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NON-VERBAL
COMMUNICATION &
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

For Afghan Refugee Youth
Facilitators

Prepared By

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REFUGEE YOUTH (AGES 14 – 18): NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION & CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Information for Community Health Workers/Field Teams/Direct Service Providers

The information provided below is for use with refugee and immigrant youth with the aim of educating youth on and supporting the development of social emotional skills to build their sense of social integration. Refugee and immigrant youth learn social emotional skills when community health workers/field teams/direct service providers provide them with opportunities and strategies to learn and apply these skills. In order to effectively develop social emotional skills in refugee and immigrant youth, it is important to create an environment where it is safe to learn and practice these skills and to express emotions; to model these skills through empathy and being emotionally responsive; to encourage and reinforce social skills, such as setting boundaries and effectively resolving conflict; and to create opportunities for refugee and immigrant youth to solve problems.

Each set of social emotional skills will be presented first as a group curriculum and then as an informational sheet. The group curriculum is designed for use with a group of refugee and immigrant youth and the informational sheet is designed for use with one refugee and immigrant youth - when the interaction is one-on-one. Examples, scenarios, and activities are provided for use, but can be modified to better suit the youth you are working with. For example, when teaching conflict resolution skills, use a relevant scenario from the refugee and immigrant youth's life, instead of one provided in the group curriculum or informational sheet. Refugee and immigrant youth are more likely to retain and practice social emotional skills in their lives when they are taught and applied to contexts that are personally relevant to them.

Lastly, your familiarity with and enthusiasm in providing this support to refugee and immigrant youth make a difference. Go over and become familiar with the content and present the information and activities with enthusiasm and confidence.

GROUP: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION & CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Objectives:

By the end of the session, youth will be able to:

1. To learn and understand different forms of communication and the meaning and power of nonverbal communication.
2. Describe how verbal and nonverbal behaviors may not be observed as the same message and may cause confusion or conflicts.
3. Explain the importance of being aware of one's own and others' nonverbal communication to make communication effective.
4. Participate in group building and trust enhancing exercises

Summary:

This session will help youth learn and understand different forms of communication, the meaning and power of nonverbal communication, the confusion and potential conflict that can result when verbal messages and nonverbal behaviors are misaligned, and the importance of being aware of one's own and others' nonverbal communication in order to make communication effective.

Note to Facilitators on Nonverbal Communication

Some youth will be very skilled at nonverbal communication. They intuitively know how to convey and express their feelings through their nonverbal communication and how to "read" the feelings of others. Other children may be less skilled at nonverbal communication. Approximately 3% to 10% of children and adolescents have nonverbal learning disorder or disability (NVLD) which can be associated with other learning, social, emotional, and behavioral problems. NVLD is a neurodevelopmental disorder marked by a set of cognitive, and sometimes social, difficulties among children of otherwise average or superior intelligence. NVLD will manifest differently from one child to the next, in terms of severity and areas of weakness. Youth with NVLD may demonstrate weaknesses in one or more of the following 5 areas: 1) visual and spatial awareness, 2) higher-order comprehension (difficulties identifying main ideas or supporting details that affect reading and writing or telling a story), 3) more advanced math based on recognizing concepts and patterns, 4) executive functions, such as organizing thinking and planning and carrying out actions, and 5) social communication (deficits in expressive and receptive components of nonverbal language).

Youth with NVLD may have trouble recognizing emotions and nonverbal cues in facial expressions and body language, so they do not know what is going on in social interactions. They miss social patterns that other youth pick up automatically, so they may not know how to appropriately respond in any given situation. Symptoms in social communication may present as repetitively asking questions, verbally labels information to understand it, over- shares information that is private or unrelated to topic at hand, extremely literal (struggles with sarcasm, innuendo, or other linguistic nuances), and highly advanced verbal skills.

If you notice a youth who displays any of the above behaviors or symptoms, particularly if they are associated with social communication, it will be helpful to get a better understanding of the severity of symptoms. Youth who demonstrate more severe behaviors or symptoms may not be appropriate for this group or one-on-one. Please refer youth to an education specialist or a mental health professional who specializes in children's disorders (child psychologist/psychiatrist or neuropsychologist). For youth who demonstrate only mild symptoms in the area of social communication, providing them with more one-on-one, structured support may be beneficial.

Session Facilitation:

[Greet and welcome youth as they arrive for group session. Encourage youth to sit in a circle.]

