



# COMMUNICATION

Volunteer Training  
Indiana Department of  
Correction

# TOPICS



Communication



Communicating with Incarcerated  
Individuals



Non-Verbal Communication



Communication with Staff



Incarcerated Individuals 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.



We are always communicating, either effectively or ineffectively. A volunteer's communication style can affect their relationship with administration, staff, and Incarcerated Individuals. 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.

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## COMMUNICATION

# COMMUNICATING WITH INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

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 the volunteer in communicating with and relating to Incarcerated Individuals.

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

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

# COMMUNICATING WITH INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

## Be yourself

There is no need to establish a façade or to create special status for yourself in relationship to the incarcerated individuals. Be the best version of yourself.

## 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 of them learning to trust you (which will come slowly in any case).

# COMMUNICATING WITH INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

## **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 INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

## **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.

## **Accept the incarcerated individual**

Accept them as an individual who is no better or no worse than anyone else. To pigeonhole or categorize a person is, in a way, to dehumanize them.



### **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 stopped volunteering.

### **Win respect for yourself**

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

**COMMUNICATING WITH  
INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS**

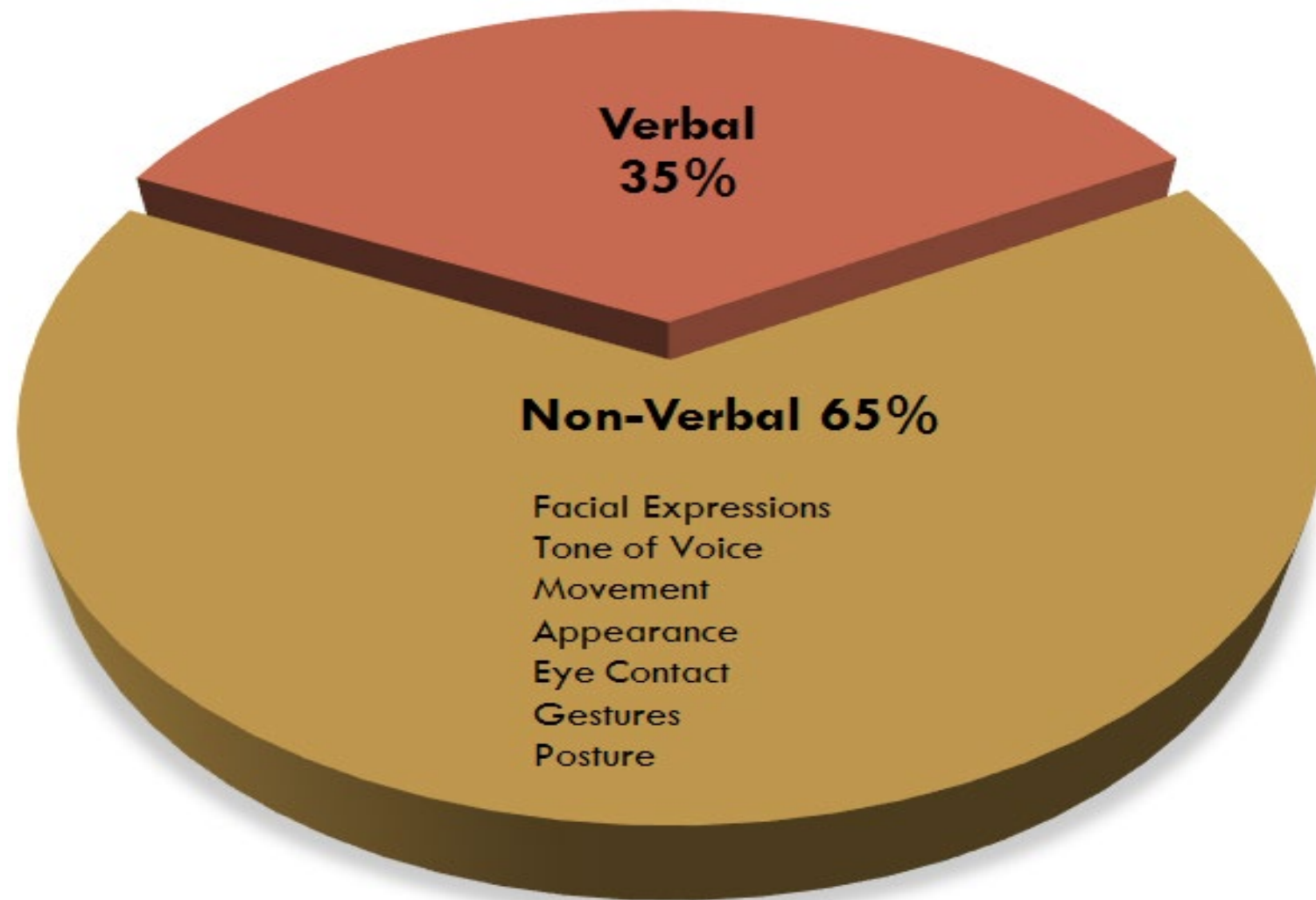
# COMMUNICATING WITH INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

