

Bead #6

TTYL - Talking, Texting & Other Tools for Communicating

Problems in the world would disappear if we talk to each other instead of about each other.

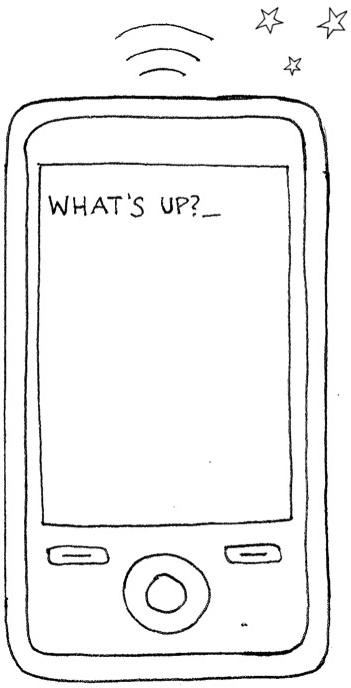
— Anonymous



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We hear a lot about communication these days, especially because we can now communicate instantly with someone all the way around the world, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

Talking, texting, email and writing are just some of the ways we communicate. There is also Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat ... the list goes on and on and is changing almost every week. We now send, receive and process massive amounts of information every day. In fact, we do so much communicating at such a fast pace that a whole new language of abbreviated versions of words and phrases, such as TTYL (Talk To You Later) developed just so we don't have to be slowed down by typing or saying the entire word.



Obviously, we humans like to communicate – a lot! It feels great to connect with another person and feel heard and understood, but the opposite – being misunderstood through miscommunication – can be a disaster. Effective communication helps us to express what we feel and mean in order to build relationships, solve problems, resolve differences and understand others. Since effective communication is crucial in so many areas of your life, let's take a look at how we can get better at it.

What does it mean to communicate? At its simplest, it is sharing information but as you've probably experienced, communicating effectively is a much more involved, complex process that requires a number of skills. It's a two-way street that involves both sending and receiving information.

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."



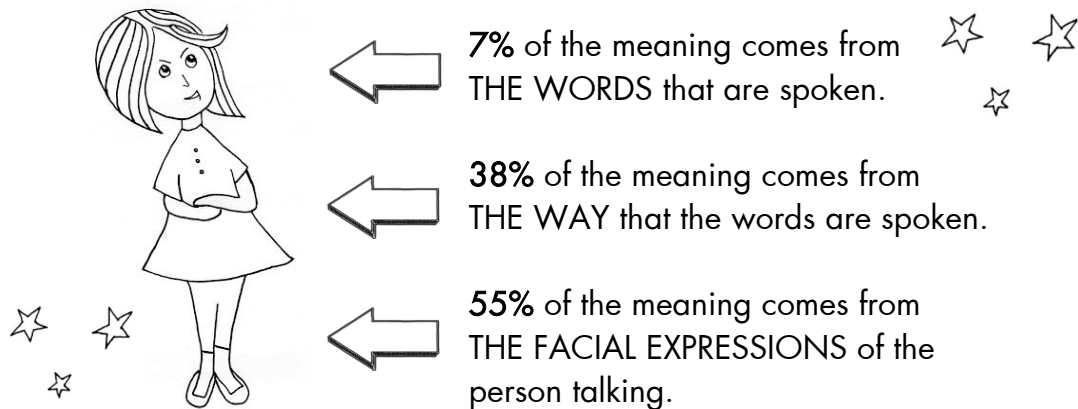
— Epictetus
(Greek philosopher)

Can you think of someone who loves to talk but is not a good listener? Annoying, right? Listening is one of the most important parts of good communication. Sometimes it's referred to as "active listening" because it requires your full concentration, avoiding interruptions, and giving feedback to the speaker to let her know you heard what she communicated. You can do this by restating what was said, asking questions, or nodding.

Perhaps you've tried to talk to someone who was watching TV, texting or doodling. Did she really hear what you were saying? Probably not. Being distracted often interferes with the message being communicated.