Part 1: Rules, Safety, Privacy, and Confidentiality

Aim: To explain expectations of the facilitators and minors and to acknowledge efforts to maintain safety, privacy, and confidentiality.

Sample Script:

For everyone to feel safe, respected, and open to sharing, it is important that we go over some group rules.

[Go over the following rules with youth]

- *Confidentiality: Everything that is said in this group stays in this group.*
- *Only one person speaks at a time while others listen. Do not hold side conversations while someone else is talking.*
- *Be kind, polite, and courteous to each other.*
- *No one will be forced to share if they do not want to.*

[Add any additional and relevant rules]

Part 2: Icebreaker/Warm Up Activity

Aim: To open the session, introduce some play and help minors feel comfortable with one another and introduce the topic for the session.

Sample Script:

Welcome everyone! We are so glad to see all of you here! Just as a reminder, my name is [] and I am a [Community Health Worker/Behavioral Health Case Manager/Therapist or Counselor].]. We are from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). We are here to provide you with education about wellness and to provide you with resources and additional support.

Warm-Up Activity: You Do not Say

1. Ask for two volunteers to come to the front of the room (or somewhere in the room so the other participants can see them).
2. Let the volunteers know that each of them will be told to demonstrate some actions or gestures by acting them out [Facilitator will whisper each action/gesture to the volunteers so that the rest of the group does not hear].
3. After each action, ask the group (audience) to explain in words what the actions or gestures are communicating or their potential meanings.

Actions/gestures that volunteers must act out:

- Leaning forward in a chair
- Leaning back in chair, arms folded
- Resting chin in both hands
- Resting chin on your knuckles
- Yawning
- Smiling

- Frowning
- Smiling and nodding
- Rubbing your temples
- Place hands on hips
- Glancing at watch
- Looking around the room
- Tapping fingers on the table
- Standing with arms crossed
- Placing hands over mouth
- Turning your back to someone
- Scratching your head

4. After volunteers are finished acting out the actions or gestures, give them a big round of applause, making sure to compliment the volunteers on their participation and have them take their seats.

5. Follow with group discussion.

[Ask the following questions for discussion]

1. *Do we all interpret nonverbal messages in the same way? Why or why not? What is the “correct” interpretation?*
2. *Based on this activity, what are some things we can keep in mind regarding the messages we send nonverbally?*
3. *Do you always notice when you are communicating non-verbally? Do you think others always notice when they are communicating nonverbally?*
4. *What are some nonverbal signals/gestures we may use in times of conflict that negatively affect resolution/make things worse?*
5. *What are some nonverbal signals that would indicate a willingness to work toward a resolution?*
6. *What are some gestures and nonverbal communication examples from Afghanistan that Americans may not understand? (For example, not making eye contact, nodding your head in understanding rather than agreement, etc.) [Spend some time on this question]*
7. *Are there gestures and nonverbal behaviors that you have seen in America that you did not understand or that confused you? (For example, someone using their index finger to communicate “come here;” thumbs up; an adult gently tapping their head as to communicate endearment or “good job”) [Spend some time on this question]*

6. Explain the following nonverbal behaviors:

Gestures: *Gestures are woven into all our daily lives. We wave, point, beckon, and use our hands when we are arguing or speaking – expressing ourselves with gestures often without thinking. However, the meaning of gestures can be very different across cultures and regions, so it is important to be careful to avoid miscommunicating.*

Facial Expressions: *The human face is extremely expressive, able to express countless emotions and messages without saying a word. Unlike some forms of nonverbal communication, facial expressions are universal (meaning that they are the same across cultures). The facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust are the same across cultures.*

Body Movements and Posture: *Consider how your perceptions of people are affected by the way they sit, walk, stand up, or hold their head. The way you move and carry yourself communicates a lot of*

information to the world. This type of nonverbal communication includes your posture, stance, and other subtle movements.

Part 3: Communicating Without Words

Aim: To learn and understand different forms of communication, the meaning and power of nonverbal communication, and cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

