms them to the point where they are completely subdued and afraid to speak up, then a



3-22

Sometimes a teacher acts as a mediator to resolve conflicts between students.

destructive method of handling conflict has been used. The conflict is ended only because one person or party has been injured or even killed by another person or group.

Gangs often use this form of conflict resolution. It also happens within some families. It may take the form of spouse abuse, child abuse, or elder abuse. If conflicts arise, one family member may attempt to completely dominate another family member. Physical force is often used, but emotional abuse can be equally devastating. Suicide also falls into this category. A person may feel there is no way out and attempt suicide.

Remember that violence does not solve a conflict. Violence is costly to society in terms of tax dollars spent on criminals in prisons. It is also costly to people in terms of lowered self-worth and lost dignity in addition to physical pain and suffering.

Always strive for positive resolutions of conflicts where differences are settled

peacefully and friendships and families are kept intact. Conflict resolution skills will benefit you throughout your life as they foster relationships, increase job productivity, and prevent violence.

Check It Out!

1. State three possible causes of conflict.
2. Give an example of a negative reaction to conflict and an example of a positive reaction to conflict.
3. Why are “I” messages more successful than “you” messages in resolving conflicts?
4. Name the most ideal negotiation and compromise method.
5. List the steps in the conflict resolution process.
6. Why is mediation sometimes needed to resolve conflicts?

Chapter Review

Summary

Developing your ability to communicate well will help you throughout your life. To do this, you will want to improve your verbal communication skills. This involves speaking and listening. As a speaker, you need to send clear messages. As a listener, you want to receive and understand messages.

Nonverbal communication is an important part of the communication process as well. As you talk with people, you will become aware of the many messages you receive through nonverbal communication. Your appearance, manners, and body language are just a few of the ways you convey messages without words.

Technology has led to new forms of communication. These include cellular phones, voice mail, and e-mail. Remember to use these mediums of communication cautiously and courteously.

Open communication is important in personal relationships. Sharing positive feelings with others encourages open communication. Recognizing common communication barriers such as stereotypes, prejudices, coded messages, and gender differences helps people overcome them.

Negative feelings can occur in relationships. Learning to handle these feelings in a positive way is another important communication skill. Because of the diversity of today’s workplace, communication in the workplace is especially important.

No matter how well people communicate, conflicts are still going to occur. There are many types and causes of conflicts, just as there are negative and positive reactions to them. Conflicts can best be resolved through negotiation and compromise. The conflict resolution process can also be used to resolve conflict. Mediation by a neutral third party is sometimes necessary. Violence is a destructive method of conflict resolution.

Think About It!

1. Why do you think good communication is easiest when people know one another and have similar backgrounds?
2. How would you rate your verbal communication skills at school and at home? Based on your rating, what steps would you take to improve your listening and speaking skills?
3. Choose conversation openers that you think would help you begin and develop a conversation with each of the following:
 - A. A soccer player.
 - B. A child in a pet store.
 - C. A teacher whose class you enjoy.
 - D. Parents of your dating partner.
4. In your opinion, is it fair to judge people on the basis of nonverbal communication? Explain your answer.
5. Apply the concept of open communication to an employee/ employer relationship. When will open communication help this relationship? When will it hinder the relationship?

6. Summarize the benefits of communicating positive feelings. How do you communicate positive feelings to others?
7. Select and rank any five barriers to communication listed in this chapter. Use the number one as the most frequently observed barrier. Use the number five as the least frequently observed barrier.
8. Imagine that someone is very angry with you. Suggest ways that you would want that person to handle his or her negative feelings.
9. What in your opinion is the least desirable way to resolve a conflict?
10. In what careers would good communication skills be especially helpful? Explain your answer.

Try It Out!

1. Try to improve your listening and speaking skills by having a conversation with another person about any topic. When one partner speaks, the other listens. Neither person may respond to any statement without first summarizing what the partner has said. Incorrect summaries must be clarified before the conversation continues.
2. The same words can be used to convey different meanings by changing the tone of voice. Ask classmates to say one statement three different ways to convey three different meanings. Examples are: "I like the new youth director." "That's a nice looking outfit you're wearing."
3. Ask classmates to demonstrate desirable skills in communicating the following messages. Discuss each message after it is delivered. Tell why you think the speaker chose a certain phrase, speaking style, or tone of voice.
 - A. Describe your favorite meal to your best friend.
 - B. Describe your favorite meal to your grandparent.
 - C. Ask a restaurant waiter to recook a hamburger that is too rare.
 - D. Ask a salesclerk to recheck a sales slip that you think is wrong.
 - E. Communicate with a four-year-old who wants to eat cookies just before dinner.
 - F. Role-play a situation in which a talkative young man is dating a quiet young woman.
4. Work in a small group to develop a list of communication barriers. Exchange lists with another group. As a team, discuss some ways to overcome barriers.
5. Brainstorm as a class and suggest as many stereotypes as you can. Discuss how such stereotypes could limit your ability to communicate with others.
6. Select a possible conflict between two students who are working together on a class project. Demonstrate the four methods used to negotiate and compromise.
7. Role-play the use of the conflict resolution process. Describe a hypothetical situation that might occur in your school where the conflict resolution process could be used. Have classmates take roles as the two groups in conflict. If your school has peer mediators, ask one of them to participate in the role-play.