Nonverbal Body Language

Another hugely important part of communication is *nonverbal or body language*. Have you ever seen someone roll her eyes, cross her arms or turn and walk away when someone was trying to talk? Facial expressions, gestures, posture, body movement and eye contact are all ways we communicate without using words. In fact, the way you look, listen, move and react to another person can often tell more about how you feel than the words you use! Scientists who research communication have proven this. For example, UCLA Professor Albert Mebrabian's study of the effectiveness (*our understanding of what the other person is saying*) of spoken communication of feelings and attitudes found:



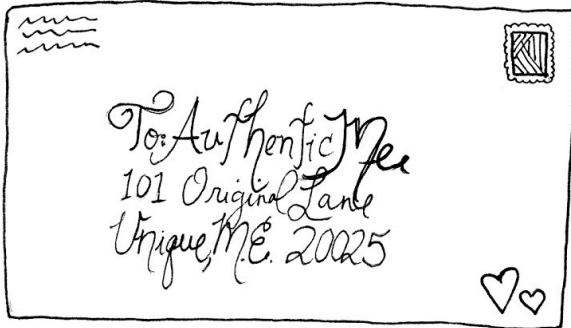
That is an over-simplification of important research but it does show the importance of our voice and body language. If body language is such a critical part of communication, you might agree that learning how to understand and use this non-verbal communication would be a powerful tool to develop.

Make sure your body language matches the words you are trying to communicate. When they match, it builds trust and connection with the other person, but if your words and actions don't match, this may generate mistrust and confusion. For example, if you are apologizing to someone while giggling, the apology may not seem genuine. You want to make sure your tone of voice, body language and words are all in sync with what you are trying to communicate. It takes practice so keep working at it and don't beat yourself up if you make a mistake.

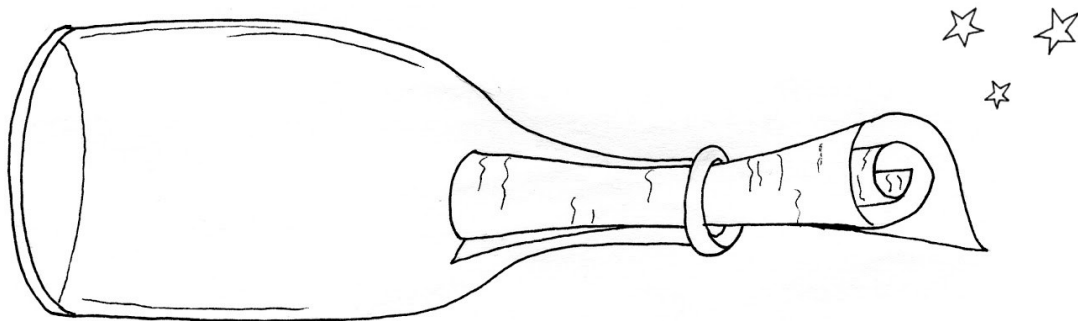
What about the times when you may not want to communicate your feelings? That's a great question because it happens a lot – especially when we are angry, hurt or stressed. Let's say you really want to appear confident and happy even though you may be feeling nervous and anxious on the inside (for example, your first day of school or an important piano recital). First, acknowledge your feelings without judgment or trying to change them. That can be very calming. Then, use the tips we provide throughout this guide – breathe slowly and deeply, hold your head high, use positive affirmations, smile and be yourself. It takes practice to improve your body language but it's worth the effort.

Emotions and Stress

A third part of learning to communicate effectively is to recognize how *emotions and stress* play an important role. We've already talked about how important it is to recognize and experience your true feelings and emotions. If you are not in touch with, can't manage, or don't understand your feelings, you'll have difficulty in relationships. The foundation for healthy relationships is the ability to express how we feel and what we need appropriately and respectfully. This takes practice (we sound like a broken record don't we?) so allow yourself time and realize you'll make a few mistakes along the way. Also be aware that your friends are learning how to recognize and manage their feelings as well. Mistakes are bound to happen, so learn how to forgive without holding a grudge.



When we are experiencing strong emotions or are under stress, we're more likely to act impulsively (quickly and without thinking), misread other people, and say or do something we will regret later. It's very important in these situations to take time to relax and calm down — to allow yourself time to think, feel and respond appropriately. How much time depends on the situation — it might be a brief moment or it could take an entire day or longer. Recall that your brain is still developing and for now, the impulsive part (Hello, Roxie!) is on high alert and ready to react, sometimes over very minor things. And, unfortunately, it often jumps to conclusions. So practice monitoring your emotions and stress and you'll see how much better your communications become.



Texting, Emails and Other Potential Pitfalls

We've talked about how complex communication is and the important role body language and emotions play. Try saying these statements out loud in each of these tones of voice: Friendly/Playful, Angry/Mad and Sarcastic.