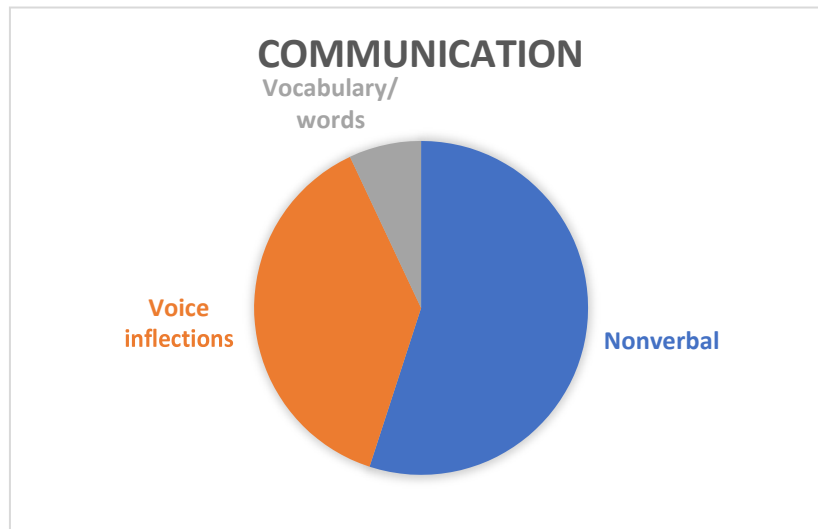
Sample Script:

Communication seems to be a simple thing to do since we communicate on a daily basis, but in reality, it is very complex. We always communicate, verbally or nonverbally, whether we realize it or not.

*As hopefully was demonstrated by the last activity, when we communicate with others, we receive and send messages on 3 basic levels: **vocabulary**, **voice inflections**, and **nonverbal communication** [Write down the 3 basic levels of communication on the whiteboard/chalkboard/flipchart]. **Vocabulary** are the actual words we use that communicate a message to the person we are talking to. **Voice inflections** consist of the way we say something. This would include tone, speed, emotions, pace, volume, etc. The way someone we something can dramatically change the meaning of the words being spoken. In **nonverbal communication**, the body, and the face reveal things the mouth might not. We usually think that we hear things with our ears only, but we also listen with our eyes, our mind, our body, and our heart. Nonverbal communication includes body language, facial expressions, and gestures that we use while communicating with others.*

Now, which of these 3 – nonverbal communication, voice inflections, or vocabulary – is most important? In other words, which is most influential in sending a message from one person to another? [Allow for responses. Then write down on whiteboard/chalkboard/flipchart the statistics below. For younger children, create a visual like a pie graph]

- 7% vocabulary/words we speak
- 38% voice inflections
- 55% nonverbal communication



So, 7% or the smallest part of what we communicate is based on the words we speak. 38% or the next biggest part of what we communicate is based on voice inflections. 55% or the biggest part of what we communicate is based on our nonverbal behaviors. Does this surprise you?

So, most of the messages we get from others are from their **nonverbal communication**. You don't have to be an expert to learn to read other people's body language such as crossed arms, an angry posture, or even facial expressions. Have any of you ever had the experience of knowing what someone was going to say by their body language before they even began talking?

38% of a message is sent through a person's voice inflections. **Voice inflections** are how you say things. The very same word or words said another way with different voice inflections could take on an entirely different meaning. For example, who can say the word 'no' with a voice inflection expressing doubt. Does everyone hear the doubt? Now who can say this same word with a voice inflection indicating a definitive negative answer? Good job! [For younger children, demonstrate saying "No?" with a voice inflection of doubt and demonstrate saying "No!" with a voice inflection indicating a definitive negative answer] There are dramatic differences in meaning between these two different interpretations of the way this same short word was just spoken.

Only 7% or the smallest part of a message is sent through the **actual words spoken**. The actual words themselves account for such a small percentage of the total because there can be so many different interpretations of a message based on things like nonverbal behaviors or voice inflections that may not have been initially intended. This is why it is so important to pay close attention not only to what is being said, but how something is being said, because this is where the true meaning of communication can be found.

So, to become more effective communicators you need to pay attention to these 3 levels of communication when communicating with others. By becoming more conscious and even in control of the way you say things, you can help ensure that you are being understood by others. We need to be careful not to send what is often called "mixed messages" to others. A **mixed message** is when the actual words being spoken are not consistent with the speaker's voice inflections and/or body language. This confuses others and makes them unsure of what the real message is. The most effective communicators present a consistent message concerning all 3 levels of communication.

[Ask youth if they have any examples of when either they or someone else gave a mixed message. Then help them construct a message in which all 3 levels of communication are consistent. Ask youth if they have any questions or comments.]

Part 4: Role Play Activity

Aim: To learn about how verbal and nonverbal behaviors may not be observed as the same message.

Sample Script: Now we are going to role-play different scenarios to see what happens when our words and nonverbal behaviors match and when they do not match.

