

# 4D

## Avoiding misunderstandings

### LESSON GOALS

- Recognize and talk about difficulties that happen in communication
- Learn ways to avoid misunderstandings
- Use simple language to deal with misunderstandings

### READING

#### 1 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

- 1 What is a misunderstanding?
  - a When you know you don't understand someone
  - b When you understand someone's mistake
  - c When you understand someone incorrectly
- 2 Do people sometimes misunderstand you when you speak? Do you sometimes misunderstand others? Give examples.  
*I'm quite direct, so sometimes people think I'm angry when I'm not.*
- 3 In your experience, what causes misunderstandings?

#### 2 Read the story about Alejandro. What is the cause of the misunderstanding?

Alejandro lives in a four-bedroom house with three other international students. They share a kitchen, a living room and two bathrooms. Living together can be difficult and sometimes there are misunderstandings between them.

One evening, Alejandro is telling his housemate Han-Bin about how messy the house often is. He talks about how everyone needs to clean up immediately after using the kitchen. Han-Bin smiles and says, 'yes'. The next day, Alejandro sees Han-Bin leaving a mess in the kitchen after cooking. Alejandro gets upset.

### MY VOICE

#### 3 Watch the video about misunderstandings. In pairs, choose the correct option (a–c).

- 1 Which reason for misunderstandings does the video talk about?
  - a People say they understand when they don't.
  - b We speak different languages.
  - c We think people understand us, but they actually don't.

- 2 Alejandro thinks 'yes' means ...
  - a 'I agree.'
  - b 'I'm listening.'
  - c 'I want to be nice and not argue with you.'
- 3 Han-Bin thinks 'yes' means ...
  - a 'I agree.'
  - b 'I'm listening.'
  - c 'I want to be nice and not argue with you.'
- 4 We know what we mean, ...
  - a so of course other people know what we mean too.
  - b but other people might not know what we mean.
  - c so there's no need to explain what we say.

#### 4 Look at the Communication skill box. In the situation in Exercise 2, which things can Alejandro do? Which things can Han-Bin do?

### COMMUNICATION SKILL

#### Avoiding misunderstandings

You can avoid misunderstandings by being clear and specific when speaking.

You can do this by ...

- explaining.
- giving examples.
- repeating what you said in different words.

When you're not sure what someone means, ask questions.

#### 5 Work in pairs. Look at the Useful language box. Which phrases can you use for ...

- 1 explaining and repeating what you said?
- 2 giving examples?
- 3 asking questions about what someone means?

### Useful language

#### Avoiding misunderstandings

When I say ('yes'), I mean ('I agree').

What I mean is ...

I'm saying this because ...

I'm not sure I understand. What do you mean when you say ('yes')?

When you say ('yes'), do you mean ('you agree')?

For example, ...



**A** One morning, Alejandro is getting ready to go out. Cara is in the next room and she asks him, 'Do you need to use the bathroom?' Alejandro replies, 'It's OK.'

One minute later, Alejandro goes to the bathroom and finds the door locked. Cara is in there. Alejandro gets really upset. He clearly said 'OK' when she asked him!

**B** A new housemate, Rami, is moving into the house. When he arrives, he looks around and starts asking Alejandro questions: 'Why is the TV on this side of the living room?'; 'Why are there only six plates in the kitchen?'; 'Why is the garden so small?' ...

Alejandro feels upset by Rami's questions, but Rami loves his new house and doesn't realize that he's saying anything wrong.

**C** Alejandro is waiting to watch the news on TV, but Martyna is watching a different programme. Alejandro asks, 'How long is your programme, Martyna?' and she replies, 'Not long. My programme finishes soon.'

An hour later, Alejandro gets upset when he comes back to the living room and Martyna is still watching TV.

#### 6 Work in pairs. Look at the three photos above. What misunderstandings do you think are happening?

#### 7 Read situations A–C and check your ideas from Exercise 6.

#### 8 Work in groups of three. Roleplay each situation with your group, taking turns to be students A, B and C. Use the Communication skill box and the Useful language to avoid misunderstandings.

**Student A:** You are Alejandro.

**Student B:** You are Alejandro's housemate.

**Student C:** Watch students A and B roleplay the conversation. Then tell them what they did well and what you noticed.

**B:** Do you need to use the bathroom?

**A:** It's OK.

**B:** So can I use the bathroom now?

**A:** But I want to use the bathroom.

**B:** I'm not sure I understand. What do you mean when you say 'It's OK'?

### SPEAKING

#### 9 OWN IT! Work in groups. Discuss the questions and give reasons for your answers.

- 1 What do you usually do when you're upset with someone?
  - a I act like everything is OK. I don't talk about it.
  - b I talk to someone else about it.
  - c I talk to them about it immediately.
  - d I wait for a good time to talk to them about it.
  - e I stop talking to them.
- 2 What do you usually do when you know someone is upset with you?
  - a I wait for them to talk to me. I don't talk about it.
  - b I talk to someone else about it.
  - c I talk to them about it immediately.
  - d I wait for a good time to talk to them about it.
  - e I try to make them happy in other ways.
- 3 Are these good ways to deal with problems and misunderstandings? Why? / Why not?

### EXPLORE MORE!

There are many tips online about how to deal with misunderstandings. Search online for 'misunderstandings + tips' to find out more.