You told him what? I'll never speak to you again!

You got those new boots? I'm so jealous of you!

Since you moved, it's like you've become a totally different person.

Can you see why the written word in a text message or email – without the benefit of body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, emotions and eye contact – can easily be misunderstood? Remember the research that shows the actual words have very little to do with what is communicated.



Also, you now know how easily your brain can think the worst and jump to conclusions without all the facts. This is especially true when you are texting. Next time, take a moment to **THINK** before you respond to something you believe is negative. Make sure you have all the facts.

A word about Sarcasm:

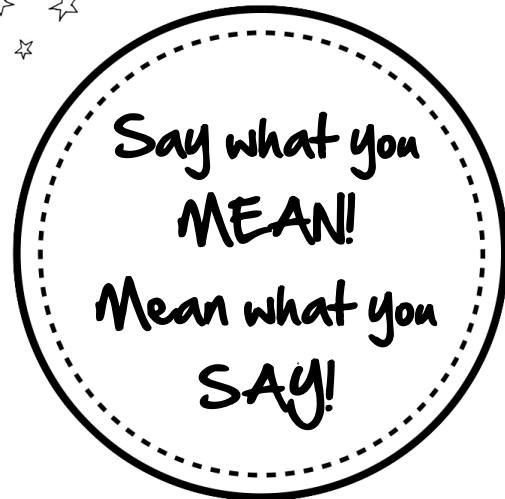
Sarcasm is a way of saying one thing but meaning the opposite. It usually involves saying something that appears to be a compliment but is really hurtful, offensive or an insult. It can be an indirect way of communicating a negative thought or emotion.

Comedians use it to be funny but be careful – some people use mean, hurtful sarcastic words and then excuse them by saying, "I was only kidding. Can't you take a joke?" Sound familiar? Examples of sarcasm include:

"You're sooo good at guitar - you should be in a band!"

"With that haircut, you should be on the cover of a magazine."

"Nice job. Way to go. You must be a genius."




Sarcasm can be funny but it can also be very damaging and hurtful. The person's tone of voice and body language can help you figure out what they intend. However, using sarcasm in written communications (texting, email, notes) can result in miscommunication!



Activity

Another way to help improve your use and understanding of non-verbal communication is to observe others. Go to a place where many people are communicating – perhaps a coffee shop, school cafeteria or shopping mall. You probably won't be able to hear their words (that would be eavesdropping!) but see if you can guess what they're communicating by their non-verbal, body language. (You can also try this by watching TV with the sound off.) Use this table to record your observations:

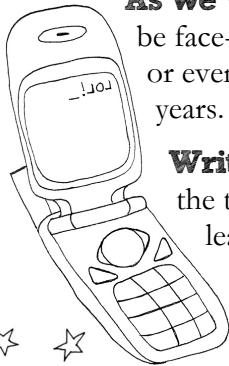
Category	What to Look For	Your Observations
Facial Expressions	Basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, love and surprise can be fairly easy to identify.	☆ ☆ ☆
Body Movements	Notice the way people hold their head, sit, walk and move.	
Gestures	Some gestures don't have universal meaning so try to observe gestures that may be misinterpreted, especially by people from different cultures or age groups.	
Eye Contact	Are people looking at each other? Do you notice how powerfully the eyes can communicate emotions?	
Touch	Look for the various ways people use touch to show emotion (holding hands, hugging, a pat on the back, etc.). Consider how the same form of touch can have entirely different meanings in different situations.	☆ ☆ ☆

Activity

The telephone was invented in 1876. Prior to that, communicating long distance was limited to the written word such as letters and telegraphs. People wrote beautifully expressive letters (often delivered *weeks* later) to friends and relatives when in-person communication was not possible. The telephone changed that by allowing people in distant locations the ability to talk and hear another's voice. Recent technologies have changed communication again. First it was through instant messaging and email, which made letters sent via regular mail seem outdated. Then mobile telephones allowed us to talk just about any time and anywhere. Texting is now a very common way to send a message quickly, often using shortened versions of words and symbols. Now, many teenagers use their mobile phones primarily for texting and not talking.






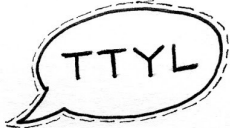




As we write this, FaceTime™ and Skype™ are the latest tools to enable us to be face-to-face with someone talking long distance. Who knows what next year or even next month will bring! Communication has certainly changed over the years.

