

PERENNIAL PROBLEM:

What to do about Nurturing Human Development

CONTINUING PARENTING CONCERN:

Promoting Healthy Parent-Child Relationships

RELATED CONCERN:

Communication Across the Life-Span

DESIRED RESULTS FOR LEARNERS:

Students will understand how to build satisfying, nurturing relationships through effective communication.

LEARNER OUTCOMES: Students will:

1. Explore the desired results in communication that promote satisfying relationships.
2. Become aware of change in communication patterns depending upon the context of the relationship and experience.
3. Analyze the consequences of ineffective communication.
4. Consider a variety of approaches to improving communication patterns in significant relationships.

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS:

- A. Importance of Communication
- B. Constructive Communication
- C. Non-verbal Communication
- D. Open Communication
- E. Communication Skills

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Historically, the family had five major functions:

1. To achieve economic survival
2. To provide protection
3. To pass on the religious faith
4. To educate its young
5. To confer status

These functions of the traditional family have either disappeared or become secondary and families have developed new functions more fundamental to family life today. There is no question that the family is changing; however, it is still in the family where we receive much of

our early and primary socialization. The role of the family is becoming more specialized. Its main contemporary function is the structuring of the personalities of young people and their stabilization as adults. Often the family unit is more isolated and this puts greater pressure on the individuals in the family to find emotional support from this immediate unit that was not characteristic of the past.

In the book *Traits of a Healthy Family* (1983) Curran identified the primary traits of a healthy family as communication and listening. These traits weren't even considered important traits a generation ago. She identified eight hallmarks of the family that is able to communicate and listen:

1. The family exhibits an unusual relationship between parents.
2. The family has control over television.
3. The family listens and responds.
4. The family recognizes nonverbal messages.
5. The family encourages individual feelings and independent thinking.
6. The family recognizes turn-off words and put-down phrases.
7. The family interrupts, but equally.
8. The family develops a pattern of reconciliation.

Communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relations people have with others. Satir (1988), author of *The New Peoplemaking*, emphasizes the importance of communication in the following statement: *"I see communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on between human beings. Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him."* Poor communication is learned. Effective communication skills can be learned. Each of us interprets words and behaviors differently. The meaning of any word, action, or other nonverbal signal is dependent upon our own thoughts, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, and experience. The communication process becomes more complex because we each communicate within our own "frame of reference," which is the sum total of a person's experiences and knowledge. There is always communication. Even when they do not speak, people are communicating with others. Some type of message always gets through. Children, because of their lack of verbal skills, frequently communicate through behavior.

Destructive communication patterns are those that cause people to feel judged or blamed and unworthy. Constructive communication patterns are those that accept individual differences that promote feelings of self-worth, and help people talk and express their feelings.

Many times families have their own rules for communication (generally unspoken rules) that prohibit family members from expressing certain feelings, needs, or awareness. Children learn these rules regarding what can and cannot be talked about from their parents. These rules eventually become unconscious inhibitors that prevent people from sharing important parts of their experiences. Some examples of unhealthy rules that distort communication are:

It is wrong to:

1. Ask for help
2. Talk about hopes and dreams
3. Express anger
4. Ask for emotional support
5. Show that you've been hurt
6. Voice disagreement or bring conflicts into the open
7. Express fear
8. Show affection
9. Ask for attention

10. Directly express your anger

To survive in a family, children have to follow rules. The rules eventually drop out of the conscious level and become a hidden influence on communication. For parents and other caregivers, it is important to recognize that there is a direct connection between how children feel and how they behave, and that when children feel right, they will behave in an acceptable manner. Steady denial of feelings can confuse and upset children. It teaches them not to trust their feelings.

When parents and other adults talk to children, they frequently do not know how to handle the feelings children express. So, they respond in ways that block further communication. Some examples of these behaviors are:

Judging: "That's where you're wrong."
"You're too emotional."