## **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 support, but let them find solutions. In the end, this will empower them for future challenges they will undoubtedly face.

## **Don't expect thanks**

While most incarcerated individuals 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

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## Facial Expressions

- Your facial expressions should be natural of course but try to avoid extreme reactions to information. Sometimes incarcerated individuals 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 purposeful 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 incarcerated individuals, staff, and other volunteers.

## Eye Contact

- Make appropriate eye contact. Too little and you may appear intimidated. Too much could make incarcerated individuals 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 being complacent. A slouched back may give the impression of insecurity or lack of confidence.

# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

# COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF



Remember, you are invited into the facility.

- Wardens are charged with maintaining the safety of 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, Community Engagement Coordinator, and/or 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.

- Incarcerated individuals may complain about correctional staff, administrators, 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 incarcerated individuals. **Under no circumstances** should a volunteer undermine the staff, as this is a security concern. Address any complaints or concerns to the Community Engagement Coordinator and/or Chaplain, and **NOT** to the incarcerated individuals.



Always work with correctional officers.

- It is the work of correctional officers to always oversee the incarcerated individuals. 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, incarcerated individuals, staff, and the volunteers. Correctional officers are vital 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, Community Engagement Coordinator, and/or Chaplain.

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF**

# 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 or the Community Engagement Coordinator or 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.



## INCARCERATED INDIVIDUAL CORRESPONDENCE

Volunteers are prohibited from any type of personal correspondence including letters, emails or phone calls with any incarcerated individuals without approval while volunteering with the IDOC. 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 the Community Engagement Coordinator. 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. This type of correspondence should be through your program supervisor and must be pre-approved by the facility.



Do NOT accept phone calls, letters, or emails from incarcerated individuals or their families without approval.

It is possible that you may receive unsolicited correspondence from incarcerated individuals. If this happens, report it IMMEDIATELY to your program supervisor, Community Engagement Coordinator, and/or Chaplain. Staff will take the appropriate action.

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## INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS CORRESPONDENCE

INCARCERATED  
INDIVIDUALS  
CORRESPONDENCE

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

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

# 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 an incarcerated individual, the incarcerated individual's family, staff member, volunteer, or other person 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

1. Volunteers are expected to respect the integrity and confidentiality of incarcerated individuals and the IDOC.
2. Do not use full names when discussing incarcerated individuals outside of the prison setting.
3. Do not engage in discussion with incarcerated individuals about topics such as other staff members, gossip, or any personal information that is sensitive in nature.
4. 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.
5. Do not encourage the incarcerated individuals to share personal information. Let the incarcerated individual share with you in their own time about the offense committed, their family, or any other personal matters.



## 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 religious programming and pastoral visits.

1. Overt/covert threats or harm self or others
2. Reports of any alleged sexual activity between an incarcerated individual and any other person
3. Reports of any sexual assault or intimidation between an incarcerated individual and any other person
4. Any information regarding the safety and security of the IDOC institutions, staff and/or other incarcerated individuals.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

# 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 incarcerated individuals 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 an individual incarcerated individual or staff member in these discussions.

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

You have completed:

# Communication

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