[Have youth break into groups of two. If there are an odd number of youths, a facilitator should partner with one of the youths. Go to each pair and assign each individual youth the same action across pairs. Direct youth to act out the scenarios with their partner. Then have them discuss how the situation made them feel. Did the words match the body language? Then assign another scenario to the other youth in the pair to do the same.]

Scenarios:

Scenario 1: Make sure NOT to smile and cross your arms while saying "It's nice to meet you."

Scenario 2: Smile while saying "Great job" but looking down at the floor while walking.

Scenario 3: Sit with your arms crossed and have your legs crossed while telling the other person, “You are my favorite person.”

Scenario 4: Smile and directly look at the other person and tell them, “You are my favorite person.”

Scenario 5: While standing, put your hands on your hips and ask, “What are you doing here?”

Scenario 6: Get very close to the other person without touching them and ask, “How has your day been?”

Scenario 7: Roll your eyes while asking, “What’s your name?” and standing straight.

Scenario 8: Greet the other person with a smile, shake hands or put your hand over your heart and ask, “What’s your name?”

Ok, great job everyone!

[Use the following questions for discussion:]

- *So, how did the other person make you feel?*
- *Did the spoken words match the nonverbal communication?*
- *How does what is being said and the nonverbal signals affect how you react to another person?*
- *What are the cultural differences in nonverbal communication between America and Afghanistan? [in terms of sounds, (e.g., laughing), ways of talking (e.g., pauses, stress on words), posture (e.g., slouching), closeness (e.g., a lot of distance vs. very close), body contact (e.g., shaking hands vs 3 kisses), eye contact, hand movements (e.g., dramatic hand movements or waving), and head movements (e.g., nodding)]*

Part 5: Closing Activity

Aim: To close the group session, bringing youth together to remind them they have a community of friends and support.

[Have each youth complete the following sentences]

1. One thing that I learned today is...
2. One thing that I can work on for the rest of the day/week is...
3. One thing that I am grateful for today is...

[Thank youth for participating. Encourage them to pay attention to others’ ways of communicating to see if they notice inconsistency or consistency in their verbal and nonverbal communication. Encourage them to practice consistency between their verbal and nonverbal communication.]

INFORMATIONAL SHEET: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION & CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Demonstrate/act out a few of the following for child/youth, and after each one, ask the child/youth what the action or gesture communicated or their potential meaning.

Actions/gestures to act out:

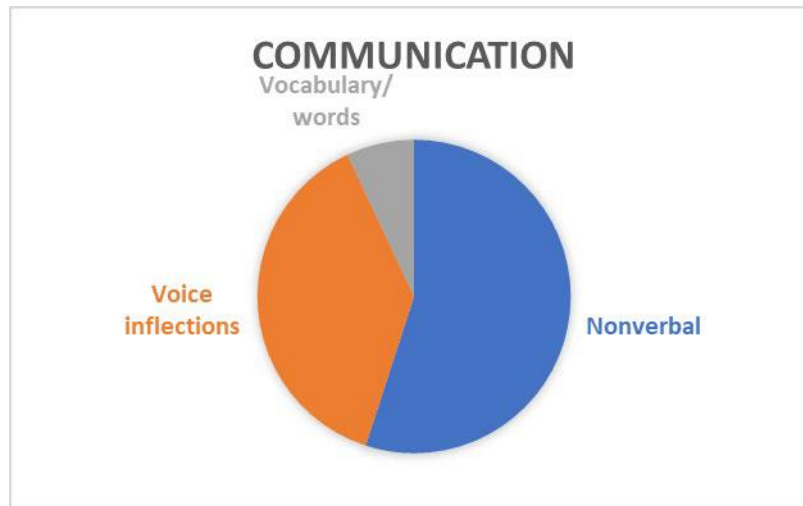
- Leaning forward in a chair (can express interest, engagement)
- Leaning back in chair, arms folded (can express disinterest, lack of engagement, defensiveness)
- Yawning (expresses tiredness or boredom)
- Smiling (expresses friendliness)
- Frowning (expresses sadness or hurt)
- Smiling and nodding (expresses friendliness, interest, agreeableness, or possibly understanding)
- Rubbing your temples (may express frustration, stress, annoyance)
- Place hands on hips (may express dominance, anger, seriousness)
- Glancing at watch (may express boredom, disinterest, being in a hurry)
- Tapping fingers on the table (may express intolerance, frustration, annoyance, boredom)
- Standing or sitting with arms crossed (may express anger, defensiveness, intolerance, frustration, or cold)
- Turning your back to someone (may express disrespect, disinterest, unwillingness to engage)
- Scratching your head (expresses confusion)