These parents are interested in proving that they are always right and that the child is always wrong.

Advising: "Try asking Jack over here to play."
"Why don't you do your math first, when you're fresh."

These parents demonstrate that they have accumulated most of the answer and try to show how superior they are.

Placating: "Right, right, you'll feel better tomorrow."
"Uh, huh, these things happen."

The placator is always trying to please, never disagreeing, no matter what.

Blamer: "You never do anything right."
"What is the matter with you?!"

The blamer is the fault finder and seems to always be saying, "If it weren't for you, everything would be all right!"

Mind Reading: "He's just jealous of his sister."
"You are doing this to spite me."

Communication patterns in relationships can be changed to become more open and understanding. Communication that is open and honest can be risk-taking since you open yourself up to others by telling what you are feeling. It also has its benefits, because as people learn to communicate verbally and non-verbally, they learn to know themselves better. Communication can help build relationships which satisfy and grow as people learn to trust themselves and others in the process.

The idea of mutual respect is at the basis of effective communication. "Mutual respect" means that children and adults allow each other to express their beliefs and feelings honestly, without fear of rejection. Developing mutual respect will take some work if families or individuals have lived with lots of judging and blaming.

Active or reflective listening involves listening to the feelings behind the words of another speaker. This can be very hard. When most people listen, they listen only to the words that are being spoken. Becoming an effective listener requires concentration. It involves establishing

eye contact and a posture which says, "I'm listening." Sometimes good listening requires us to be silent and sometimes it requires us to respond. The communication process is always non-verbal as well as verbal. Our actions, facial expressions, and tone of voice communicate whether or not we are listening. We can communicate non-verbally through a smile, a frown, or a pat on the back. Active listening can be called "listening between the lines." The listeners can ask themselves, "What is she or he really trying to say?" "What is she or he feeling?" People can respond with either closed or open responses. A closed response is one which indicated that the listener has neither heard nor understood what was said and tends to cut off communication. An open response is one which indicates that the listener has heard what the other person has said and reflects the speaker's message in a way that clearly indicated the listener has heard the feelings between the words.

Active listening is a way of listening to a child that lets him or her know you are working to understand his or her thoughts and feelings. The adult should:

- **Make sure his or her body language says he or she is interested and listening.** Make eye contact with the child, turn his or her body toward the child and nod as the child is talking to let the child know he or she is listening.
- **Reduce any distractions that will keep from focusing on the message.** If it is not a good time to focus on the child's concern, postpone listening until a better time. Tell the child, "I will be better able to listen to you once I am done with _____."
- **Check-out what the child said:** "What I am hearing from you is" "It sounds like _____ was very upsetting for you."

One of the most destructive kinds of communication results in blaming and accusing other people. This kind of message is known as a "you message." "You messages" are common in all types of relationships, but are probably used most often in families. "You messages" are accusing and blaming and convey criticism of the person receiving the message. It suggests they are at fault. The person receiving a "you message" feels unworthy and judged by the other. In an "I message," people simply tell how a situation makes them feel. They tell how the other person's actions seem to them. The "I message" is a statement of fact about the speaker and is not as threatening to others. It is much more harmful to suggest that there is something bad about others because they behaved that way. "I messages" place control for action on the other person. This helps avoid power conflicts.

People may choose to continue to do something that you don't like, that hurts you, or that you disapprove of. However, they have done it knowing exactly what you think about them. You trust them to handle the situation well and to respect your needs. You give them a chance to act constructively to build your relationship. By sending messages that tell what you feel, you build intimacy with others. This leads to the kind of strong relationships which give the most satisfaction.

