

KID CONNECTS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PART 1

Issue 5: May 26th, 2020

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Contact our warm line at, (303) 245-4418, to talk directly to an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant.



COVID-19 has spurred countless changes to our day-to-day lives. Guidelines and regulations shift as new information is being released. Communication is key to navigating these changes and implementing guidelines effectively. This issue of our weekly e-newsletter addresses communication: how we can be mindful of what and how we are communicating information, as well as how we assert our needs. Because communication is so important, we have dedicated two issues to tips and strategies to

How Effectively Do You Communicate?



improve communication. Part 2 of our communication newsletter will be released next week. We hope you find it helpful. As always, please reach out to our warm line for any questions or concerns (303)245-4418 or to the Kid Connects' supervisor, Beth Garrett-Myers, at bgarrett@mhpcolorado.org

How do to effectively to communicate?

How we communicate with one another is more than the message we are trying to convey with the words we are saying. Effective communication includes body language and tone of voice (how we say things and nonverbals), timing (when we say things), and the words we use. In addition, being an active and flexible listener while asking questions is a critical aspect of effective communication. Let us break these down.

Tone of Voice and Body Language.

¹ In the 1970's Prof. Albert Mehrabian studied the importance of body language, tone of voice, and words. He went so far as to quantify the effectiveness of communication as: **actual words used (7%) are not as significant as the way we say something (38%) or body language (55%)¹**. Many might argue this formula is near impossible to prove, however the general message remains relevant to our everyday communication: **our body language and the way we say things matter**. They express our attitudes and feelings in ways that words cannot. Being aware of the tone in our voice and our body language is crucial in communicating effectively and avoiding misunderstanding and misinterpretations. Positive body language can include eye contact, smiling, good posture, and head nodding.

¹ Belludi, N. (2008). Right Attitudes. *Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Rule of Personal Communication*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rightattitudes.com/2008/10/04/7-38-55-rule-personal-communication/>.

Timing.

When we choose to deliver information is important. If we are distracted, stressed, or multitasking while trying to have an important conversation, the message may not be delivered the way we intended. For example, if you've just received information from public health on a new regulation that you need to begin implementing next week and it has you feeling tense, anxious, and stressed, it may not be a good idea to tell your staff immediately. Taking a step back, taking time to calm down, and taking time to think about how you might convey this information to your staff, will impact how your staff receives the message. Might it be helpful to tell each person 1:1? Would it be easier to tell them at a staff meeting? Is there a way to reframe the information or put a positive spin on it so it appears less daunting?

Words Matter.

According to licensed clinical social worker Mel Schwartz, "words are the heartbeat of our relationships. When we misuse our words or truncate our sentences to save time, we dishonor ourselves and our relationships."² Choosing our words wisely, taking our time to say what we mean, and knowing our audience when we are talking is key to effective communication.

Active/Flexible Listening.

An important part of communicating is our ability to actively listen, ask questions, be emotionally aware, and be flexible in conversations and meetings. Actively listening means not interrupting, not daydreaming, and not thinking of a rebuttal or your next point to make. A tangible way you can actively listen: **Use your right ear more.** "As strange as it sounds, the left side of the brain contains the primary processing centers for both speech comprehension and emotions. Since the left side of the brain is connected to the right side of the body, favoring your right ear can help you better detect the emotional nuances of what someone is saying."³ When you are being an active listener you begin to truly pick up on the other person's nonverbals, attitudes, point of view, and emotions.

For teachers: The importance of advocating for your needs

Assertive vs. Aggressive: There is often a misconception that being assertive equates to being aggressive. This is not true. Assertive means standing up for your rights and needs while balancing the rights and needs of other people. When you are assertive you demonstrate competence, empathy, and compassion. Aggression is about winning, demanding & intimidating and often involves bullying tactics. ⁴

² Schwartz, M. (2019). *Our Words Matter*. Psychology Today. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shift-mind/201904/our-words-matter>.

³ Robinson, L., Segal, J., and Smith, M. (2019). Help Guide. *Effective Communication*. Retrieved from: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm>

⁴ Essential Communications (2020). Executive Coaching Tips. <https://essentialcomm.com/podcast/assertion-versus-aggression/>

6 Self Advocacy Tips



- 1. ⁵ Believe in Yourself:** Everyone has value and worth. You deserve to be advocated for. Remember, you have skills, abilities and talents that got you your job. Believing in your own self-worth and right to a healthy work environment will help your mindset moving forward.
- 2. Remember, No One is a Mind Reader:** It can be easy to think someone does not care about our plight when we feel upset, thinking someone is deliberately being malicious or unfeeling. In reality, most people are doing the best they can and do not want us to be unhappy. To see positive change, we need to communicate with our boss and/or coworkers before they can understand our situation. Until we communicate with others, they might not even know that we are struggling.
- 3. Engage in Perspective Taking:** It is easy to feel aggrieved. Perspective taking is more difficult. Perspective taking is a skill and takes conscious effort on our part. Seeing a situation from another's point of view can help us see the bigger picture and anticipate the how's and why's behind someone's choices and responses. Seeing the situation from another person's perspective does not mean you have to agree with them.
- 4. Suspend the Belief That There is a Right and Wrong and Find Ways to Join:** Again, being assertive does not mean winning. Challenges are often complex in nature. As with a child, the goal is not to engage in a power struggle with your colleagues and/or boss to prove who is in control, rather to connect over a common goal. Ask yourself what is the common goal, consistency in the center, creating an environment of trust and supports, helping families feel their children are safe...?
- 5. Beware of Negativity:** We can all appreciate the impact of negativity. There is a balance between acknowledging our feelings & processing our experiences and putting all our focus on what is not going well. Do you find yourself often venting to coworkers? While we can benefit from connecting with others regarding our struggles, sometimes these connections can turn into a space where we "bond over the negative." It is also important to bear in mind that our current COVID climate makes us more susceptible to negativity so we may need to redouble our concerted effort to also acknowledge what is going well. Try to hold the positive in mind as well as ask yourself if sharing your views with others is constructive or only deepens your sense of grievement.
- 6. What is Your Ask:** When addressing your concerns ask for what you need/ would like to see change. Helping to create a solution shows your willingness to problem solve and turns what could sound like a complaint into a positive change. Frame your ask in a way that shows how these issues, when resolved, would help all involved.

Remember, the change process can take time. You might have to repeatedly advocate for yourself and/or be willing to compromise. Applaud your efforts, this process can feel defeating when we respectfully advocate and still feel unseen and unheard. While you do not have control over someone else's decisions, you can at least know you made a concerted effort and feel empowered by your ability to advocate for yourself.

⁵ The Muse (2020). Feeling Frustrated? How to Advocate for Yourself at Work.

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/feeling-frustrated-how-to-advocate-for-yourself-at-work>

