

Breaking Barriers: Vocal Communication for Autism

Course Introduction

Block Type	Element Type	Content
Text	Heading	Welcome to Breaking Barriers
Text	Paragraph	This course is designed to support individuals on the autism spectrum in understanding and using non-verbal communication more effectively in everyday interactions. In this course, you will learn how gestures, facial expressions, and body language affect how we understand others.
Text	Subheading	Objectives
Text	Paragraph	By the end of this course, you will be able to:
List	Bullet List	• Identify key types of non-verbal communication • Interpret common non-verbal cues in everyday situations • Recognize how non-verbal communication can affect understanding • Apply this knowledge to improve communication in real-life interactions
Text	Subheading	Why This Matters
Text	Paragraph	Non-verbal communication plays a major role in how messages are understood. Understanding these cues can help improve everyday interactions and reduce misunderstandings.

Lesson 1: Introduction to Non-verbal Communication

Block Type	Element Type	Content	Notes
Text	Heading	What is Non-verbal Communication?	
Text	Paragraph	Non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial expressions, and body language.	
Text	Subheading	Types of Non-Verbal Communication	
Text	Paragraph	Click each flashcard to learn about the different types of non-verbal communication.	
Interaction	Flashcards	Card 1 (Front): Image of person using hand gestures + “Gestures” Card 1 (Back): Movements like hand signals or pointing that help communicate meaning. Card 2 (Front): Image of person showing emotion + “Facial Expressions” Card 2 (Back): Emotions shown through the face that help others understand how someone feels. Card 3 (Front): Image of posture/body stance + “Body Language” Card 3 (Back): Posture, stance, and physical positioning that can indicate comfort, confidence, or discomfort.	Card 1 (Gestures) Image: lesson 1 - gestures.png Placement: Within flashcard Purpose: Shows natural hand gestures to introduce concept of gestures Card 2 (Facial Expressions) Image: lesson 1 – facial expressions.png Placement: Within flashcard Purpose: Demonstrates facial expression as emotional cue Card 3 (Body Language) Image: lesson 1 – body language.png Placement: Within flashcard Purpose: Illustrates posture differences indicating comfort or discomfort
Text	Paragraph	These three elements work together to shape how we interpret communication and help us understand emotions and intentions without using words.	
Text	Subheading	Why Non-verbal Communication is Important	
Statement	Emphasis	Did you know? Approximately 93% of communication is non-verbal, including body language, tone, and facial expressions.	

Text	Paragraph	Click each row to learn about the importance of non-verbal communication.	
Interaction	Accordion	• Item 1: Building Trust and Connection Helps establish openness and sincerity. • Item 2: Conveying Emotions Facial expressions show how someone feels. • Item 3: Understanding Intentions Gestures help clarify meaning.	
Text	Subheading	Think About It	
Text + Image	Side-by-side	Paragraph: Have you ever misunderstood someone because of their tone, facial expression, or body language? Image: Two people interacting with subtle mismatch in non-verbal cues	Image: lesson 1 – think about it.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Encourages learners to recognize subtle mismatches in non-verbal communication and reflect on how tone, facial expression, and body language can lead to misunderstandings
Text	Paragraph	Look at the image below and identify the non-verbal cues being used. Click each marker to learn more about how gestures, facial expressions, and body language are being communicated.	
Interaction	Labeled Graphic	Image: Two people in conversation showing multiple non-verbal cues • Marker 1: Facial expression - Shows emotion • Marker 2: Body posture - Indicates comfort or discomfort • Marker 3: Eye contact - Signals attention or avoidance	Image: lesson 1 – labeled graphic.png Placement: Center (labeled graphic interaction) Purpose: Helps learners identify facial expression, posture, and eye contact cues
Text	Subheading	What Do You Notice?	

Text	Paragraph	Review the scenario below and select the best answer. You're talking to a coworker. They avoid eye contact and keep their arms crossed while speaking.	
Image	Full-width or Medium	Image: Person in conversation with arms crossed and avoiding eye contact	Image: lesson 1 – scenario.png Placement: Center (medium image) Purpose: Supports interpretation of closed body language
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	What might this indicate? A. They are confident B. They may feel uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are excited D. They are distracted	
Text	Subheading	Check Your Knowledge	
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	What percentage of communication is non-verbal? A. 25% B. 50% C. 79% D. 93% (Correct) Correct Feedback: Correct. Research suggests that a large portion of communication—up to 93%—is non-verbal, including body language, tone, and facial expressions. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. Non-verbal communication makes up a much larger portion of how messages are understood. It includes body language, tone, and facial expressions, which all influence meaning. Keep tone supportive. Reinforce importance of non-verbal cues.	

