

If you have an uneven number of group members, join the party yourself. After about two minutes, give the signal to switch. Make sure everyone changes partners; then announce the new topic. Continue the activity for several rounds.

Here are some topics to get you started.

trade secret

If you have the time to come up with topics of your own, all the better. After all, who knows the interests of your group better than you?

- Describe an important friendship in your life right now.
- Describe an important decision you've made in the last year.
- Describe why your family is important to you.
- Describe ways in which you see yourself changing.
- Describe some important traditions in your family.
- Name some things you worry about a lot that really aren't very important.

The perfect greeting

Make the transition to your next activity by saying something like this—

You're pretty good at verbal communication. How good are you at non-verbal communication? Whether you know it or not, you're probably communicating nonverbally right now. Nonverbal forms of communication are just as important as verbal ones when it comes to letting people know how we feel. If you don't believe it, check out this demonstration.

You'll need one volunteer to help you with this activity.

Let's say [name your volunteer] and I are in a school hallway. I'm going to greet [your volunteer] several different ways. Each time, though, I'm just going to say one word, "Hi." Notice how the situation changes as I change my nonverbal communication.

You and your volunteer will run through the same scene seven different times. Each time, you will walk up to the person and say, "Hi," altering your nonverbal communication according to the following instructions.

1. Walk past the person, looking continually at the floor, and say, "Hi."
2. Walk past the person, look quickly at him, then down again, and say, "Hi."
3. Walk past the person, look up at him, smile, and say, "Hi."
4. Walk up to the person, stop, look at him, smile, pat him on the arm, and say, "Hi."
5. Walk up to the person, stop, look at him, smile, put your arm on his shoulder (or shake hands), and say, "Hi."
6. Walk up to the person, stop, look at him, smile, give him a sideways hug, and say, "Hi."
7. Announce—but don't demonstrate—that the next step might be a bear hug or a kiss.

After you've gone through the different scenarios, get some feedback from your volunteer. Ask questions like these—

- Which greetings did you prefer? Why?
- Which greetings made you uncomfortable? Why?
- How do you think you'd respond if someone greeted you like I did in the last few scenarios?

After the volunteer shares his feelings, share some of your own thoughts, feelings, and preferences concerning nonverbal communication.

Introduce the next part of your meeting, perhaps by saying —

Let's spend the rest of our time focusing on nonverbal communication. It's not just the way we greet people; it's how we look when we say something, how we stand or sit, and how we hold our bodies. The fact is, we communicate more nonverbally than we do verbally.

Include your group members in the discussion by encouraging them to answer the following questions. If you find that some of your kids are reluctant to respond, call on them specifically. Make this a group-wide discussion.

- Give me an example of one nonverbal form of communication you've noticed in this meeting so far.

Be prepared to share an example or two that you've noticed to give your kids an idea of what you're looking for. For instance, did anyone look at his watch or shift in his chair? Both of those actions could be considered nonverbal messages of impatience.

- Do your parents ever communicate nonverbally? If so, when and how? What are they saying?
- Give an example of your own form of nonverbal communication, using only your face or body.

Give your kids some practice in communicating nonverbally. Explain the activity:

I want each of you to think of an attitude or emotion. One at a time, we're going to try to express those attitudes without using words.

Put yourself on the spot by going first. Convey an attitude such as boredom, disinterest, anger, or love using facial expressions, body language—anything but verbal cues. Let your group members try to guess what emotion you're expressing. After someone correctly guesses what you're trying to communicate, have the person sitting on your right go next. Continue around the circle until everyone has had a chance to express herself nonverbally.

trade secret

Not every exercise or activity in the meeting is going to work with your group. Don't let these little failures throw you. Keep your focus on the big picture of the meeting. If you sense that an activity's failing, bail out of it and move on.

You don't say

Ask for a volunteer to stand with you in the middle of the circle. Describe the activity by saying something like this—

We all have a personal comfort zone. A comfort zone is the amount of space we need around us in order to feel at ease. We're going to do a little experiment now to see how big [the name of your volunteer]'s personal comfort zone is.

Stand facing your volunteer from a distance. Look him in the eye and smile.

I'm going to keep stepping closer and closer to you until you decide I've invaded your personal comfort zone. When that happens, when you start to feel uncomfortable about how close I am, just say, "Stop."

Take one step toward your volunteer and ask if he's comfortable. If he says, "Yes," take another step. As you get closer, watch for any nonverbal clues the volunteer may give off to indicate growing discomfort. For example, the volunteer may get an embarrassed look on his face, start to lean back, shift his weight to his heels, change the position of his arms, or turn away from you.

Point out any nonverbal clues you pick up on. When the volunteer says, "Stop," give the rest of the group a chance to look at the space between you. Ask other students to explain whether their personal comfort zones are bigger or smaller than your volunteer's.

If you have a few extra minutes, do a little experimenting with body position. Turn away from your volunteer and see whether that makes him feel more comfortable. Stand to his side and see if he still feels uncomfortable. Discuss as a group how a person's comfort zone can change.

Discuss your group members' personal preferences using some of the following questions.

- How do you usually greet the people you're closest to?
- What kind of greeting are you most comfortable with?
- What nonverbal forms of communication does your family use?
- Would you describe yourself as a physical person? If so, why do you suppose you're like that? If not, why not?

It's a group thing

Prepare your group members for another potentially uncomfortable exercise.

It's time for another big challenge. Here's what we're going to do. Without saying a word, we're all going to stand up and greet each other, letting our nonverbal communication do the talking. You might give some people a bear hug, some people a playful punch in the arm,

trade secret

As you're moving toward your volunteer, give your kids a running commentary as to your own comfort level. When you get too close for comfort, tell your group members about it and explain how you feel.

some people a high five, and some people a handshake. The only rule is that you have to greet everyone in the group. Ready? Nonverbally communicate!

Afterward, discuss the exercise using questions like the ones below. Ask three or so group members to answer each question.

- How uncomfortable were you during this activity?
- What was uncomfortable about the experience?
- How did different people in the group greet you?
- Why do you suppose different people were greeted differently?
- What's one thing you learned about yourself during this activity?

Says You

Wrap up this meeting by sharing a few thoughts from God's Word.

This session has been a real learning experience for me. I'm still not totally comfortable with all of this nonverbal communication stuff. I have a lot to learn. I just want to thank you for being open to trying these new ideas and activities.

As you've probably noticed by now, each week I try to bring up a Bible verse that relates to our session topic. This week I want to talk about the ways in which God communicates to us.

The Bible tells us that God communicates to us in three different ways: (1) through his son, Jesus Christ; (2) through his book, the Bible; and (3) nonverbally, through his creation.

Read Romans 1:19-20. Then continue.

I can really identify with these verses. When I'm on the beach or in the mountains or just out looking at the stars at night, I can pick up God's nonverbal communication. I see what he's done, and I understand more about him because of it.

Give a personal example of a time God's creation revealed something about him to you.

This has been the second of three lessons on communication. If I could communicate just one thing for you to remember after you leave here today, I'd want you to know that—

Finish this sentence by sharing something personal (and brief) about your faith and your life.

trade secret

Make sure you keep your talk to five minutes or less. Any longer than that, and you risk losing your kids' attention.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

—Romans 1:19-20

trade secret

After the meeting, make it a point to seek out your group members individually to thank them for coming and let them know how glad you are that they came.