It is best to focus on the consequences the behavior creates rather than on the behavior itself. An "I message" generally has three parts. It can be constructed by following these steps:

1. Describe the undesirable **behavior** (rather than blame). For example: *When you don't come home on time, it makes me feel...."*
2. State your **feelings** about the consequences the behavior produces for you. For example: *"I get scared...."*
3. State the **consequence**. For example: *"Because I think something might have happened to you"*

Brisbane (2004) indicates that techniques for good communication depend somewhat on the child's age. Some general suggestions for young children are:

1. **Get on the child's level.** Sit or kneel so that you are eye to eye, not towering over the child.
2. **Be simple.** Use words the child can understand. Long complicated sentences are confusing. If you must give a child a long set of instructions, break it into steps and give one direction at a time.
3. **Be clear.** Think in terms of the child's point of view. A four-year-old child told to "settle down" will have little idea of what you mean.
4. **Be timely.** Young children shouldn't be expected to remember instructions given to them far in advance. Give directions at the time you want them carried out.
5. **Use action words.** Put them near the beginning of the sentence. "Please pick up your toys" is much easier to understand than a statement like "I need to get this room cleaned up, so wouldn't you like to help me?"
6. **Be positive.** Hearing a constant series of "don'ts" and other negative messages is discouraging. Instead of "How many times do I have to tell you not to slam the door!" try saying, "Please shut the door quietly."

As children get older, they often resist dialogue with their parents. They resent being preached to, talked at, and criticized. They feel that parents talk too much. Parents in turn become frustrated, realizing that everyday language is not adequate for communicating meaningfully with their children. One of the most important things to remember with school age children is to precede statements of advice or instruction with statements of understanding.

Communication is often difficult to achieve during adolescence. It is difficult for children and parents largely because the adolescent becomes increasingly independent of his or her parents. Parents should create an atmosphere in which teenagers feel comfortable about discussing their true feelings and in which parents feel secure about telling the teenager their own feelings as well. Some suggestions for communicating with adolescents:

- Discuss rather than lecture.
- Respect the teenager's privacy.
- Use language and behavior appropriate for an adult.

Communication does not stop when grown children move out of the family home. Parents do not stop caring, being concerned, worrying, and thinking about their children. The quality of communication between parents and their grown children depends on the patterns that have been established over the years.

TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Think about your own problems with communication and your efforts to improve communication with others in your family, in close friendships, and in relationships at work. How did you do it? What assistance did you have that might be useful?
2. Reflect on the relationships your students are attempting to develop with others. How could

a better understanding of how we communicate improve those relationships at home, school, work, and with friends?

Note: TM in the activities refers to transparency master and SM refers to student master.

DIRECTED ACTIVITIES:

Supporting Concept A: Importance of Communication

1. **“Communication: What is it?”:** Have students write down a definition of communication and have them discuss in small groups what is involved when communication takes place. Share the comments from the small groups with the entire class and develop a broad definition of communication, trying to incorporate all the components they have identified (listening, talking, hearing, seeing, body language, facial expression, voice tone, etc.).

Have students analyze the following analogy about communication from Virginia Satir:
“Communication is to relationships what breathing is to maintaining life.”

- What does she mean?
- How do we achieve this? Within this context, is it easier to understand why there is so much pain in human relationships?
- In what ways has communication changed in our relationships due to technology?
- What types of communication problems may technology contribute to relationships?

Have students develop their own analogy about communication. Have them write down or illustrate it in some way and share with the class. Next ask them to think about a relationship that is important to them and then describe how they could develop an ideal communication pattern with this individual or these individuals.

(Desired Results, Awareness of Context)

2. **“Power in Communication”:** Using selections from novels the students are presently reading in their literature classes, have them analyze the communication patterns depicted and suggest ways to improve those patterns. Some suggested novels: Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*--incidents with Calpurnia and the children, Jem and Scout; Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*—Chapter 1; and Anne Tyler’s *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*--the incidents on pages 34 to 38. These situations all relate to parent-child or caregiver-child communication in which power plays a part. Read one of these excerpts out loud to the class.

- How did the parent (or caregiver) make the children feel?
- What do you think they would have liked to say to their parent (or caregiver)?
- Why do you think the children allowed themselves to be treated this way?
- Why didn’t they speak up to their parent (or caregiver)?

