

Effective Communication

Learning Guide

Written by

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Learning Outcomes:

- To identify key principles for effective communication
- To learn the skills of paraphrasing, clarifying and reflecting
- To explain barriers to effective communication

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References

Learning Guide Feedback Form

Using this Learning Guide

This guide has been written to assist you to learn through self paced study and facilitated professional development sessions held at your children's service.

It is recommended that a senior staff member is nominated to facilitate the PD sessions, however each individual has a responsibility for their own learning, and to assist the team as a whole to work and learn together.

Each person should individually read through the information provided, and then come together with their work colleagues to discuss their understanding of the information and work together to complete the "Putting ideas in practice" exercises. These exercises are always identified with the following symbol:



Write down your answers to the exercises where you see this symbol:



Sometimes you will be asked to complete an action, identified by this symbol:



Many of the practical exercises can be implemented at your centre, and should be used to add to and enhance your professional practice.

If you wish to provide feedback to the developers your comments would be most welcome. Please complete and return the feedback sheet at the end of this package.

What is effective communication?

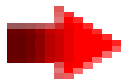
Definition of communication

Communication is an exchange of thoughts, ideas and information that is clearly explained and clearly understood.

The communication process has 5 main components:

- The **sender** sends the **message**
- The **receiver** pays attention and listens to what is communicated
- The receiver responds to the message
- The sender receives the **feedback** and sends a further **response** back

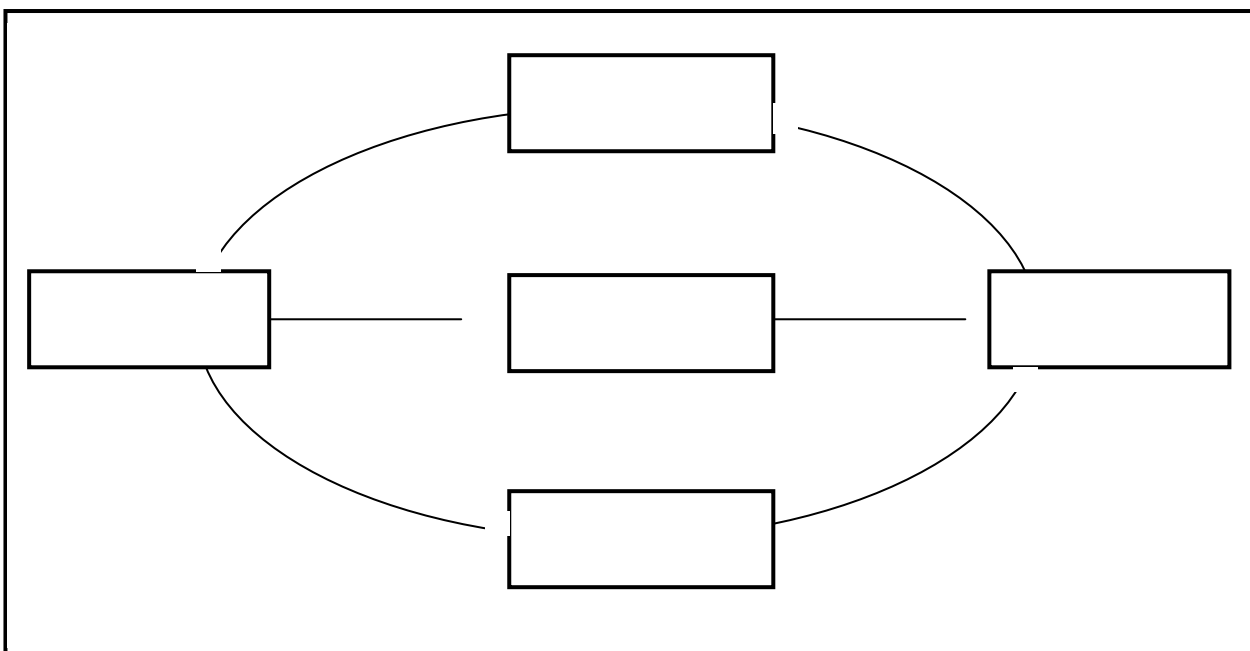
This process establishes the **Communication Cycle**.



Putting ideas in practice



Complete the arrows and insert the 5 words bolded above to describe the communication cycle in the following diagram.