Lesson 2: Gestures

Block Type	Element Type	Content	Notes
Text + Image	Side-by-Side	Heading: What are Gestures? Paragraph: Gestures are movements of the hands, arms, or body that help communicate meaning without using words. Image: Person using natural hand gestures during conversation	Image: lesson 2 – what are gestures.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Demonstrates natural gesture use in conversation
Text	Subheading	Common Gestures	
Text	Paragraph	Click each flashcard to explore different types of gestures and what they typically communicate.	
Interaction	Flashcards	Card 1 (Front): Image of handshake + 'Handshake' Card 1 (Back): Often used as a greeting or to show agreement. Card 2 (Front): Image of thumbs up + 'Thumbs Up' Card 2 (Back): Commonly signals approval or agreement. Card 3 (Front): Image of pointing + 'Pointing' Card 3 (Back): Used to direct attention or indicate something specific.	Card 1 (Handshake) Image: lesson 2 - handshake.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Demonstrates natural gesture use in conversation Card 2 (Thumbs Up) Image: lesson 2 – thumbs up.png Placement: Within flashcard Purpose: Shows approval or agreement Card 3 (Pointing) Image: lesson 2 – pointing.png Placement: Within flashcard Purpose: Shows directing attention or emphasizing a point

Statement	Emphasis	Gestures can strengthen, replace, or even change the meaning of spoken words.	
Text	Paragraph	Gestures can vary across cultures, so the same movement may have different meanings in different contexts. For example, a thumbs-up may signal approval in some cultures, but can be considered rude in others. Similarly, pointing with a finger may be acceptable in some places but disrespectful in others.	
Text	Subheading	Why Gestures Matter	
Text	Paragraph	Click each row to learn about the importance of gestures.	
Interaction	Accordion	Item 1: Reinforcing Messages – Gestures can support what is being said verbally. Item 2: Replacing Words – Some gestures communicate meaning without speaking. Item 3: Showing Emotion – Gestures can reveal how someone feels.	
Statement	Emphasis	Gestures don't just support communication—they are communication.	
Text	Subheading	Think About It	
Text + Image	Side-by-side	Paragraph: Think about a time when someone used a hand gesture while speaking. Did it help you understand their message? Image: Person using hand gestures during conversation	Image: lesson 2 - think about it.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Encourages reflection on gesture interpretation
Text	Subheading	Identify the Gesture	
Text	Paragraph	Look at the image below and identify the non-verbal cues being used. Click each marker to learn more about how gestures, facial expressions, and body language are being communicated.	

Interaction	Labeled Graphic	Image: Person speaking with visible hand gestures Marker 1: Hand movement – Emphasizes key points Marker 2: Arm position – Indicates openness or confidence Marker 3: Direction of gesture – Guides attention	Image: lesson 2 – labeled graphic.png Placement: Center (labeled graphic interaction) Purpose: Highlights hand movement, arm position, and gesture direction
Text	Subheading	What Do You Notice?	
Text	Paragraph	Review the scenario below and select the best answer. A person is speaking and frequently points while talking.	
Image	Medium	Image: Person pointing while speaking	Image: lesson 2 – scenario.png Placement: Center (medium image) Purpose: Supports interpretation of pointing as emphasis
Text	Subheading	Check Your Knowledge	
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	What might this indicate? A. They are unsure B. They are emphasizing a point (Correct) C. They are confused D. They are bored Correct Feedback: Correct. Pointing while speaking often indicates that the person is emphasizing a point or directing attention to something specific. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. Pointing is commonly used to emphasize a message or draw attention, rather than showing uncertainty, confusion, or boredom. Keep feedback concise and supportive. Avoid overly negative language.	

Lesson 3: Facial Expressions

Block Type	Element Type	Content	Notes
Text + Image	Side-by-Side	Heading: What are Facial Expressions? Paragraph: Facial expressions are movements of the face that communicate emotions and reactions without using words. Image: Person showing a clear facial expression (e.g., smiling, frowning, surprised)	Image: lesson 3 – facial expressions.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Demonstrates facial expression examples
Text	Subheading	Common Facial Expressions	
Text	Paragraph	Click each flashcard to explore common facial expressions and what they may communicate.	
Interaction	Flashcards	Card 1 (Front): Image of smiling face + 'Happiness' Card 1 (Back): A smile often shows friendliness, happiness, or approval. Card 2 (Front): Image of frowning face + 'Sadness' Card 2 (Back): A frown may indicate sadness, disappointment, or concern. Card 3 (Front): Image of surprised face + 'Surprise' Card 3 (Back): Raised eyebrows and widened eyes can signal surprise or shock.	Use diverse, realistic faces. Avoid exaggerated expressions.
Statement	Emphasis	Facial expressions can communicate emotions instantly—sometimes even before words are spoken.	
Text	Paragraph	Facial expressions can sometimes be misinterpreted, especially when context is unclear. For example, a neutral expression may be seen as disinterest or confusion, even if that is not the intention.	

