

GRUNDTVIG PARTNERSHIP 2013-2015 “ENGAGING DISADVANTAGED PARENTS TO ACQUIRE PARENTING SKILLS ” EDPAPS

GUIDE

“Examples of communication between me and my child .”



1. General information about communication between parents and children.

What is communication, and why is it such an integral part of family life? Communication, in the context of the family, simply refers to the exchange of verbal and non-verbal information between two or more family members. It is through communication processes that parents and children express their needs, wants, concerns, as well as their love and admiration for one another. Just as effective communication is almost invariably found in healthy families, poor communication is typically associated with unhealthy family relationships. Researchers have discovered that poor communication can lead to numerous family problems, including excessive family conflict, ineffective problem solving, lack of intimacy, weak emotional bonding, and behavioral problems in children (Bray and Heatherington, 1993).

2. Communication patters - ways of communication

Four Styles of Communication

1. Clear and Direct Communication

Clear and direct communication is the most healthy form of communication and occurs when the message is stated plainly and directly to the appropriate family member. An example of this style of communication is when a father/mother, disappointed about his son failing to complete his chore, states, "Son, I'm disappointed that you forgot to take out the trash today without my having to remind you."



2. Clear and Indirect Communication

In this second style of communication, the message is clear, but it is not directed to the person for whom it is intended. Using the previous example, the parents might say, "It's disappointing when people forget to complete their chores." In this message the son may not know that his parents are referring to him.

3. Masked and Direct Communication

Masked and direct communication occurs when the content of the message is unclear, but directed to the appropriate family member. The father in our example may say something like, "Son, people just don't work as hard as they used to."

4. Masked and Indirect Communication

Masked and indirect communication occurs when both the message and intended recipient are unclear. In unhealthy family relationships, communication tends to be very masked and indirect. An example of this type of communication might be the parents stating, "The youth of today are very lazy."¹

3. How to talk with your child - practical examples.

Communication between a parent and child begins very early. Research on early brain development indicates that it is extremely important for parents to begin communicating with children from the day they are born (if not before). Talking to a child, singing to a

¹ <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/350/350-092/350-092.html>

child, reading to a child, and touching a child are all forms of communication that stimulate a child's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. As children grow older, their ability to communicate and their knowledge of the rules of communication rapidly expand.

- **Think about who you are communicating with.** Communicating with children, especially very young children, requires a unique set of skills and a basic understanding of child development. Children can be effective communicators; however, they are limited by their developmental capacities. A related recommendation for parents is that they communicate on the same level as their child. Using language that children understand helps facilitate communication. This can also be done by physically coming down to the child's level (e.g., bending down on one knee so that face-to-face interaction can take place).
- **Pay attention to non-verbal messages.** Parents and children communicate very strong messages through their non-verbal behavior. Facial expressions, body posture, hand gestures, and tone of voice are all examples of non-verbal communication. Parents can enhance their ability to communicate with their children by paying close attention to their children's non-verbal messages. Children do not always possess the vocabulary necessary to articulate their emotions; therefore, it is imperative that parents learn to interpret non-verbal behavior, as well as seek clarification when they are unclear how their children feel. Also, it is extremely important that parents understand the impact of their own non-verbal messages. For example, an angry glare from a father can have the same impact as a harsh word.
- **Be an active listener.** An essential aspect of effective parent-child communication is the ability and/or willingness to listen to what children have to say. Being an active listener involves trying one's best to understand the perspective of the other person. When listening to a child, it is extremely important to pay close attention to his verbal and non-verbal messages.

es. For example, when listening to a child, a father or mother can nod his head or say, “I understand,” which conveys to the child that what he has to say is important. Another aspect of active listening is seeking clarification from a child when the message is not understood. This can be done by simply asking, “What did you mean when you said.?,” or “Help me understand what you are saying.”

