

BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION



We have all heard and most likely even said the following statement before -
"All behavior is a form of communication."

However, just because we hear and even repeat something that does not necessarily equate to fully believing, acknowledging and applying a given statement in practice. Hopefully this week we will all have a better understanding of this idea and take significant steps towards fully believing this idea and actually practicing it both in our work with those whom we serve, in our interactions with co-workers and finally in our relationships with those outside of work such as family and friends.

Before we jump to behavior as communication, let us review some basics of communication in general.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior" (Merriam-Webster) Thus for communication to take place at the least 2 individuals are required. In a conversation there is a Giver and a Receiver. However these, rolls alternate within the present interaction. As an example. at this very moment I am the Giver and each of you are the receivers. I have written these words (giving) and you are reading them (receiving). However, what and more importantly how information is shared is impacted not just on the current interaction between 2 parties, but also on the interactions and experiences of the Giver in the past. Likewise, the Receiver also filters the message being given through the lens of their own past interactions and experiences.



Of course, we cannot talk about behavior as communication without pointing out a fact that most of us don't even realize. ALL communication is mostly behavior. In fact, nonverbals account for 90% of every message that is communicated. 20% being the tone and inflection of one's voice and the other 70% being body language. It is exactly like our moms and dads used to tell us, "ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS."

We must learn the art of listening with our eyes not just with our ears.

Have you ever had a time that you were so upset and frustrated that you simply could not find words to express it and you wanted to do is scream? When is the last time you got to hold a crying baby and you did everything that you could think of and you still could not seem to comfort it and get it to calm down? There are times in our lives and often more so in the lives of those we serve that we are just like one or the other of these situations we cannot find the words to express what we are feeling or need in a given instance. As a result, we / they turn to behavior to attempt to communicate what we cannot with our words. Too often we, minimize behavior as being behavior without a real purpose. But all behavior has a purpose and we have to learn to find what the underlying message and purpose of that behaviors is.



Behaviors that we typically classify as "problematic" typically are trying to communicate messages that fall into one of three themes

- Physical Discomfort
- Emotional Distress
- Needs Unmet



So, I am sure you are asking, "How do I know which one of these is the issue and more specifically what is the message the person is trying to communicate? Believe it or not it is not as hard as we might think, but it does take time and effort. Whether they arise with our consumers or our family and other relationships effectively responding to these situations comes down to 5 simple principals -

Relationship - We must develop and maintain health, positive and caring relationships

Knowledge - A product of these relationships is knowledge, we get to know the other person

Observation - We must be attentive to what is going on around us and as stated earlier, "Listen with our eyes."

Awareness - When are actively applying the above we will be aware when something "isn't right" with the person we are concerned about.

Intervention - When we become aware then there is no other choice, but to take action in order to assist in addressing the concern or need of the individual.

AGAIN, these principals are just as applicable in our relationships outside of work as they are within it.