(Awareness of Context)

Discuss the role of power in communication patterns. Have students make a list of people or positions that are dominant in our society and how these became dominant. Do the same for subordinate roles. Discuss how people can change roles. Think about different cultures and ethnic backgrounds as you are generating the list.

- In the previous selection, who is dominant?
- Who is temporarily subordinate?
- Who is permanently subordinate?

- What will change these rules?
- How might communication be improved?
- What suggestions would you have which would help improve the communication of the characters?

(Awareness of Context, Alternative Approaches)

Ask the students to reflect on their own lives and discuss how power in their relationships affects communication patterns (in the family, in the classroom, in peer relationships, in opposite sex relationships, on the job, etc.).

- In which situations do they feel less important?
- How does that affect the communication patterns and the self-esteem of the individuals involved?
- In which situation do they feel more dominant?
- Where do children pick up messages about not sharing power?
- What are the role models they see in the family and in society in general? Think of some examples on television and the messages they convey to children on a daily basis.

(Desired Results, Awareness of Context)

Students could be asked to role play these different situations to demonstrate how interactions change when they are in different situations or in different positions of power or dominance.

(Alternative Approaches, Awareness of Context, Desired Results)

They could also reflect on their interactions with children and how they can help children have some power in their lives. One way to do this and also help children develop autonomy is to give the children a choice in decisions that have to be made in their lives. It might seem inconsequential to ask a child whether he wants to wear his blue pants or his red pants, whether he wants a half glass of milk or a whole glass, his toast light or dark. However, to a child, each small choice represents one more opportunity to exert some control over his own life. Ask the students for examples.

(Alternative approaches, Desired Results).

Supporting Concept B: Constructive Communication

3. **“Identifying Feelings”**: Reproduce the student resource, “Identifying Children’s Feelings,” (SM-1) for each student. Use this exercise to help students discuss children’s feelings in some typical situations. There are no incorrect answers. Since people have trouble giving labels to their feelings, it might be helpful for the teacher to generate a list of feelings with the students prior to conducting this activity, using SM-2, “Feeling Words.” Students may want to work in groups of two to discuss and share personal experiences that may help them better understand what a child might be feeling in each situation.

Examples of feelings the students might suggest when working on the worksheet are:

1. Glad, happy, relieved
2. Proud, confident, pleased
3. Afraid, fearful, nervous, apprehensive
4. Bored, restless, stumped
5. Inadequate, discouraged, envious
6. Defeated, discouraged, overwhelmed
7. Left behind, abandoned, lonely, jealous
8. Discriminated against, competent, confident
9. Guilty, regretful, sorry, repentant

10. Resentful, defiant, threatened
(*Awareness of Context*)

Now that students are able to identify feelings and understand how they relate to how a child acts and what he says, it is important to understand how to respond as the adult. Put up a transparency of "Teacher's Behavior Continuum" (TM-1). Go over the continuum with the students and then have them use the continuum to discuss the following scenarios.

- a. *Sara and Tommy are riding the tricycles outside on the sidewalk. Julie comes over and asks if she can have a turn. Sara says, "NO!!!" Tommy and Sara laugh and Julie runs over to you crying.*
 - b. *Several children have just built a boat in the block area. Nadia and Sergio spot the wooden paddle that was put in the block area that morning. They begin to argue over who will use it, and as their dispute begins to escalate into yelling, crying, and hitting, the high school buddy comes to assist.*
 - c. *Chris is sitting next to the teacher at large group. Out of nowhere, Rashell appears, squirms his body between Chris and the teacher, pushing and jostling everyone. "Hey!" Chris shouts, "I was here first!" With that he slaps Rashell. Rashell slaps Chris back and says, "There, now you know how that feels!"*
4. **"Listening":** Using the cartoon, "Please Listen to Me" (TM-2), have students discuss their own experiences of being ignored by adults as young children and their feelings related to that.
- Where and when did it occur? (Help them identify some situations where this might have occurred, e.g., in large family gatherings, going shopping with their parents as young children, going to the doctor or dentist, etc.)
 - What were the circumstances?

