

# COMMUNICATION

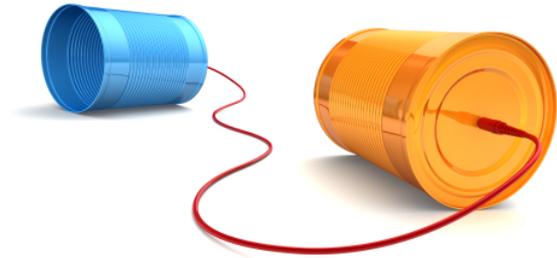
Volunteer Training  
Indiana Department of  
Correction

# TOPICS



- Communication
- Communicating with the Population
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Communication with Staff
- Outside Correspondence
- Confidentiality
- The Privacy Act

# COMMUNICATION



- Communication is the most powerful tool that staff and volunteers have to enact change among those that are incarcerated.
- Done correctly, it can encourage the appropriate mindset for a successful re-entry.
- Done poorly, it can lead to manipulation and negative consequences for everyone involved.
- This module will go over examples of both.

# COMMUNICATION

We are always communicating, either effectively or ineffectively. A volunteer's communication style can affect their relationship with administration, staff, and the population. Communicating effectively is a skill that can be learned. Good communication skills can assist and even enhance the work you do. The following information has been assembled to provide you with both general and correctional-specific guidance in this area.



# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

Individuals that are incarcerated have had more than their share of frustrations throughout their lives. Most have experienced repeated failure and are, at least at the outset, suspicious of any offer of assistance or guidance. Effective and appropriate communication is essential to creating a bond and building the trust necessary for real change.

The following guidelines provide a frame of reference for volunteers in communicating with and relating to our population.

However, many of the best practices are learned with experience and through the assistance of veteran staff and seasoned volunteers.

**Ask staff and other volunteers lots of questions throughout your volunteer service.**

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

## **Be yourself**

There is no need to establish a façade or to create some kind of special status for yourself. Be the best version of you.

## **Mean what you say**

Never make a promise unless you have thought it through first and are prepared to carry it out. They will test you, call your bluff, and see if you will deliver. This is an important part in the slow process of them learning to trust you.

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

## **Be supportive**

Be encouraging, friendly, but also firm. It is a part of your job to be honest and objective, disapproving when this is warranted, as well as praising, supportive, and encouraging when that is warranted.

## **Show respect**

Respect is the foundation of effective communication. They will not be open with you until they respect or trust you. Conversely, you must respect their individuality and basic rights as a human being. There is no room for narrow prejudices or feelings of superiority.

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

## **Don't probe**

Let them tell you on their own time about the offense committed, the family left behind, or any other deeply held guilt-associated matters. Be respectful to them as an individual.

## **Acceptance**

Accept them as someone who has a unique story like everyone else. To pigeonhole or categorize a person is, in a way, to dehumanize them.

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

## **Be patient**

Do not expect overnight miracles. When things have been going wrong for many years, these things cannot be corrected in a few weeks or months. The positive effects of your relationship may not have a decisive effect until long after you have moved on.

## **Win respect for yourself**

Volunteers that follow the rules are respected by both staff and the population. Be a role model and lead by example. Nothing wins respect more than a positive and caring volunteer that follows the rules and holds them to a higher standard.