COMMUNICATING WITHOUT WORDS

When we communicate with others, we receive and send messages on 3 basic levels: **vocabulary**, **voice inflections**, and **nonverbal communication**. **Vocabulary** messages consist of the actual words we use to communicate with others. **Voice inflections** consist of the way someone says something. This would include tone, speed, emotions, pace, volume, etc. The way someone says something can dramatically change the meaning of the words being spoken. In **nonverbal communication**, the body, and the face reveal things the mouth might not. We usually think that we hear things with our ears only, but we also listen with our eyes, our mind, our body, and our heart. Nonverbal communication includes body language, facial expressions, and gestures that we use while communicating with others.

Now, which of these 3 – nonverbal communication, voice inflections, or vocabulary – is most important? In other words, which is most influential in sending a message from one person to another? [Allow for response. Then write down on whiteboard/chalkboard/flipchart/paper the statistics below. For younger children, create a visual like a pie graph]

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So, to become more effective communicators you need to pay attention to these 3 levels of communication when communicating with others. By becoming more conscious and even in control of the way you say things, you can help ensure that you are being understood by others. We need to be careful not to send what is often called "mixed messages" to others. A **mixed message** is when the actual words being spoken are not consistent with the speaker's voice inflections and/or body language. This confuses others and makes them unsure of what the real message is. The most effective communicators present a consistent message concerning all 3 levels of communication.

[Ask youth if they have any examples of when either they or someone else gave a mixed message. Then help them construct a message in which all 3 levels of communication are consistent. Ask youth if they have any questions or comments.]

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication means expressing information or communicating without using words. This might involve using facial expressions or hand gestures to make a point, or it could involve using (or not using) eye contact, physical proximity (closeness), and other nonverbal gestures to communicate a message. Every day, we use and respond to many nonverbal behaviors/actions, including postures, facial expressions, eye gaze, gestures, and tone of voice. Our nonverbal communication reveals a lot about who we are, and it impacts how we relate to other people. When we are talking to someone, the words we use are only one thing that help us get our meaning across. We also need to think about what expression we have on our face (facial expression), HOW we say the words (tone of voice), and how we hold our body (body language). If any of those things do not match each other, it is more likely that the other person we are talking to will be confused or will not receive the meaning or message you are trying to communicate. In other words, what comes out of our mouth and what we communicate through our body language may be totally two different things.

Questions to Ask Youth:

- When we are talking to someone, what are some things we should pay attention to besides the words we use?
- When we are listening to someone, what should we do to make sure they know we are listening to them?
- When we are listening to someone, what things should we pay attention to besides the words they use?
- How can things like tone of voice, facial expressions, or body language, change the meaning of the words we are saying?

Types of Nonverbal Communication

- Facial expressions (smile, frown, and other emotions)
- Gestures (waving, pointing, stop, come, peace sign, etc.; many gestures are based on culture)
- Volume and tone of voice (loudness, inflection, and pitch)
- Body language and posture (can indicate feelings and attitudes)
- Space (amount of distance between people when communicating)
- Eye gaze (looking, staring, blinking, not making eye contact; people's eyes can express many different emotions, including hostility, interest, friendliness, sympathy, etc.)
- Touch (touch can be used to communicate affection, familiarity, care and concern, and other emotions)

Facial Expressions

The human face is extremely expressive, able to express countless emotions and messages without saying a word. Unlike some forms of nonverbal communication, facial expressions are universal (meaning that they are the same across cultures). The facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust are the same across cultures.

What do you think these facial expressions are communicating?



Facial expression and body language (arms crossed) communicate **anger**



Scared, afraid, fear



Disgust



Surprised



Happy, content, excited, cheerful



Sad, grieving, heartbroken, despair



Sad, unhappy, depressed, melancholy

Body Movements and Posture

Consider how your perceptions of people are affected by the way they sit, walk, stand up, or hold their head. The way you move and carry yourself communicates a lot of information to the world. This type of nonverbal communication includes your posture, stance, and other subtle movements. For example, standing straight might communicate confidence while slouching might communicate feeling uncomfortable or sad.

What do you think these body movements and postures are communicating?



Emphasize how body movements and posture sometimes communicate slightly different messages to different people, based on their perceptions. Also, emphasize how the pictures (above) depicting body movements and postures can tell a story. For example, in the first picture of the man and woman leaning on the table facing each other, someone might say that they are competing with one another for a job promotion.