Key Principles for Effective Communication

- ***Clear and precise exchange of information*** – so that everyone that receives the message receives the same meaning
- ***Open and non-judgmental*** – does not allow biases or prejudices to get in the way of transmitting or hearing the message
- ***Understanding the meaning behind the words*** – looks for the real message, which may be different from the message conveyed through the words alone of the sender – this is where you have to listen to the tone of voice and observe the body language and facial expressions (the non-verbal message)
- ***Clarify meaning to ensure the listener receives the right message*** – involves making sure you know what the sender is trying to say by questioning and paraphrasing
- ***Two way interaction that involves both parties*** – is based on mutual respect and valuing each other's viewpoints
- ***Appropriate time and place*** – ensures the receiver is able to receive the message that is being given without external interruptions or influences such as background noises – TV; radio; children playing; static noise; or lack of time to fully attend to what is being said
- ***Recognizes verbal, non-verbal and vocal messages*** – the receiver receives the full message by watching body language, facial expressions and listening to vocal nuances
- ***Can be in writing*** – especially to confirm important communications such as times, dates, or topics that require the receiver to come prepared to discuss

- ***Uses appropriate language set at a level and pace the receiver can understand*** – the sender knows the developmental ability of the receiver – for instance in the case of talking to a child
- ***Involves negotiation, problem solving and supporting one another*** – seeks a win win outcome for both parties
- ***Is on-going and messages given over time do not conflict with each other but maintain consistency of meaning*** – consistency is achieved through continually reassessing and evaluating communication strategies and how messages are sent and received
- ***Keeps everyone informed and aware of what is happening*** – uses a range of communication methods and styles to ensure that everyone receives the correct information i.e. spoken; email; memo; flier; notice; letter; newsletter
- ***Uses positive body language and eye contact*** – (where culturally appropriate) to encourage the receiver to ask questions if they don't fully understand the message

Communication and the Quality Assurance Process

Effective communication is an integral part of the Quality Assurance process and is imbedded in all of the Quality Areas.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication incorporates more than 70% of any message. This means that although the words we choose are important (30%), it is the minority of the message received. The non-verbal components of a message are:

Eye Contact (where culturally appropriate)

Eye contact is something to watch fairly astutely. It's difficult to stare intently at another's eyes without making them feel uncomfortable, therefore assure that your eye contact is maintained, but in a non-threatening way. Also be aware that different eye contact is indicative of different cultures and this should be respected. Eyes tell one a lot about the emotional state of another.

Tone & Inflection of Voice

By practising different ways of saying a phrase, e.g. "Don't tell me what to do", the message sent can be taken or interpreted in different ways. It all depends on how loud or intense your tone is and which words you put the inflection on.



Putting ideas in practice



Taking turns in a group, try saying this phrase *"Don't tell me what to do"*, in as many different ways as is possible, making it sound and mean different things each time.

Body Language

Body language refers to the unconscious message sent from the brain that becomes an outward reflection of a person's emotional state - a reflection of how a person feels told through the body itself. It is not difficult to begin to understand body language; anybody can become knowledgeable in the art of reading body language.

The most important aspect of body language is CLUSTERS. For example somebody folding their arms may not mean they are tuning off or rejecting what you are saying, it could mean they are cold, but folding their arms, crossing their legs, body to one side, tightening their mouth and narrowing their eyes would be a fairly strong indication of their not accepting what you are saying. Therefore, once you begin to look for body language, be aware that they should be read in clusters. Repetitive signals are another obvious signal that should be tuned in to, e.g. nose touching, hair twirling, ring fiddling or collar pulling, done out of context and in isolation of other gestures, are signs of boredom or tension. Changes in facial skin tone such as flushing can mean a person is hot, but when observed with other signs such as those listed above, can mean anger or embarrassment.

Body language can be read about, studied, observed and learned and I'd recommend Alan Pease's books:

"Body Language" and "Talk Language" (Camel Publishing, Sydney)



Putting ideas in practice



Think about how you respond both verbally and non-verbally in different situations.

Write down your answers to the following situations:

- (a) When you feel bored with what is being said in a discussion, how do you usually express/display your feelings?

Verbally _____

Non-verbally _____

- (b) When you feel annoyed with another person with whom you want to build a better relationship, how do you usually express/display your feelings?

Verbally _____

Non-verbally _____

- (c) When another person says or does something which offends you how do you usually express/display your feelings?

Verbally _____

Non-verbally _____

- (d) A peer or superior asks you to do something that you are afraid you cannot do well. You also want to hide the fact that you feel inadequate. How do you express/display your feelings?