Write on the whiteboard or overhead projector the statement, "*Children are to be seen and not heard.*"

- Where do they think this came from and what was the purpose?
- Did they ever find themselves ignoring children in social settings or other situations?
- Why do they do it?
- What is the message children get when they are not listened to by adults?
- What are some ways children may respond to being ignored?
- Do different cultures have different norms for listening to or ignoring children?
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action*)

Reproduce "Techniques for Improving Listening Skills," (SM-2) for students. Using these ten strategies, provide students with a scenario, and have them practice their listening skills. Engage students in a discussion about how they feel when something they have to say is being interrupted by someone's cell phone or electronic device. Have students come up with a list of "Do's and Don'ts for the Thoughtful Use of Technology."

Support Concept C: Non-Verbal Communication

5. **"Non-Verbal Messages":** In order to help students identify some of the messages people give in non-verbal communication, try these exercises:

- a) Divide the class into pairs and have one person stand and the other person sit on the floor in front of him or her. Ask them to carry on a discussion that might be typical of a parent-child interaction. The person standing typifies the parents. Stop after two minutes and have them discuss how it feels to talk in this position.
- b) Have the two people attempt to make hand contact. The one on the floor obviously has to hold his hand and arm up. The one standing has his arm down. Because the adult enjoys a more comfortable position with his arm down, he might find it difficult to realize the discomfort he is inflicting on the child. The child might struggle to get away, and the adult could become irritated at this "negative" behavior when all the child wants is to get comfortable.
- c) Have the "parent" and "child" get into the standing and sitting position again and look at each other for 30 seconds. Then break your eye contact and notice how quickly this change in position will give your neck, eyes, shoulders, and back some relief.

Imagine how easy it would be for an adult to interpret this action on the part of a child as disrespectful. On the other hand, the child trying to contact his parent could interpret his glancing away as interference or rejection. It would be natural for the child to tug at his parent for attention. This could annoy the parent to the extent that he would want to punish the child.

- What if the parent responds to the tugging by patting the child on the head?
- Would this be interpreted by the child as comforting?

Demonstrate a variety of different poses, gestures, stances, etc. that people use (such as hands on hips, arms folded across body, different facial expressions).

- What effects do these messages have on the person who receives them?
- Do other people always receive the non-verbal messages in the way the sender intended? If not, what is the effect or consequence of this?

Discuss body language parents often use with children to get a non-verbal message across. If students are working with children, have them do an observation on the body language people use with children. Why is it used? Also, have them observe the body language of the children with whom they are working. Since children frequently do not have the verbal ability to express their needs and wants, they use a great deal of body language. Students could do an observation on a child they are working with (at school, at home, as a babysitter, etc.) to help them better understand the way children communicate.
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action*)

Supporting Concept D: Open Communication

6. **"Open Versus Closed Communication"**: Select a current communication video; for example [Level With Me: Honest Communication](#) and show segments of the video illustrating each of the communication styles that can, when used consistently, thwart open and honest communication.

Review the six styles. Divide the class into small groups and assign students to write a role-play illustrating each style and prepare to present it to the class. When presented, class members will guess which style each role-play is illustrating. Have the class discuss why they selected the style they did. An alternative would be for the teacher to prepare the role-plays for each group to present to the class and follow the same process.