Gestures

Gestures are woven into all of our daily lives. Many people use their hands to emphasize what they are saying. We wave, point, beckon, and use our hands when we are arguing or speaking – expressing ourselves with

gestures often without thinking. Other parts of the body are also used to convey the meaning of our words. For example, shrugging your shoulders is a way to say, “I don’t know” or “I don’t care.” However, the meaning of gestures can be very different across cultures and regions, so it is important to be careful to avoid miscommunicating.

What do you think the following gestures are communicating?



A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



F.



G.



H.



I.

Answers:

A. A-Okay



In countries like Australia, U.S., UK, and Canada, this indicates satisfaction. However, in other parts of the world, this gesture means something different. For example, in France, this gesture means “zero” or “worthless.” In Venezuela, Turkey, and Brazil, it is a vulgar slang that is considered offensive and rude.

B. Thumbs up and thumbs down



In the U.S., UK, Canada, and Russia, the thumbs up is a sign of approval and the thumbs down is a sign of disapproval. However, in Latin America, West Africa, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of Italy and Greece, the thumbs up may be considered offensive and rude.

C. Peace sign (palm facing outward) or V sign (palm facing inward)



In many parts of the world, holding your index and middle fingers up in the shape of a V may signal the number two, like “2 pieces of Bolani or pizza.” In the U.S., regardless of whether your palm is facing outward or inward, this gesture is a sign for peace and love or victory. However, in Australia, UK, Ireland, and New Zealand, this gesture (with your palm facing inward and the back of your hand facing outward) may be seen as rude and is frequently used to signify contempt or defiance towards authority.

D. Come here or finger summoning with index finger



In Australia, U.S., UK, and Canada, this gesture is used to motion someone to come over to you. However, in the Philippines, this gesture is considered highly offensive, as this gesture is reserved for dogs. In Singapore and Japan, this gesture signifies death.

E. Downwards palm wave inwards



In many countries, like Afghanistan, Middle Eastern countries, Philippines, Vietnam, India, and Ghana, this gesture means “Come here.” Slightly changing the motion to waving the fingers outwards instead of inwards means “shoo” or “Go away” in countries like the U.S., UK, Canada, and Australia.

F. Fingers all together



In Italy, this gesture means, “What is this?” or “What do you want?” – usually done with a flick of the wrist. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is a sign for a small amount. In Turkey, it indicates that something is beautiful. In Egypt, it is a motion to show that you will only be a minute. In some other Middle Eastern countries, it is used to emphasize something that is being said - for example, as a disciplinary threat or scolding by parents.

G. Fingers crossed



In Australia, U.S., UK, and Canada, crossing one's fingers is a wish for good luck or desperately hoping for something.

H. Pinching hand with index finger and thumb



In the U.S, UK, and Canada, this gesture means "a little bit" or "a few."

I. Arm straight with palm facing outward and fingers up



In most Western countries, this gesture means "Stop."

Use the following scenarios below with youth to demonstrate how verbal and nonverbal behaviors may not be observed as the same message. As a community health worker/field worker, demonstrate a few of the scenarios below first, then ask the youth to demonstrate them.

Scenario 1: Smile with your arms crossed while saying "I really didn't like the way you just talked to

me." Scenario 2: Smile while saying "Great job" but looking down at the floor while walking.

Scenario 3: Sit with your arms crossed and have your legs crossed while telling the other person, "You are my favorite person."

Scenario 4: Smile and directly look at the other person and tell them, "You are my favorite person."

Scenario 5: While standing, put your hands on your hips and ask, "Why did you choose to come

today?" Scenario 6: Get close to the other person without touching them and ask, "How has your

day been?" Scenario 7: Roll your eyes while asking, "What's your name?" and standing straight.

Scenario 8: Greet the other person with a smile, shake hands or put your hand over your heart and ask "What's your name?"

[Use the following questions for discussion:]

- So, how did the other person make you feel?
- Did the spoken words match the nonverbal communication?
- How does what is being said and the nonverbal signals affect how you react to another person?
- What are the cultural differences in nonverbal communication between America and Afghanistan (or any other country of origin)? [in terms of sounds, (e.g., laughing), ways of talking (e.g., pauses, stress on words), posture (e.g., slouching), closeness (e.g., a lot of distance vs. very close), body contact (e.g., shaking hands vs 3 kisses), eye contact, hand movements (e.g., dramatic hand movements or waving), and head movements (e.g., nodding)]