Verbally _____

Non-verbally _____

- (e) When a person you are attending to appears uncertain of his facts, confused and generally dithering around in your presence, how do you express/display your feelings?

Verbally _____

Non-verbally _____

Some times a person's body language contradicts what they say:

Tom, a nine year old, repeatedly kicks the gym mat. His face is bright red, his eyes narrowed and his mouth is tight.

You ask him if there is anything wrong.

He replies, "No!"

Do you believe him? Or do you trust your observations?

When a person's words and body language appear to contradict each other, most of us choose to believe what we see rather than what we hear. We trust a person's body language more than we do their words.

It must be remembered, however, that different cultures have different ways of relating. In western cultures for instance making eye contact with the person we are communicating with is a sign of respect and interest. However in some Aboriginal and Asian cultures it is a sign of rudeness and disrespect. Being aware of these differences is important. Your first few interactions with people will give you clues as to what is appropriate and what is not. Watch closely and listen carefully.

When a new family arrives at your centre you want to make them feel

- welcomed
- respected
- valued, and
- acknowledged.



Putting ideas in practice



Which of the following behaviours will help new families to feel welcome.

Tick the appropriate boxes:

- Smiling and walking towards the person as they enter.
- Sitting behind your desk and continuing what you were doing.
- Looking away and ignoring the person.
- Maintaining eye contact, nodding and smiling whilst listening to the person.
- Putting whatever you are doing aside and giving the person your full attention.
- Glaring at the person as they begin to speak.
- Sighing heavily.
- Leaning forward slightly and fully attending as the person speaks.
- Carrying on your phone conversation, even though it's a personal call.

Effective Listening – paraphrasing; clarifying; reflecting

Effective listening requires that we focus on sounds and then try to make sense of them. When we are interacting with others its not just a matter of hearing the words, but also:

- Being aware of the person's body language
- Giving your full attention
- Being alert to any underlying feelings and emotions
- Suspending your own feelings, emotions and judgments
- Allowing the person to talk and not interrupting with your own comments and observations
- Not talking about yourself
- Not changing topics
- Not advising, diagnosing, reassuring, encouraging or criticizing
- Not pretending you have understood their meaning if you haven't
- Being focused on the speaker's needs and assisting the speaker to express their thoughts or feelings in safety

This is ACTIVE listening. Active listening requires the listener to ATTEND to what is being said and to have the skills of *paraphrasing, clarifying* and *reflecting*.

Paraphrasing

Saying in your own words what the other person has said to you. This is a technique to show that you have heard and understood what the person has said. Do not make judgments, offer advice or add your own interpretation.

Paraphrasing helps you to understand the other's point of view, which may be different from your own.

Clarifying

Make sure you understand what the speaker means by questioning:

- *I believe what you are saying is ...*
- *What I'm hearing you say is ...*
- *What did you mean when you said ...*
- *Are you saying ...*

Reflecting

Listening with understanding requires that the listener shows empathy towards the speaker's feelings:

- *You sound really angry (about ...)*
- *I'd be really upset if that happened to me*
- *How are you feeling about what has happened?*

If you can put yourself in the place of the other person you will have a better understanding of the issue from their perspective.



Putting ideas in practice



Paraphrasing is the skill of being able to send the message received, back to the sender to assure that what you are receiving is what they meant to send. Reflective listening is the rephrasing of the words, not verbatim, but in other ways to let the person know you are attempting to understand.

With the following statements paraphrase into your own words what you believe are the feelings that the sender is transmitting. Utilise the skills of reflective listening.

S: It makes me so mad, can't they see that the children's safety is the most important issue in this discussion!

P: Are you saying: _____

S: If the children are not allowed to go out, then I'm going to find another centre. My child is entitled to a quality service!

P: Are you saying: _____

S: I really can't understand why everyone is getting so upset. I don't think it is about the excursions, it seems to have become very personal.

P: Are you saying: _____

S: I just get so tired of meetings, meetings and more meetings!

P: Are you saying: _____

S: You know, if I could just get on with my job as Supervisor, all this about excursions wouldn't be happening, I'd just organise it the way I thought it should happen!

P: Are you saying: _____

S: I don't think I'll ever volunteer to go on another Committee in my life.

P: Are you saying: _____

Open and Closed Questions

The art of clarifying requires asking questions. Questions also have another important function. They allow us to gather additional information. Through questioning we can find out more about the children in our care, and their families, or the particular issue under discussion.

There are two types of questions: *open* and *closed* questions.

Closed questions require short, to-the-point answers. They give us information and help to clarify and pinpoint details, but they do not encourage people to talk.