Supporting Concept E: Communication

7. **“Active or Reflective Listening”**: Using TM-3, discuss and illustrate active listening to the students. Once the class understands the steps divide them into pairs. Have students pick a person A and a person B. Explain that the students are going to tell each other about what they did this morning. Give the students one minute to do this. Have person A start first. When the one minute is over Person B will follow through with step four of the active listening approach. They will then switch roles.
(Alternative Approaches, Desired Results)
8. **“Paraphrases, Perception Checks, Turn-Offs”**: Words alone are often unclear. For this reason, it is important for people to clarify and qualify what they say. Likewise, it is important that the sender let the receiver know what is going on inside him or her. If verbal communication is to be reasonably clear, both the sender of a message and the receiver have the responsibility to make it so. Discuss:
- How many times do you have trouble getting your point across?
 - How often does your message turn out exactly the opposite of what you intended?
 - Can you think of an instance when someone misunderstood the “feelings” you were trying to get across?
 - How do you feel when people turn you off or tune you out?

Use “Paraphrases, Perception Checks, Turn-Offs” (SM-3) to help students practice their communication with others.
(Alternative Approaches, Desired Results)

9. **“I Messages”**: Discuss what happens to communication when people use blaming statements.
- How do you feel when someone blames you for something?
 - Why do people blame others?
 - Is it a habit?
 - Do we do it so we don’t have to accept responsibility?

On the board or on an overhead projector share the formula, just like in math, for constructing an “I message.”

1. When you(state the behavior)
2. I feel.....(state the feeling)
3. Because.....(state the consequence)

This communications formula allows the sender to share his or her feelings. Discuss why people might find communicating using a formula difficult to do. Reproduce SM-4 for students. Divide the class into small groups and have them prepare to demonstrate to the class “I messages” for each of the role plays.

10. **“Age-Related Communication”**: Parents need to adapt communication skills to fit the different age levels of their children. Ask students to think of several family situations which might occur at any age level—preschool through the teenage years, (e.g. the child’s room is messy, assigned chores have not been done, it’s time to turn off the television) List these on the board. Divide the class into three groups, one for each of the following age levels:

1. Preschool
2. School age
3. Teenage

Within each group, ask pairs of students to develop a skit depicting a situation. Taking on the role of either parent or child, have students present their skits to the entire class.

- What communication techniques were used by the groups? (Reflective listening? Using "I message," etc.?)
- How successful was the "parent" in gaining the "child's" cooperation in each situation?
- How was each technique adapted for the different age levels?
- How is communication different if the parent is single? A father? A mother? A step-parent?
- Why are there differences?

(Awareness of Context, Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Action, Desired Results)

- 11. "Between Generations":** In addition to communication between parents and children at home, parents face communication challenges with their own parents.

Ask students to watch (or pre-record on video tape) a television show which depict grown children and/or grandparents as members of the cast.

- What communication skills are being used by the grown children?
- What communication skills are being used by the parents and the grandparents?
- Can you identify any non-verbal messages? Active listening? "I messages?" Turn-off phrases?
- Would you describe the communication patterns as open or closed? Why?
- What suggestions could you make which would result in better communication between family members?

(Alternative Approaches, Desired Results)

- 12. "Action Plan":** Have students make their own personal plan for improving their communication skills. This should include use of the following:

- a. Active listening
- b. Paraphrasing
- c. I messages
- d. Responding to non-verbal messages

Ask students to keep a weekly record of their attempts to use each of the above techniques. A suggested format follows:

- Describe the situation and people involved.
- State which techniques were tried.
- Describe how successful/unsuccessful the attempt was.

At the end of the week, assess progress:

- How many times did I remember to use one of the above techniques?
- How many times was I successful?
- How many times was I unsuccessful?
- What kind of responses did I receive from the persons I was communicating with?

- What do I need to focus on next week?
(*Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Action, Desired Results*)

RESOURCES:

Brisbane, H. E. (2004). *The Developing Child: Understanding Children and Parent*. Mission Hills, CA: Glencoe.

Curran, D. (1983). *Traits of a Healthy Family*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc.

Satir, V. (1976). *Making Contact*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

Satir, V. (1988) *The New Peoplemaking*. Mountain View, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc.

