

Non-Verbal Communication in the ICF/IID

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- When people think of non-verbal communication, some things that usually come to mind are eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, proximity to another, or gestures.

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- For example, eye contact can show you are interested in the person you are communicating with.
- Add facial expression to eye contact and you may communicate many different messages (e.g., you are angry with an individual, happy with an individual, bored etc.).

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- Body posture and gestures may also communicate a variety of messages.
- For example, standing with one's hands on their hips may convey authority.
- Arms folded with one hand on the chin may convey one is contemplating something.

Non-Verbal Communication in the ICF/IID

- Scratching one's head may convey one is perplexed or just that their head itches.
- Shrugging the shoulders may communicate one does not know something.

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- All of these are important when communicating with the individuals you work with.
- However, there are other aspects of non-verbal communication that you should be aware of.

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- The Observational Learning Theory¹ states learning takes place through observation and imitation. This is especially true when the person being observed has an authoritative or a popular status.

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- Two of the primary goals of an ICF/IID is to promote greater independence and choice for each individual and there are multiple regulations related to those goals, including, but not limited to, W125, W126, W133, W136, W137, W196, W227, W228, W233, W247, W249, W250, W268, W269, W270, W436, W467, and W487².
- However, even when facilities actively work to promote independence and choice and reduce power struggles,³ power differences between individuals and staff⁴ can exist based on the nature of assistance some individuals require.

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- This means when you work in an ICF/IID, you become a role model for the individuals you work with.
- All of your behavior (verbal and non-verbal) has the potential to be observed and imitated.
- With this in mind, consider some day to day possibilities that can send non-verbal messages.

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- Non-verbal communication can be based on what a person does and does not do.
- An example of what a person does could be dressing inappropriately for weather conditions.
- If a staff dresses inappropriately for weather conditions, it may be harder to convince an individual they should dress appropriately.

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- An example of what a person does not do could be transporting individuals in their car.
- What message would it send if their car is full of empty soda bottles and hamburger wrappers?
- Does the company vehicle look the same?
- This situation might lead an individual to wonder why staff want them to clean their room when the staff's car or company vehicle is not clean.

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- Always remember you are being watched and your non-verbal communication may speak louder than your verbal communication.

References

- ¹Understanding Observational Learning: An Interbehavioral Approach. Retrieved from the National Center for Biotechnology Information <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3139552/>
- ² *State Operations Manual Appendix J - Guidance to Surveyors: Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities.* Retrieved from https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/som107ap_j_intermcare.pdf
- ³ NADD Bulletin Volume IX Number 5 Article 2. Retrieved from <http://thenadd.org/nadd-bulletin/archive/>
- ⁴ A TREATMENT IMPROVEMENT PROTOCOL. Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services Tip 57. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4816/SMA14-4816.pdf>

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Send your comments or questions to
fsb@dhw.idaho.gov