



## OCTOBER POSITIVE COMMUNICATION CUES

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**Objective:** Build and improve relationships between lunchroom staff and students.

Participants use the Smarter Lunchrooms principle Suggestive Selling to promote positive interactions between lunchroom staff members and students. In the Booster Shot lesson, participants host a meet-and-greet decorating party with select students.



## LESSON 3: Positive Communication Cues

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### MATERIALS

- Trainer's Script
  - WORKSHEET: *Cues for Positive Communication* (page 94)
  - Highlighters
  - Pens/pencils
  - Index cards
  - Tape
  - Large paper, markers
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### **SAY:**

This month, we shift focus from our product (food) to our customer service. The students' interactions with staff hugely impact their perceptions of our food. As we have learned, ***in matters of taste, perception is reality***. For students to feel excited about our food, they need to feel *welcomed, informed, and respected*. When we give them options, they feel empowered. Lastly, *we are the adults*; it's our role to guide the conversation and stay positive and on task.

In today's workshop, we will use the Smarter Lunchrooms principle Suggestive Selling to promote positive interactions with students, even in difficult situations where a student may be indecisive, shy, or even hostile. With a few well-chosen words, we can nudge students to purchase and enjoy our healthy meals. We can even turn rude comments into opportunities for positive lessons.

Let's try it and see.

To begin, please form pairs. (Pause) We'll start with a **Think-Pair-Share** activity. Think about this question, then share with your partner:

- \* Can you name a situation (hypothetical or from experience) when an interaction between a lunchroom staff member and a student or school staff member led to anger, frustration, or hurt feelings (on either side)? What happened?

### **DO:**

- Prompt participant pairs to think silently, then share with each other. (1 minute)

### **SAY:**

Let's share as a group. Volunteers do not need to say whether their examples are real or hypothetical, or their own versus their partner's.

## LESSON 3: Positive Communication Cues continued



### ➔ DO:

- Allow participants to share. (1 minute) Highlight situations addressed on the **Cues for Positive Communication worksheet**. Answers will vary and may include:
  - › Students being slow to order or not knowing options and holding up the serving line
  - › Students forgetting elements of a reimbursable meal
  - › Students not wanting to take meal components (ex.: vegetables or milk)
  - › Students making negative comments about food
  - › School staff members not assisting needy students or being impatient
- Make note of situations addressed on the Positive Communication Cues worksheet.

### 💬 SAY:

These situations are common and can often be avoided or improved by using positive messages. Although it can be tempting to retaliate against negativity (for example, by saying “Well, that’s all we have today” or “You have to take this”) or to brush aside the problem for time’s sake (for example, by prompting students to take food “but you don’t have to eat it”), these responses only create long-term friction with the people we serve. They can ultimately hurt the lunchroom by alienating consumers and encouraging waste. Instead, use positive messages to *improve rapport, defuse potential conflicts, and promote target foods and reimbursable meals* to help the lunchroom be successful.

**Food for thought: Nobody wins an argument with a student.** A snappish, proud retort is more likely to prompt a student (and his/her peers) to swear off school food forever than to convince them you were in the right. In difficult situations, remember that a frustrated or angry student who lashes out is often reacting to feeling powerless. The root problem probably has nothing to do with you at all! By turning a student’s negative comment around, we show all students that our lunchroom is a *respectful, safe, and compassionate* place.

For this next exercise, imagine you are working as a server and a student approaches with slumped shoulders and an angry or worried look on his (or her) face. When it is time to order, he avoids making eye contact with you. He says something rude like “I hate this place” or “This food sucks.” With your partner, brainstorm what might be going on in his life to prompt this kind of behavior.

### ➔ DO:

- Allow participants to brainstorm. Then, encourage them to share with the whole group (1 minute). Reinforce helpful answers and write them on large paper. Answers will vary and may include:
  - › Problems at home (anything from concerns for a sick parent, to a fight with a family member, to dealing with traumatic situations such as divorce, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and abuse)
  - › Problems at school (poor grades, language barriers, worry about an upcoming assignment or audition, friction with a teacher)





## LESSON 3: Positive Communication Cues continued

- › Problems with peers (bullying, changing friend groups or romantic relationships, loneliness)
- › Any of the awkward, disappointing, or embarrassing life events that seem to characterize the school years

### **SAY:**

It's important to note that NONE of these examples is related to school food, the lunchroom, or us as people. A distraught child is not angry or frustrated with *us*. But *we can still help*. Let's remember these compassionate thoughts as we move to the final part of today's workshop. Keep these bits of wisdom in mind:

- 1. We are the adults and our responses control the situation. We can afford to be generous of spirit.**
- 2. Each day, our smiles and caring words might be the first bits of kindness a child experiences. We have the capacity to make a real, positive difference for our students every time we come to work.**

### **DO:**

- Distribute the **Cues for Positive Communication worksheet** and highlighters.

### **SAY:**

With your partner, choose two Occasions from the first column which resemble situations faced in your daily work or which you shared earlier today.

Read the Goals pertaining to each of the chosen Occasions, then take turns reading the practice cues to each other in a **positive, sincere voice**. Pretend you are speaking to a real student or school staff member.

After trying out the options listed beside your chosen Occasions, choose the 2–3 cues which felt most natural and effective to you and which you could see yourself using daily. *Highlight or mark* these cues.

### **DO:**

- Allow 2–3 minutes for participant pairs to work. Circulate to answer questions or provide support as needed.
- Distribute index cards and writing utensils.

### **SAY:**

In under 10 minutes, this workshop has let us identify a realistic problem; collaboratively select, test, and rank options; and problem-solve.

Now, write your chosen prompts on your index card, then hang this card by your work station to reinforce the new approach. If you have more than one work station, create one card per area.