IDENTIFYING CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

Read each of the typical messages children send (first column) and write the feelings you think the child might have in the second column. There are no incorrect answers, so think about your own experiences when you were a child and try to remember how you might have felt in this type of situation.

Child Says:
Child is Feeling:

Example:

"I don't know what is wrong.
I can't figure it out.
Maybe I should just quit trying."

Stumped
Discouraged
Tempted to give up

1. "Oh boy, only ten more days until school is out!"
2. "Look, Daddy, I made an airplane with my new tools!"
3. "Will you hold my hand when we go into the nursery school?"
4. "I'm not having any fun. I can't think of anything to do."
5. "I'll never be good like Jim. I practice and practice and he is still better than me."
6. "My new teacher gives us too much homework. I can never get it all done. What will I do?"
7. "All the other kids went to the beach. I don't have anyone to be with."
8. "Jim's parent let him ride his bike to school, but I'm a better rider than Jim."
9. "I shouldn't have been so mean to little Jimmy. I guess I was bad."
10. "I want to wear my hair long. It's my hair, isn't it?"

FEELING WORDS

Upset Feelings:

Angry

Guilty

Anxious

Hurt

Bored

Miserable

Disappointed

Put Down

Embarrassed

Sad

Frightened

Unloved

Happy Feelings:

Accepted

Good

Capable

Happy

Confident

Proud

Excited

Loved

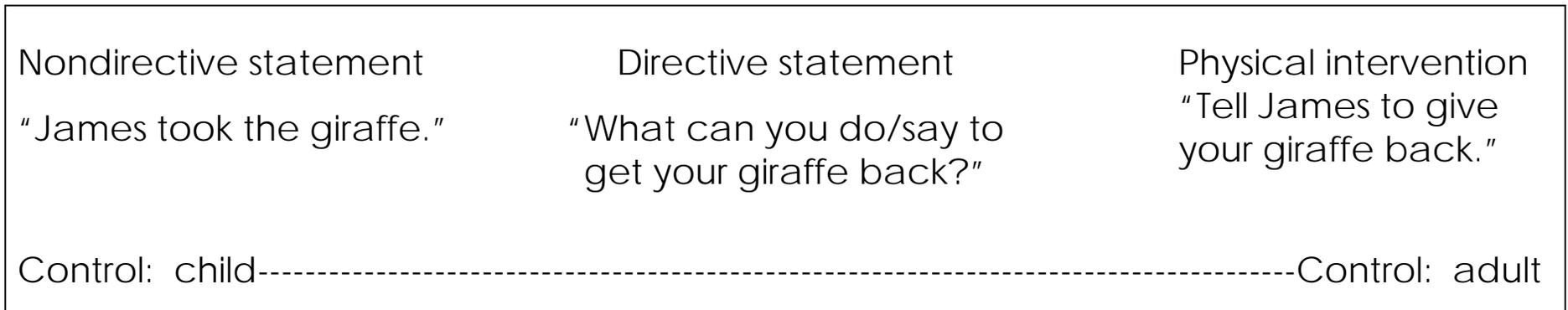
Glad

Satisfied

Teacher’s Behavior Continuum (TBC)

TBC – Strategies to try in sequence when interacting with children.

Left side – least amount of intervention



Right side—the greatest amount of intervention

If the situation involves a dispute between two children deal with the “victim” (if there is one) first.

Remember that the goal is to give children the language tools to solve their own problems.

Physical intervention of the adult comes only after the child is unable to solve the situation on his/her own.