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE POPULATION

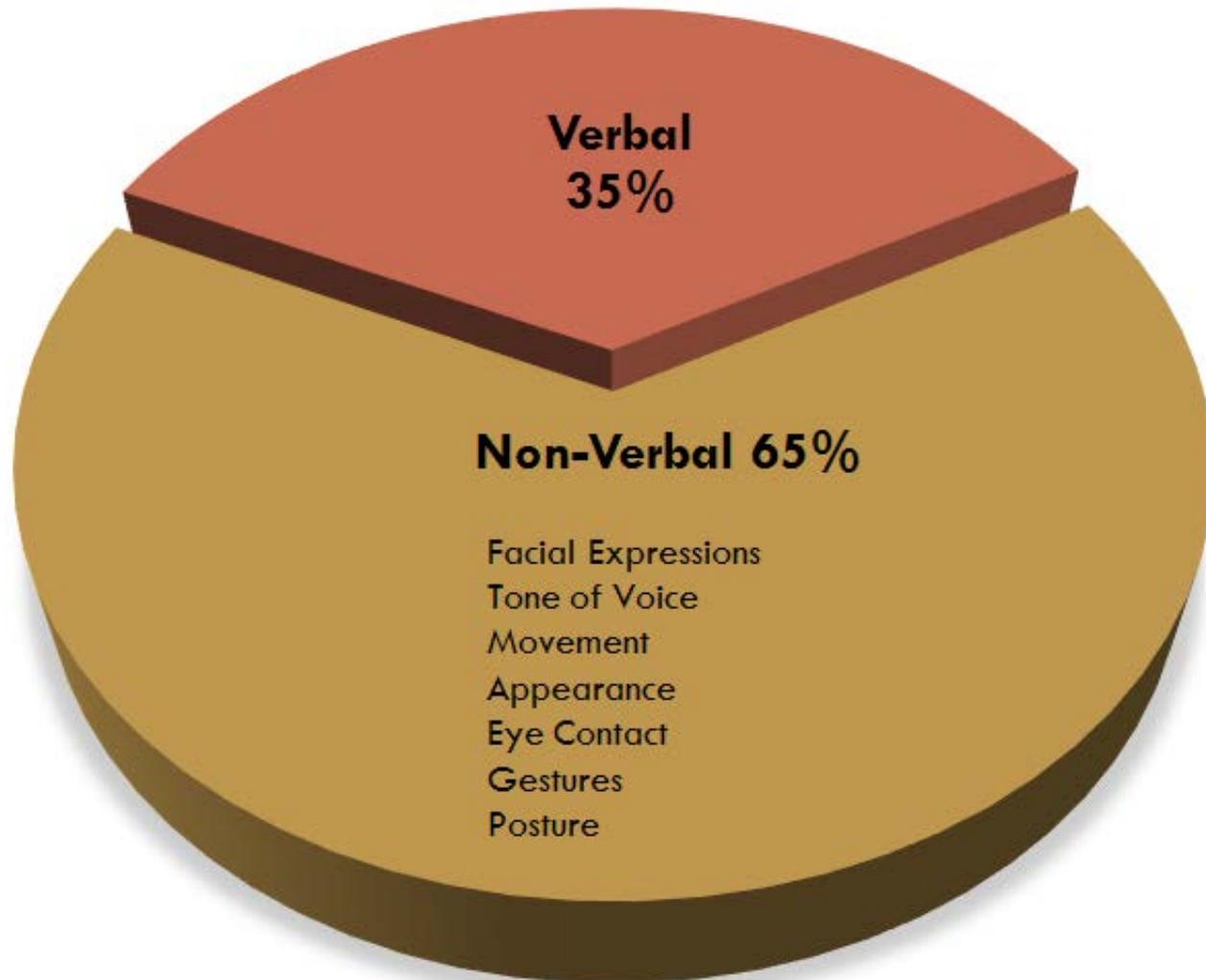
## **Don't over-identify**

You cannot take the burden of someone else's problems on yourself. They are not your problems to solve. Offer a listening ear, caring demeanor, and face of support, but let them find their own solutions. In the end, this will empower them for the future challenges they will undoubtedly face.

## **Don't expect thanks**

While most of the population will express their appreciation, you may not receive thanks or any overt show of gratitude. They may feel it but may not know how to express it or may actually feel embarrassed by it. You may not hear “thank you” but your effort will be, in the long run, greatly appreciated, probably more than you will ever know.

# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION



# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

## Facial Expressions

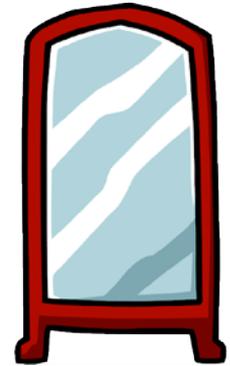
- Your facial expressions should be natural of course but try to avoid extreme reactions to information. Sometimes they are trying to gauge your reaction.

## Tone of Voice

- Try to keep your voice calm and collective and avoid extreme tones. A calm and collective voice communicates control.



# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION



## Movement

- Your movement should be thoughtful and speak to confidence. Parents often tell their children to walk with a purpose.

## Appearance

- Your appearance is extremely important. Your appearance should be neat and appropriate for a correctional environment. Be very mindful of what your appearance communicates to the population, staff, and other volunteers.

# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION



## Eye Contact

- Make appropriate eye contact. Too little and you may appear intimidated. Too much could make them uncomfortable, especially those lacking social skills.

## Gestures

- Be conservative when using gestures. Remember that you are in a correctional facility.

## Posture

- Your posture should always be alert and attentive. Volunteers that settle into a routine can find themselves becoming complacent. A slouched back may give the impression of insecurity, lack of confidence, or indifference.

# COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF



Remember, you are a guest of the facility.

- Wardens are charged with maintaining the safety and security of their facility while providing rehabilitative programming. The latter cannot be accomplished without the dedication of volunteers. Volunteers are invited into the facility to provide these vital services, but they must also operate within facility operations designed to keep everyone in a safe and secure environment.

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- Activities must be scheduled in strict accordance with existing facility routines, rules, and regulations. If a situation arises where there is a question or doubt as to the proper course of action, the volunteer should consult with their group leader, facility supervisor, Community Engagement Coordinator, and/or the Chaplain.

# COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF



Your relationship with staff is just as important.

- Volunteers should be aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the facility staff.

Always be supportive of staff and the facility.

- You may hear complaints from the population about correctional staff, the administration, rules and regulations, or even other volunteers. It is the role of the volunteer to be supportive of staff and the facility while still empathetic of the offender. **Under no circumstances** should a volunteer undermine the staff, as this is a security concern. Address any complaints or concerns to your facility supervisor, the Community Engagement Coordinator and/or the Chaplain.

# COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF



Always work with correctional officers.

- It is the work of correctional officers to oversee the population at all times. A correctional officer or other staff member may be assigned to be in the vicinity of your volunteer program/activity. This is for the safety of the facility, the population, staff, and the volunteers. Correctional officers are essential to the success of facility operations.

Maintain a cooperative relationship with custody staff.

- If you have any questions about the direction you have been given, please follow-up with your group leader, facility supervisor, Community Engagement Coordinator, and/or the Chaplain.

# COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF



- Facilities operate within a chain of command. What this means is that direction flows down from the Warden and any questions or concerns flow up through each supervisor. All staff and volunteers alike are expected to operate under this model.
- If at any time you have any concerns, you should follow the chain of command by contacting your group leader, facility supervisor, the Community Engagement Coordinator or the Chaplain. If you feel that your issue has not or cannot be resolved at this level, you can contact the Deputy Warden of Re-Entry or Program Director for a resolution. If the DWR or Program Director feels it rises to the level of the Warden, they will make that decision.
- It is important everyone abides by the chain of command to ensure information is shared appropriately and situations can be resolved successfully.

# OUTSIDE CORRESPONDENCE

Volunteers are prohibited from any type of personal correspondence including letters, emails, or phone calls with anyone incarcerated with the IDOC without prior approval. Any personal contact that exists prior to volunteering must be disclosed on the Volunteer Application. Any personal contact after volunteering has begun must be reported to staff. This includes any previously approved visitation.

The facility may allow a volunteer group to distribute general information throughout the facility. Examples are religious materials, re-entry resources, or announcements of the group's upcoming events. The request to distribute these types of resources should be through your facility supervisor and must be pre-approved by the facility.

# OUTSIDE CORRESPONDENCE

It is possible that you may receive unsolicited correspondence via phone calls, letters, or emails from someone incarcerated or their family or friends. If this happens, report it IMMEDIATELY to staff. Staff will take the appropriate action.

# OUTSIDE CORRESPONDENCE

There are situations where offender correspondence is in the best interest of their re-entry. This may be in connection with formal mentoring or a re-entry program.

Any and all correspondence during their incarceration and post-incarceration must be pre-approved by the Warden.

# OUTSIDE CORRESPONDENCE

If you would like to request that contact be allowed with an individual outside of your normal volunteering duties, you may make the request to the Community Engagement Coordinator or Chaplain and they will issue you the proper form.

# CONFIDENTIALITY



To the extent permitted by law, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all information to which they are exposed to while serving as a volunteer for the IDOC, whether this information involves someone incarcerated, their family, staff members, volunteers, or other people or program information. Volunteers may not use or release information acquired as a result of their volunteer service if it is confidential by statutory provision or officially designated as confidential.

# CONFIDENTIALITY



Confidentiality is a vital aspect of the professional code in human services. All volunteers are subject to the same rules of confidentiality as Department staff.

As a volunteer, you are prohibited from disclosing the contents of records, files, papers and written/verbal communication to which you may have access.

You also agree not to give out or discuss any specific personal information about any individual under the supervision of the DOC regardless of the source of information

# CONFIDENTIALITY



Volunteers are expected to respect the integrity and confidentiality of offenders and the IDOC.

Do not use full names in discussions outside of the facility setting.

Do not engage in discussion with the population about topics such as other staff members, gossip, or any personal information that is sensitive in nature.

Prior approval from the Warden is required before any information regarding your volunteer experience with the IDOC is published or released to the media in any way.

# CONFIDENTIALITY



## **Cases Where Confidentiality Does Not Apply**

As a volunteer, you should be aware of circumstances in which you are required to notify staff as soon as possible. This also applies to information shared during faith-based programming and pastoral visits.

1. Overt/covert threats to harm self or others
2. Reports of any alleged sexual activity between someone incarcerated and any other person
3. Reports of any sexual assault or intimidation between someone incarcerated and any other person
4. Any information regarding the safety and security of the IDOC facilities, staff, the community, and/or the population

# CONFIDENTIALITY



## **Cases Where Confidentiality Does Not Apply**

5. Plans to riot or escape
6. Possession of drugs or weapons
7. Suspicious or unexplained deaths (homicides, suicides)
8. Unknown past criminal conduct that increases the potential risk to a facility, including self-reported acts of homicide, attempted homicide, or sexual assault

# PRIVACY ACT



Access to confidential information about those that are incarcerated or institutional security is a critical part of the facility operation.

Occasionally, this information may become known to volunteers.

You may not release, even to friends and family, any information of this type obtained while volunteering. You may discuss your volunteer work with others, and we encourage you to do so. However, you should never identify any individual incarcerated or staff member in these discussions.

The Privacy Act of 1974 regulates the maintenance of records and releasing information about those that are incarcerated. There are civil and criminal penalties that may be applied to anyone who releases information improperly.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed the eLearning Training Module:

## Communication

If you have any questions,  
please contact your Community Engagement Coordinator.