career.guide

Employment Opportunities | Entrepreneurial Opportunities | Rewards and Demands | Preparation Requirements

Food Science, Dietetics, and Nutrition Careers

Career Ladder for Food Science, Dietetics, and Nutrition

► Advanced Degree

Nutrition researcher
Health inspector
Clinical dietitian
Food production chemist
Quality control director

► Bachelor's Degree

Registered dietitian
Food technologist
Food inspector
Test kitchen supervisor
Quality control technician

► Associate's Degree

Laboratory technician
Dietary aide
Foodservice assistant

► High School Diploma

Food processing worker

► Pre-High School Diploma

Volunteer in a community kitchen or a meal delivery service for shut-ins
Participate in local science clubs and 4-H programs related to science

Food scientists apply the principles of science to maintaining a food supply that promotes health and satisfies consumers. Dietitians help people improve their health and well-being through more nutritious diets.

Employment Opportunities

Many food scientists help manufacturers produce, process, preserve, and package food products. They research new food sources and develop products that meet consumer demands for taste and convenience. Food scientists also inspect handling operations to make sure safety standards are met. In government agencies, they conduct basic research to improve food sources. Scientists also monitor compliance with nutrition labeling laws and health standards to enforce government regulations.

Dietitians can serve many roles depending on their work setting. In hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities, they plan diets to address patients' needs. Community dietitians counsel individuals and groups as part of local public health programs. Management dietitians direct the foodservice operation for hospitals, schools, restaurant chains, and other institutions. They handle all hiring, training, budgeting, planning, and purchasing to prepare nutritious, appealing meals.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

With a background in food science, a self-employed person can offer research services to food companies on a project basis. This type of arrangement allows them to work the hours they prefer. Self-employed dietitians offer consulting services to food companies, airlines, hotels, weight-loss centers, and private clients. Those with writing skills sometimes become the authors of cookbooks, textbooks, or newspaper columns.

Rewards and Demands

Many workers in this field make significant health contributions to the food supply and the diets of individuals. These workers are rewarded by knowing they are helping people live longer, healthier lives.

Demands of this career area involve standing for many hours and making sure all work is done accurately. There is no room for error. Some jobs may require working evenings or on weekends.

Preparation Requirements

Few jobs are available in this professional field without a college degree or special training. In high school, students can prepare for college entry by taking as many science classes as possible. If offered, food science is a good choice. Math classes are very important, too.

Entry-Level Jobs

A high school education may qualify workers for jobs in food processing plants.

Midlevel Jobs

There are several job possibilities for graduates of community college programs. Dietary aides help dietitians assemble meals in hospitals and nursing homes. Large schools that employ foodservice directors use trained lunchroom assistants to help prepare and serve the menus. Research technicians help scientists set up laboratory experiments.

Professional-Level Jobs

Beyond a four-year degree, food scientists and dietitians who wish to work in a research lab, clinic, or public health office usually need a master's degree or a doctorate. Requirements vary by state, but most dietitians need a license to practice. This requires completion of a college program approved by the American Dietetic Association (ADA), an internship, and a certification exam. The license allows the dietitian to become a registered dietitian (RD).

Personal Qualities Needed for Success

Food science and dietetics careers require above-average ability in science and in communicating scientific principles to the general public. Laboratory scientists prefer solitary work, but dietitians and other food scientists must enjoy working with people. Curiosity, imagination, patience, and persistence are important traits for workers in this field.

Future Trends

The rapid growth of scientific knowledge touches all fields, especially food and health. Scientists are finding new ways to add more-nourishing ingredients to food products. As facts increase about preserving health and preventing disease, dietitians play important roles in helping people make informed food choices. With adults living longer and the population growing, demand by seniors for nutrition counseling will increase. As health and fitness become more important aspects of everyday life, foodservice providers, restaurant chains, and catering companies will need more nutrition consulting from dietitians.

Career Interests, Abilities, and You

A good way to pursue a career in this field is to take food-related and science courses in high school. You might also ask to shadow someone working in one of the occupations. Seek part-time employment or do volunteer work in a food-related program.



[Some scientists conduct research aimed at improving the nutrient quality of the food supply.](#)