Text	Subheading	Why Facial Expressions Matter	
Text	Paragraph	Click each row to learn about the importance of facial expressions.	
Interaction	Accordion	Item 1: Expressing Emotions – Facial expressions clearly show how someone feels. Item 2: Supporting Communication – They help reinforce what is being said verbally. Item 3: Providing Feedback – They signal understanding, confusion, or interest.	
Statement	Emphasis	Even subtle changes in facial expression can change how a message is understood.	
Text	Subheading	Think About It	
Text + Image	Side-by-Side	Paragraph: Think about a time when someone's facial expression made you feel a certain way. Did it match what they were saying? Image: Two people interacting where one person's facial expression is noticeable	Image: lesson 3 – think about it.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Encourages reflection on emotional impact of facial expressions
Text	Subheading	Identify the Expression	
Text	Paragraph	Look at the image below and identify the facial expressions being shown. Click each marker to learn more.	
Interaction	Labeled Graphic	Image: People showing varied facial expressions Marker 1: Eyes – Indicate emotion (e.g., widened eyes for surprise) Marker 2: Mouth – Shows emotional tone (e.g., smiling or frowning)	Image: lesson 3 – labeled graphic.png Placement: Center (labeled graphic interaction)

		Marker 3: Eyebrows – Signal reactions (e.g., raised for surprise, lowered for concern)	Purpose: Helps learners identify facial expression components
Text	Subheading	What Do You Notice?	
Text	Paragraph	Review the scenario below and select the best answer. A person says they are fine, but their face looks tense and they avoid smiling.	
Image	Medium	Image: Person showing tense or mismatched facial expression	Image: lesson 3 – scenario.png Placement: Center (medium image) Purpose: Reinforces mismatch between verbal and non-verbal cues
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	What might this indicate? A. They are relaxed B. They may be feeling uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are excited D. They are joking Correct Feedback: Correct. Even though the person says they are fine, their facial expression suggests something different. Tension and lack of a smile can indicate they may be feeling uncomfortable or unsure. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. While the person says they are fine, their facial expression tells a different story. Look for signs like tension or lack of a smile—these can suggest they may be feeling uncomfortable rather than relaxed, excited, or joking.	
Text	Subheading	Check Your Knowledge	

Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	A person is smiling, but their eyes appear tense and they avoid eye contact. What might this indicate? A. They are feeling genuinely happy B. They may be feeling uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are confused D. They are bored Correct Feedback: Correct. Facial expressions can sometimes be misleading when taken at face value. A smile may not always indicate genuine happiness—other cues like eye tension or avoidance can suggest discomfort. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. While a smile often suggests happiness, other facial cues—like tense eyes or avoiding eye contact—can indicate that the person may be feeling uncomfortable or unsure.	
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Lesson 4: Body Language

Block Type	Element Type	Content	Notes
Text + Image	Side-by-Side	Heading: What is Body Language? Paragraph: Body language refers to posture, movement, and physical positioning that communicate how a person feels or responds without using words. Image: Person standing or sitting with clear posture (e.g., open vs closed posture)	Image: lesson 4 – body language.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block) Purpose: Demonstrates posture differences
Text	Subheading	Common Body Language Signals	
Text	Paragraph	Click each tab to explore different types of body language and what they may communicate.	

Interaction	Tabs	Tab 1: Posture - Open posture (relaxed, facing forward) may show comfort and confidence. Closed posture (crossed arms, turned away) may indicate discomfort or defensiveness. Tab 2: Personal Space - Standing too close or too far can signal comfort level, cultural norms, or boundaries. Tab 3: Movement - Fidgeting, pacing, or stillness can indicate nervousness, energy, or engagement. Use clear labels and concise descriptions	Use diverse, realistic people and natural posture.
Statement	Emphasis	Body language can reveal how someone feels—even when they don't say it out loud.	
Text	Paragraph	Body language can sometimes be misunderstood. For example, someone who avoids eye contact or keeps distance may not be disinterested—they may simply feel uncomfortable or need personal space.	
Text	Subheading	Why Body Language Matters	
Text	Paragraph	Click each row to learn about the importance of body language.	
Interaction	Accordion	Item 1: Showing Engagement – Body posture can indicate interest or attention. Item 2: Communicating Comfort – Physical positioning can show how comfortable someone feels. Item 3: Supporting Meaning – Body language can reinforce or contradict spoken words.	
Statement	Emphasis	Small changes in posture or movement can completely change how a message is interpreted.	
Text	Subheading	Think About It	
Text + Image	Side-by-Side	Paragraph: Think about a time when someone's posture or movement affected how you interpreted what they were saying. What did you notice?	Image: lesson 4 – think about it.png Placement: Right side of screen (side-by-side block)