- **Communicate frequently.** In order to for a parents to develop a strong relationship with their children, they must communicate with them on a regular basis. Frequent communication enables to know the needs of his children.. Communication can take place in a wide variety of settings (e.g., at the dinner table, in the car, on the telephone, at bedtime, through letters, etc.).
- **Use “I” messages.** I-messages are statements that reflect what a sender is thinking or feeling at a particular moment. I-messages focus on the parent, rather than the child. These statements are typically non-threatening and non-judgmental. I-messages stand in contrast to You-messages, which often put down, blame, and nag children (Dinkmeyer, McKay, and Dinkmeyer, 1989). For example, a parent may say to a child, “You did a bad job on your homework.” The same parent using an I-message, could have said, “I think you could have put more effort into your homework.” I-messages tend to be phrased more positively and encourage cooperation.
- **Emphasize the positive.** While it is often necessary to address problematic behavior with children, effective communication is primarily positive. Family researchers have discovered that unhappy family relationships are often the result of negative communication patterns (e.g., criticism, contempt, defensiveness). Psychologist, John Gottman, has found that satisfied married couples maintain a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions (Gottman,

1994). In other words, couples who tend to be very dissatisfied with their relationships tend to engage in more negative than positive communication. ²

4. Helping children to develop good relationship and communication skills.

What can I do to develop my child's communication skills?

- **Be interested and attentive.** Children can tell whether they have your interest and attention by the way you reply or don't reply. Forget about the telephone and other distractions. Maintain eye contact to show you are really with the child. Showing interest in a child and her activities will encourage her to express her feelings and make her feel important. Get down on the child's level; don't stand and tower above her. Children tend to feel very close to an adult who, by expressing concern and caring, gets them talking about themselves.
- **Encourage talking.** Some children need an invitation to start talking. You might begin with, "Tell me about your day at school." Children are more likely to share their ideas and feelings when others think they're important. Ask children the kinds of questions that will require more than yes or no or right answers. Simple questions such as, "What is the dog's name?" often lead a conversation to a dead end. But questions such as, "What do you like about the dog?" or "What other dogs have you played with?" may extend the conversation.
- **Extend conversation.** If a child says, "I like to watch TV," then you in your response should use some of the same wording the child has used. "What are some of the TV shows you like best?" If the child says, "Sesame Street," your response could be, "What happens on Sesame Street that you like seeing?" Avoid asking too many questions, though. Provide

² <http://fcs.tamu.edu/files/2015/01/keys-to-effective-father-child-communication.pdf>

some information - for example, "I think Bert and Ernie are my favorite Sesame Street characters."

- **Listen patiently.** Children often take longer than adults to find the right word. Listen as though you have plenty of time. Hurrying children or calling attention to their use of the wrong word while they are talking is upsetting and confusing. Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking. If you are interested in helping your child share a conversation, avoid correcting grammar or pronunciation. This can inhibit a child. Correction can take place in a different context and you can model correct grammar in your own speech. As parents you can set an example of consideration by waiting your turn to speak.
- **Reflect feelings.** Sometimes just reflecting a child's feelings back to him encourages him to tell you what's on his mind. Saying, "You're really feeling sad today, aren't you?" is more likely to invite a child to share and confide his feelings than asking, "What's wrong?" Restating or rephrasing what children have said is useful when they are experiencing powerful emotions they may not be fully aware of.
- **Be an example.** Communication skills are influenced by the examples children see and hear. Parents who listen to their children with interest, attention and patience set a valuable example. The greatest audience children can have is an adult who is important to them and interested in them.³

³ <http://listserv.ed.gov/archives/edinfo/archived/msg00183.html>



5. Creating a climate for communication - chatting with your children at mealtimes and other creative ideas.

One of the most difficult challenges facing families today is finding time to spend together. According to a recent Wall Street Journal survey, 40% of the respondents stated that lack of time was a greater problem for them than lack of money (Graham & Crossan, 1996).

With our busy schedules, it is difficult to find sufficient time to spend with one another in meaningful conversation. It is extremely important for families to make time to communicate. Talk in the car; turn the TV off and eat dinner together; schedule informal or formal family meetings to talk about important issues that affect your family; and talk to your children at bedtime. There are many creative ways to make time to communicate with other family members.

Healthy families communicate their thoughts and feelings in a clear and direct manner. This is especially important when attempting to resolve problems that arise between family members (e.g., spouse, parent-child). Indirect and vague communication will not only fail to resolve problems, but will also contribute to a lack of intimacy and emotional bonding between family members. In order for effective communication to take place within families, individual family members must be open and honest with one another. This openness and honesty will set the stage for trusting relationships. Without trust, families cannot build strong relationships. Parents, especially, are responsible for providing a safe environment that allows family members to openly express their thoughts and feelings. One of the best ways to foster children's language development is to have conversation with them. Conversation means a shared verbal exchange between adult and child, not just an adult talking to a child or directing a series of questions at a child.