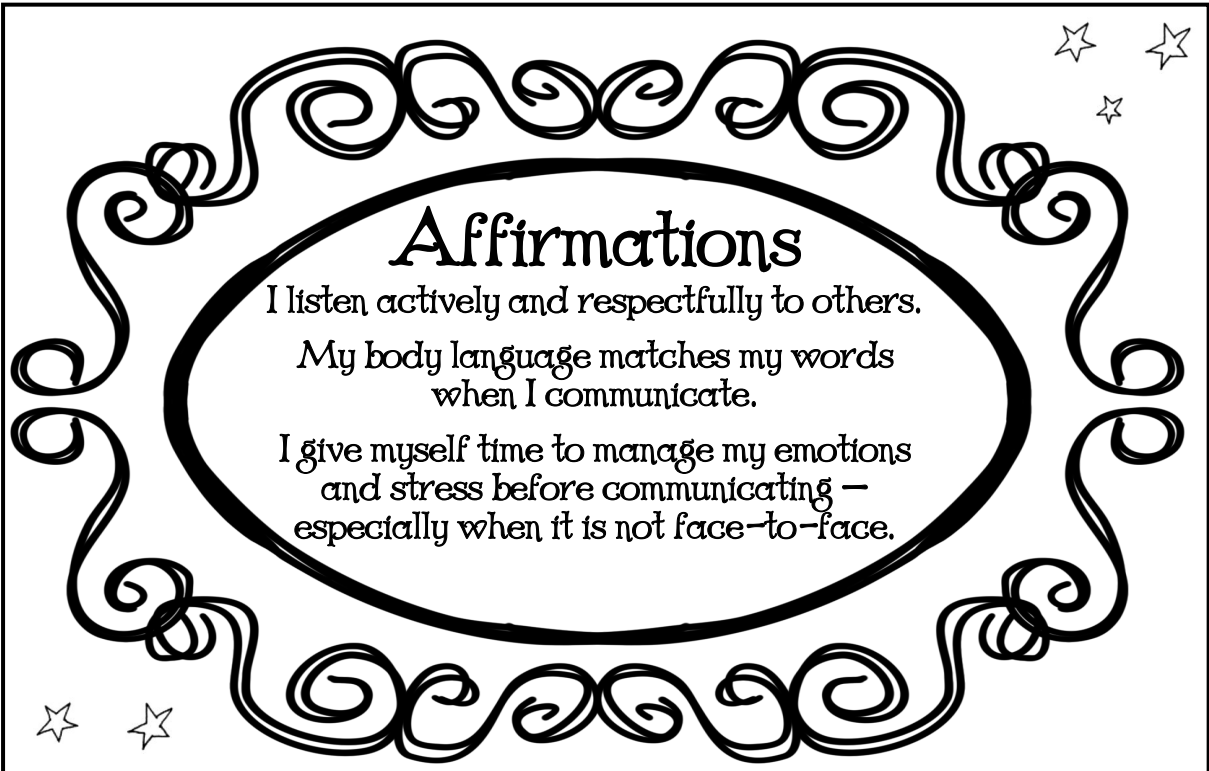


Write the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of some of the tools of communication used over the past 100 years. Consider what you learned about the importance of body language and how emotions play an important role. Then compare them to in-person, face-to-face communication and record your thoughts.