LESSON 3:  
Positive Communication Cues  
continued



➔ **DO:**

- Assist participants in copying 2+ chosen prompts per card. Then direct them to tape their cards at their work stations where they will see and use them.
- Thank participants for their engagement and efforts.



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**FOLLOW-UP**

Over the next 2–3 weeks, encourage staff members to use the new cues every day. Spot-check to see that the changes are being maintained sincerely. Give positive reinforcement for their efforts. Do not be discouraged if there is some backsliding, but firmly remind participants to stick with it. It takes up to 30 days to assimilate a new habit, so *don't give up*. Repeat this workshop as needed to address other areas of need or instances of conflict.

Lastly, always thank participants for their efforts. Remind participants that change takes time and it may be a few weeks before they see significant changes in student requests or staff-student rapport. Don't be discouraged.





## BOOSTER SHOT 3: Meet and Greet Decorating Party with Students

*This easy, fast decorating project lets staff members and students work together to add beauty, fun, and interest to lunchroom spaces. It lays the foundation for friendly rapport and cooperation on future projects.*

### MATERIALS

- Trainer's Script
- Name tags for participants and students
- Decorations for lunchrooms
  - Possible themes include food, school spirit, and seasonal holidays
- Gather items for the service area, dining area, walls, ceiling, and/or bulletin boards
- Fasteners (tape, putty, hangers, thumbtacks, etc.)

### ADVANCE PREPARATION

**At least two weeks before the Booster Shot lesson, coordinate the students' visit.** Get permission from the school's administrative staff. Then ask school staff members to nominate students (approximately one student per lunchroom staff member) to collaborate on one or more short projects to improve their lunchroom. Say you are looking for students from different grades who are pleasant and positive and who will represent their peers well. Good choices are student body leaders, service club members, and students who are already known for their willingness to help out in the school. The activities will be short (10 minute) projects, 1-4 times throughout the school year.

Invite the students to come to the lunchroom at the designated time to meet the lunchroom staff and help them decorate the lunchroom. 3-5 days before the event, issue passes including each student's full name plus the date, time, location, and purpose of the event. Inform the students' teachers.

**Before the lesson,** buy, borrow, or create colorful, age-appropriate decorations. Gather appropriate fasteners. Clear lunchroom spaces (walls, bulletin boards, and even ceiling tiles) to make room for decorations. Themes may include healthy foods, school spirit, seasonal holidays, or signs the lunchroom needs (ex.: "Recycle Here ➡" or "Tomorrow's Specials"). Signs should be neat, colorful, clean, and easy to read from 20 feet away. Free and customizable sign designs are available at **SmarterLunchrooms.org**. Laminate signs for durability.

This could be a golden opportunity to start a SNAC (Student Nutrition Action Committee) at your school. To learn more, go to [SmarterLunchrooms.org](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org).

Ask guidance counselors and teachers of health/wellness, speech, gym, and home economics classes to recommend students for this activity.

## BOOSTER SHOT 3: Meet and Greet Decorating Party with Students continued



### ➔ DO:

- Assemble the prepared decorations and fasteners. Create name tags for all participants and students.
- Confirm you have access to the lunchroom and attached hallways.

### 💬 SAY: (begin with just staff members)

Welcome to the Booster Shot lesson! Earlier this month, we discussed the importance of having positive communication with students. Today we will meet some of our students and work together to decorate the lunchroom, making it inviting, attractive, and fun for all of us.

Let's invite them in. Let's be welcoming and friendly—they are new to this, too!

### ➔ DO:

- Invite the students to enter and meet the lunchroom staff. Smile! Thank them for sharing this time with you. Pair each student with a staff member.

### 💬 SAY:

Let's start with brief introductions. Tell your partner three things about yourself: your name, what you like most about your work or classes here at [school name], and your favorite thing about our lunchroom. Then you can introduce your partner to the whole group.

### ➔ DO:

- Allow pairs 1–2 minutes to talk, then direct them to briefly introduce their partner to the group. (4 minutes total)

### 💬 SAY:

Now let's get to the best part: decorating the lunchroom.

### ➔ DO:

- Invite each pair to choose a different area of the lunchroom to embellish: one team may take the waiting area, another the dining area, etc. Distribute the decorations and fasteners. (If the decorations are area-specific, make sure to send them to the correct zone.)
- Circulate to assist with the decorating and interactions. Encourage pairs to work together and have fun! Make sure signs are clearly visible to students standing 20 feet away. (Remember that elementary children are shorter!) Praise their efforts.
- At the end of the workshop time, gather participants and students for farewells and thanks.





### BOOSTER SHOT 3:

## Meet and Greet Decorating Party with Students continued

#### **SAY:**

Thank you all for being so welcoming, friendly, and creative. This is our lunchroom, all of ours, and we want to make sure we all feel welcome and comfortable here. Enjoy the spaces you helped create and say hello when you see each other in the lunchroom. We all work hard here at [school name] and a little appreciation and friendliness can go a long way.

We are working all year to improve the lunchroom and the experiences of both staff members and students. Sincere, helpful feedback is always welcome. I hope we can collaborate on other changes and celebrations in the future.

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### FOLLOW-UP

Check back with staff members about their reactions to meeting the students. Post discussion questions in the staff area or at meals. Sample questions include:

- Describe your experience interacting with the students during the workshop. How was it like what you expected? How was it different?
- What are some ways students could communicate helpful feedback to the lunchroom staff regarding future improvements?
- How could the students assist with creating a welcoming, positive, orderly lunchroom environment? How could we deliver those requests in a non-threatening, effective way?

Update seasonal decorations every 1–3 months, as appropriate.