		Image: Two people interacting with contrasting body language (one open, one closed)	Purpose: Encourages learners to compare contrasting body language (open vs. closed posture) and reflect on how posture and movement influence interpretation in real-world interactions
Text	Subheading	Identify the Body Language	
Text	Paragraph	Look at the image below and identify the body language being shown. Click each marker to learn more.	
Interaction	Labeled Graphic	Image: Person or group showing varied body language Marker 1: Posture – Indicates openness or defensiveness Marker 2: Distance – Shows comfort level or personal space Marker 3: Movement – Signals energy, nervousness, or engagement	Image: lesson 4 - labeled graphic.png Placement: Center (labeled graphic interaction) Purpose: Helps learners identify posture, personal space, and movement in body language
Text	Subheading	What Do You Notice?	
Text	Paragraph	Review the scenario below and select the best answer. A person is leaning away, avoiding eye contact, and keeping their arms close to their body.	
Image	Medium	Image: Person with closed posture leaning away	Image: lesson 4 – scenario.png Placement: Center (medium image)

			Purpose: Supports interpretation of discomfort through body language
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	What might this indicate? A. They are very confident B. They may feel uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are excited D. They are relaxed Correct Feedback: Correct. Leaning away, avoiding eye contact, and keeping arms close to the body are signs of closed body language. These cues often indicate that the person may be feeling uncomfortable or unsure. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. These behaviors—leaning away, avoiding eye contact, and closed posture—typically suggest discomfort rather than confidence, excitement, or relaxation.	
Text	Subheading	Check Your Knowledge	
Knowledge Check	Multiple Response	Which of the following are examples of body language? (Select all that apply) A. Crossing your arms (Correct) B. Leaning forward during a conversation (Correct) C. Tone of voice (Incorrect) D. Maintaining personal space (Correct) Correct Feedback: Correct. Body language includes posture, positioning, and physical movement—not tone of voice. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. Remember, body language refers to physical movement and positioning, not vocal elements like tone.	

Summary & Final Challenge

Block Type	Element Type	Content
Text	Heading	Course Summary
Text	Paragraph	You've learned how non-verbal communication—including gestures, facial expressions, and body language—affects how we understand others. These cues can provide important information about emotions, intentions, and comfort levels.
Text	Subheading	Key Takeaways
List	Bullet List	• Non-verbal communication plays a major role in how messages are understood • Gestures can emphasize or replace spoken words • Facial expressions can reveal emotions—but may sometimes be misleading • Body language can show comfort, confidence, or discomfort • Context matters when interpreting non-verbal cues
Statement	Emphasis	Understanding non-verbal communication can help you respond more effectively and reduce misunderstandings in everyday interactions.
Text	Heading	Final Challenge
Text	Paragraph	Review each scenario and select the best answer based on the non-verbal cues being shown.
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	Question 1: You're speaking with someone who is smiling, but they are avoiding eye contact and leaning away slightly. What might this indicate? A. They are completely comfortable B. They may be feeling uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are excited D. They are confident Correct Feedback: Correct. You're accurately interpreting multiple non-verbal cues. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. Consider all non-verbal cues together when interpreting meaning.
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	Question 2: A coworker leans forward, maintains eye contact, and nods while you are speaking.

		What might this indicate? A. They are bored B. They are confused C. They are engaged and interested (Correct) D. They are uncomfortable Correct Feedback: Correct. These cues show engagement and interest. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. These behaviors usually indicate attention and interest.
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	Question 3: A person crosses their arms, avoids eye contact, and keeps their distance. What might this indicate? A. They are very confident B. They may be feeling uncomfortable (Correct) C. They are excited D. They are relaxed Correct Feedback: Correct. These cues suggest discomfort. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. These cues often indicate discomfort or unease.
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	Question 4: Someone is pointing while speaking. What is this most likely doing? A. Showing boredom B. Emphasizing a point (Correct) C. Indicating confusion D. Showing nervousness

		Correct Feedback: Correct. Pointing is often used to emphasize or direct attention. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. Pointing usually emphasizes or directs attention.
Knowledge Check	Multiple Choice	Question 5: A person smiles, maintains eye contact, and uses open posture. What might this indicate? A. They are uncomfortable B. They are disengaged C. They are confident and comfortable (Correct) D. They are confused Correct Feedback: Correct. These cues suggest comfort and confidence. Incorrect Feedback: Not quite. These behaviors typically indicate comfort and engagement.