Open questions on the other hand, can lead to explanations and insights.



Putting ideas in practice



Read through the following questions and indicate whether they are open or closed:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Do you have an emergency contact number? | Open/Closed |
| 2. What would you really like to do? | Open/Closed |
| 3. Does Mary like arts and crafts? | Open/Closed |
| 4. How do you feel about children going on outings? | Open/Closed |
| 5. You seem worried, what's bothering you? | Open/Closed |
| 6. Did you bring your lunch today? | Open/Closed |
| 7. What have you got in your lunchbox today? | Open/Closed |

Giving and receiving feedback

Feedback can be positive or negative depending on how it is delivered. The impact you can have on others can be devastating if not managed in a constructive and positive way. Feedback should be given to HELP and not HURT, and therefore you should try to balance positive rather than negative feedback by a ratio of at least 2:1.

Positive constructive feedback:

- Improves confidence
- Improves performance
- Improves relationships
- Motivates
- Encourages level of responsibility
- Focuses on behaviour rather than the person
- Focuses on facts, not speculation
- Describes rather than judges
- Is sensitive and gentle and demonstrates empathy

Silence:

- Can be threatening
- Leaves people confused
- Reduces confidence
- Can affect performance
- Can be dangerous

Advice:

- Sometimes restricts initiative
- Can lend support
- Can enhance performance
- Might be overpowering if not given in small doses

Criticism:

- Affects self confidence
- Is usually negative
- Can be destructive
- Leads to avoidance

Helpful Hints on Giving Feedback:**1. Be specific –**

“Let’s look at some alternative words you could use ...”
rather than *“What you’ve said is all wrong.”*

2. Start with a positive

“I really like the way you did (this), and think you could have had an even better result by ...”

3. Focus on the behaviour and not the person

“I like the way you’ve helped Jenny ...”

4. Reflect on the person’s feelings when giving feedback

“I think you are not very sure about ...”

5. Focus on things the person can do

“Maybe next time this happens you could discuss this with another staff member” rather than *“You shouldn’t have done (that) ...”*

6. Give feedback when the person is asking for feedback and is able to fully attend to what you are saying

“When can we meet to discuss this further?”

7. Share your expertise and experience

“When I do this particular task, I find it useful to ...”

8. Be careful not to overload the receiver

“Next time start by ...” rather than
“You must remember to do this, and this, and then this, and don’t forget to ...”

9. Make sure the person understands your feedback

“Let’s recap what we have been discussing.”

Helpful Hints on Receiving Feedback:

Receiving feedback can be quite confronting because it is personal and our feelings are on the line.

1. Listen to what is being said without judging or debating the issue.
2. Do not interrupt.
3. Let the person finish and assume they are trying to be constructive and helpful.
4. Don't jump to conclusions.
5. Be sure you understand what is actually being said.

"Have I understood you correctly ..."

6. Take time to consider what has been said, and give your response after you have gone away and thought about it.

"Thank you for your feedback, I need to consider what you have said and will get back to you ..."

Later come back and be assertive in your response.

 **Putting ideas in practice**

With a partner think of a recent situation either at work or in your personal life, where you have had to give and or receive feedback. Having read the above hints, discuss how you could have addressed the situation differently and achieved a different outcome?



Good and Poor Communicators

There are some distinguishing characteristics of good and poor communicators.

Good communicators

- Know what they are going to say
- Can gain the attention of the listener
- Choose when and where to communicate
- Are clear, succinct and coherent
- Do not get distracted
- Are active listeners
- Know how to close a conversation
- Can establish and maintain relationships

Poor communicators

- Are not clear about what they want to say
- Communicate at inappropriate times and places
- Are not aware of their listener's when they are speaking
- Fail to respond to verbal and non-verbal feedback
- Have difficulty getting their point across
- Get distracted easily and go off into irrelevant issues
- Have difficulty closing conversations
- Have difficulty maintaining relationships

Common barriers to effective communication

There are many things that can get in the way of effective communication:

- ***Inappropriate vocabulary and differences in meaning*** – don't talk in jargon or speak at a level that is above or below the receiver, as they will just tune out from what you are saying – consider that words and gestures mean different things in different cultures
- ***Anxiety*** – when we are anxious we don't always interpret meanings correctly and may respond in ways that do not express what we really want to say
- ***Not listening and inattentive attitude*** – “People are more likely to listen to us if we listen to them.” (Hugh Mackay – Why don't people listen? 1994)
- ***Jumping to conclusions*** – assuming you “know” what the other person means by imposing your own interpretations and not fully listening to what is being said
- ***Prejudice and bias*** – judging the other person because of your prejudices and biases, and not then listening to what they have to say
- ***Sensory disability*** – check that the other person is able to hear and understand what is being said
- ***Personal problems*** – may intrude on and block the message
- ***Your own self image*** – which effects how you interpret comments, what you say and how you say it
- ***The other person's self image*** – which effects the way they receive your message i.e. they may think you are criticizing them when you are not; they may feel insecure and inadequate and so concentrate on the negatives; or they may consider themselves to be superior to you and not be prepared to accept what you are saying
- ***Noisy distracting environment, lack of time and interruptions*** – affect both the sender's and receiver's concentration and ability to fully attend to the communication process

- ***Inappropriate location*** – i.e. discussing a personal or confidential issue when other people are within hearing
- ***Not being clear about what you want to say*** – it is difficult to get the message across if you are not clear in your own mind what you want to say – preparing, practicing or writing down the information you need to give, can help to build confidence and clarify the message you wish to give
- ***Information overload*** – after a while the brain cannot assimilate more information, and we stop paying attention
- ***Insufficient information*** – the full message will not be transmitted
- ***Not asking questions if you don't understand*** – it is important to clarify what is being said by asking questions or asking for clarification
- ***Lack of common ground*** – a good communicator will find some common ground on which to begin the communication process



Putting ideas in practice



What are your communication barriers? Complete the questionnaire below by answering each question as honestly as possible, and then discuss your answers with the group.

1. If you were giving a set of instructions to a group of children about an activity you were conducting and they looked at you with blank faces, would you:

- repeat the instructions clearly and precisely and then start the activity;
- re-phrase the instructions;
- ask the children if they understood the instructions;
- question the children about the activity to see if they understood your instructions.

2. If you were at a staff meeting, and the Supervising Officer gave a set of instructions for the forthcoming vacation care program that you did not fully understand, would you:

- keep silent and then later ask another staff member what the Supervising Officer meant;
- ask the Supervising Officer to repeat the instructions;
- question the Supervising Officer about what you were required to do, until you were clear about the tasks in hand.

3. How often do you let the children or other staff members know when you like or approve of something they say or do?

Never 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 Always

4. How often do you let others know when you are unhappy, irritated or opposed to something they say or do?

Never 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 Always

5. How often do you try to find out what other staff members are feeling in general, and about specific issues, rather than assuming you know?

Never 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 Always

Ten laws of communication

1. It is not what your message does to the listener, but what the listener does with the message that determines your success as a communicator.
2. Listeners generally interpret messages in ways that make them feel comfortable and secure.
3. When people's attitudes are attacked head on they are likely to defend those attitudes and, in the process, reinforce them.
4. People pay most attention to messages that are relevant to their own circumstances and point of view.
5. People who feel insecure in a relationship are unlikely to be good listeners.
6. People are more likely to listen to us if we listen to them.
7. People are more likely to change in response to a combination of new experiences and communication styles, than in response to communication alone.
8. People are more likely to support change that affects them if they are consulted before the change is made.
9. The message in what is said will be interpreted in the light of how, when, where and by whom it is said.
10. Lack of self knowledge and an unwillingness to resolve one's own internal conflicts make it harder for us to communicate with other people.

Hugh Mackay (1994 – Why don't people listen? Mackay Research Limited, 1994)

References

Other learning guides in this series:

Building Trust and Confidence through Leadership Learning Guide by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

Encouraging Parent Involvement Learning Guide by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

Other relevant resources:

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance – Quality Practices Guide, by National Childcare Accreditation Council 2003

Lets Discuss – Effective Communication resource sheet by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

Body Language and *Talk Language* by Alan Pease, published by Camel Publishing, Sydney

Why don't people listen? by Hugh Mackay, published by Mackay Research Limited, 1994

Learning Guide Feedback Form

Your feedback will help us to improve our learning materials so they are more useful to you. Please rate the following criteria on a sliding scale of 1 (good) to 5 (poor) by circling the appropriate number.

	Good				Poor		
clear language	1	2	3	4	5	language unclear	
easily understood	1	2	3	4	5	confusing/difficult	
relevant	1	2	3	4	5	not relevant	
exercises useful	1	2	3	4	5	exercises of no use	

Please add any other comments you wish to add about the learning guide:



Name (optional): _____

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