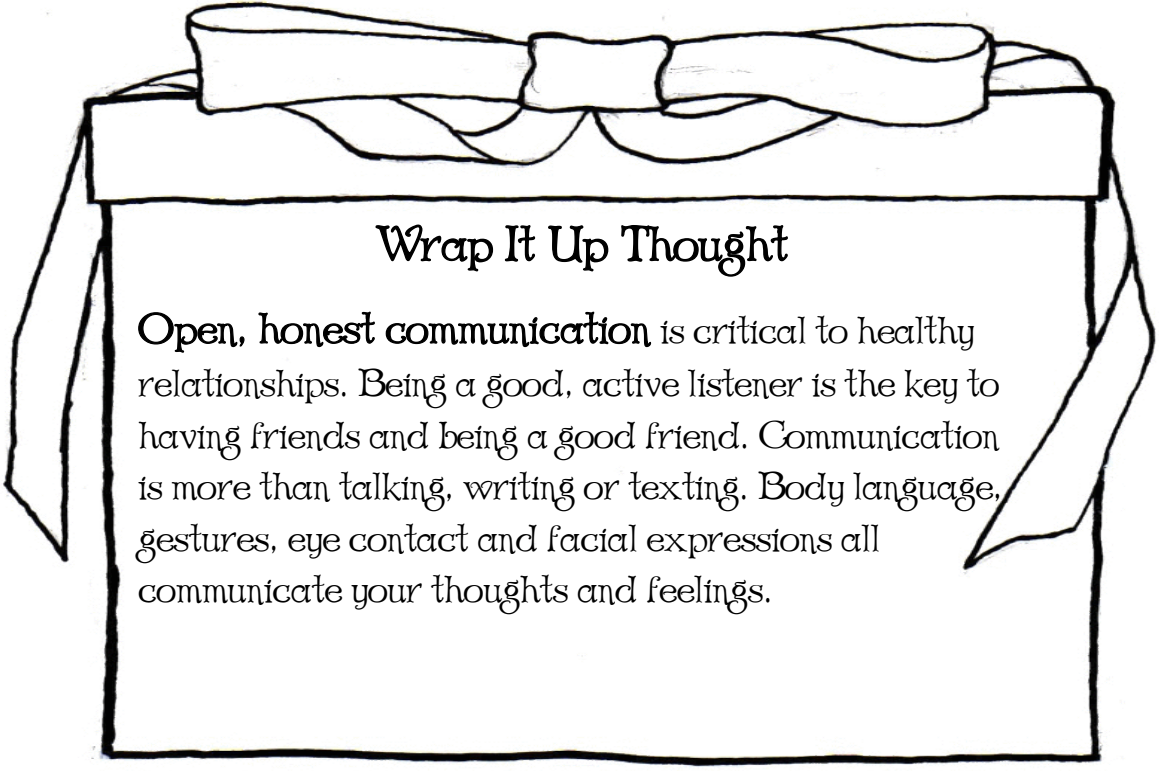
TYPE OF COMMUNICATION	PROS	CONS	THOUGHTS
Written Letter			
Telephone			

TYPE OF COMMUNICATION	PROS	CONS	THOUGHTS
Instant Messaging 			
Social media posts (i.e. Facebook)			
Email 			
Texting			
Face-to-Face (in person)			



Affirmations

I listen actively and respectfully to others.
My body language matches my words
when I communicate.
I give myself time to manage my emotions
and stress before communicating –
especially when it is not face-to-face.



Wrap It Up Thought

Open, honest communication is critical to healthy relationships. Being a good, active listener is the key to having friends and being a good friend. Communication is more than talking, writing or texting. Body language, gestures, eye contact and facial expressions all communicate your thoughts and feelings.

Bead #6

The bead for this section is a **STAR**

to remind you to **SHINE** before you **SHARE** when you find yourself in a situation where you feel strong emotions about what you are saying.

S is for STOP! Count to 21. Take a few deep breaths. Remember that the parts of your brain that help you make good decisions are not fully developed yet, but the part that is impulsive and emotional is in full bloom! This means that you sometimes **ACT** before your brain has had time to **THINK**. Take a few moments for your brain to consider the consequences of your actions.

H is for HONOR your feelings. Take the time to recognize and appreciate the full range of your feelings. They are the core of who you are!

I is for IGNORE some things. It's so easy to get caught up in girl drama and most of it ends up with hurtful, negative consequences. What you share says a lot about your character. Sometimes it's best to just ignore negative, hurtful or untrue rumors, notes, and text messages. Gossip and rumors will stop if people stop spreading them. You have the power to do that! However, **DON'T** ignore situations that involve bullying or anything dangerous or cruel. Seek the help of a trusted adult.

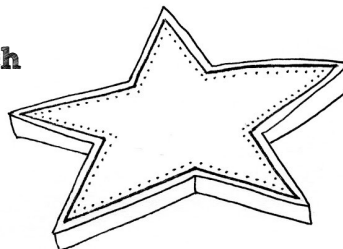
N is for NEVER say, text or post anything you wouldn't want your grandmother to see or read in a newspaper headline. Think about it. You have absolutely **NO CONTROL** over what happens to messages or photos you send or post electronically. They can be forwarded zillions of times – even by people you trust. You may regret something you've sent but you will almost never regret something not sent. So, take the high road and use this rule before saying or sending anything.

E is for EMPATHIZE with others. Put yourself in their shoes. Empathy helps you to treat others the way you want to be treated. That will really make you **SHINE**.

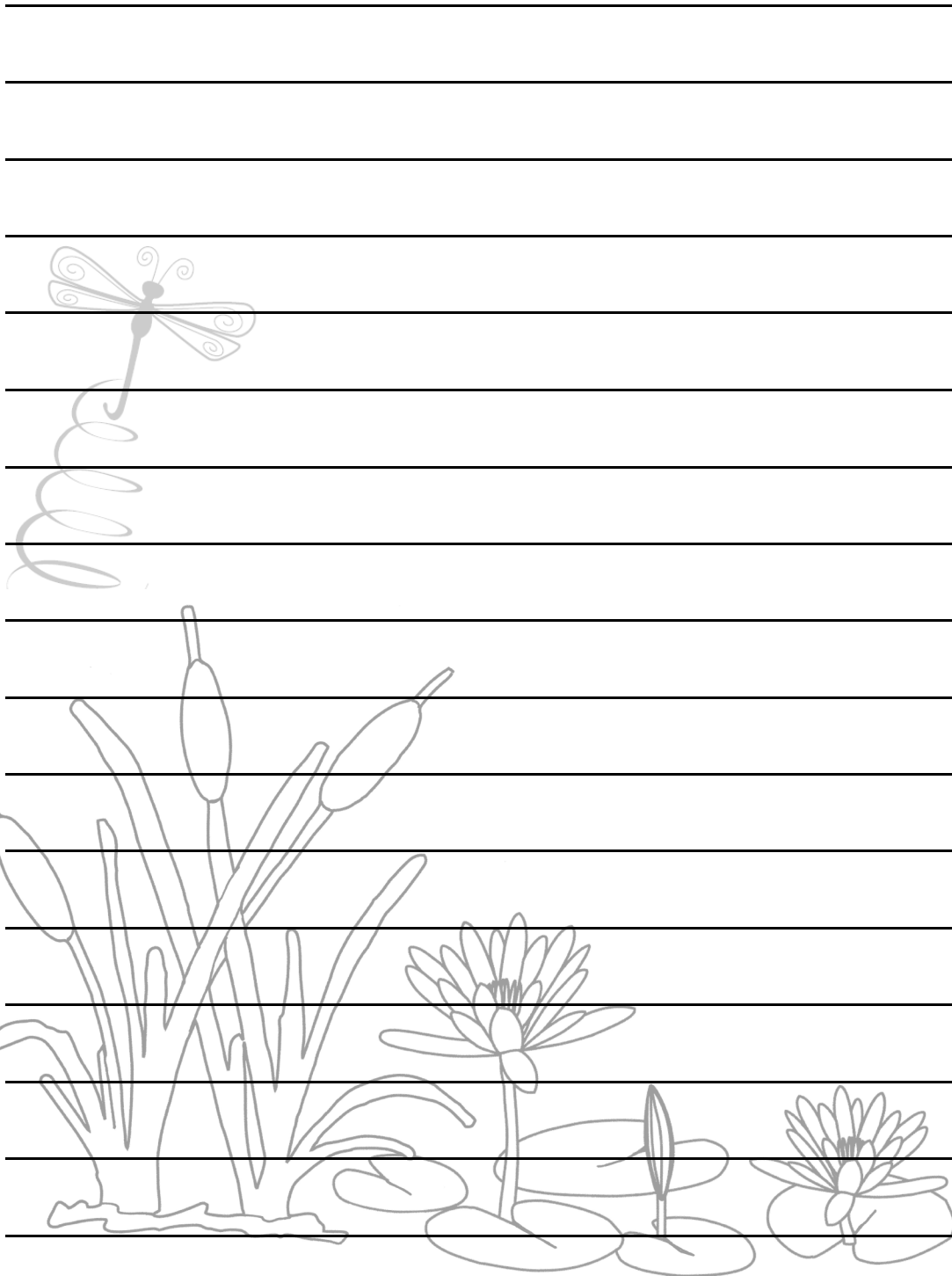
BE A STAR: Stop and think about what the authentic you wants to communicate — whether talking, texting or in writing – before you share it. It's very hard to take something back once it's said or sent.

You may also want the five points on the star to remind you of the five types of non-verbal communication:

- 1 Facial Expressions**
- 2 Gestures**
- 3 Touch**
- 4 Body Movement**
- 5 Eye Contact**



explore, embrace, empower



explore, embrace, empower