PLEASE LISTEN TO ME



TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS

Listening for Mastery: The art of listening is a crucial parenting skill that can almost always be improved upon. It requires lots practice, and can improve the quality of the parent-child relationship significantly when done well. (Macomber, 2003)

1. **Stop talking:** This is an obvious one, but often we talk over someone else in a conversation, especially children. We show caring for the concerns of children by listening to them without talking over them.
2. **Put all your energy into listening.** Turn off electronic devices like cell phones and iPods. When a child's conversation is interrupted by such technological devices, trust and self esteem are compromised. Although it's difficult for some, with practice, this can become effortless.
3. **Notice your own filters when listening.** We're all human and we allow some voices and sounds to be filtered out due to our concerns, past experiences, commitments we may be thinking of, perspectives, and moods. In addition, we all have "blind spots" where we simply tune issues out. Think of which of the above affect your listening skills.
4. **Don't argue, mentally, when a child is speaking.** Don't think about whether or not you agree or disagree with what is being said; simply let the speaker have his say.
5. **Inhibit your impulse to immediately answer questions.** Most of us want to be helpful. Many of us go overboard trying to fix what appears to be broken. A mother might ask, "When will you be home?" The answer, "11:00," misses Mom's concern for safety or her own issues. The quick answer to the question fails to reveal the concern. Asking Mom, "Why do you ask?" allows her to share her underlying concerns.
6. **Adjust to the situation.** Situations are almost never exactly what we perceive them to be. Suspending our going-in presumption of the situation allows us to newly perceive it. Listen with attention and intention.
7. **When in doubt about whether to listen or speak, keep listening.** Allow a child to completely finish a thought before jumping in with ideas, advice, or suggestions. Interrupted thoughts and words may not resurface, and the issue can go unresolved.
8. **With children, don't assume that you have anything to do but to listen.** Listening is sometimes all that children want from us. They perceive it as a gift from us.
9. **Work at listening.** It's an acquired skill, just like golfing or public speaking. With practice, and by not allowing technological interruptions to occur, we can master the art of this key communication skill.
10. **Listen generously, with a willingness to be influenced.** Keep open the possibility that we may not understand completely what is being said and why. Ask clarifying questions, like, "Why are you saying that? What makes you feel that way right now?" Use follow-up questions to learn more about what the child is really saying.

Active Listening Approach

1. **STOP-** what you are doing.

2. **LOOK-** at the person who is talking.

3. **LISTEN** – to what the person is saying.

4. **RESPOND** – to the person by:
 - Paraphrasing what they say
 - Asking clarifying questions

PARAPHRASES, PERCEPTION CHECKS, TURN-OFFS

Three skills will help you improve your communication with everyone. They are:

1. Knowing how to do a **Paraphrase** – letting the other person know what meaning his statement made to you.
2. Knowing how to do a **Perception Check** – learning how to describe accurately what the other person feels.
3. Knowing what **Turn-Offs** and **Tune-Outs** are – learning not to use them and knowing how they hurt other people’s feelings as they hurt your own feelings.

Examples:

Statement or Message: *“This problem is much too hard for me.”*

Paraphrase: *“Do you mean you would like someone else to do it for you?”*

Perception Check: *“Do you feel like you aren’t smart enough to solve it?”*

Turn-Off: *“What else is new?”*

Statement or Message: (Student just before a new school year.) *“I had a terrible year last year.”*

Paraphrase: *“Do you mean that your classes were too hard?”*

Perception Check: *“Do you feel like this coming year will be better?”*

Turn-Off: *“Who didn’t?”*

Assignment:

Following are several statements – for each statement write a paraphrase, a perception check, and a turn-off. Turn-offs and Tune-outs are the most fun of all to write – we use them every day, like “So what?,” “You don’t say,” and “Big deal!” Do we really need to use them?

Statement or Message: (Child to father) *“I don’t ever get what I want.”*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *“I don’t like my lunch today.”*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

SM-3 (Continued)

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *"I don't think today will be very good."*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *(Mother to small child) "That's an interesting drawing."*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *"I want to talk to you seriously."*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *"You're mean and selfish. I hate you."*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

Statement or Message: *(Child to mother) "John's mom lets him."*

Paraphrase:

Perception Check:

Turn-Off:

"I MESSAGES" – ROLE PLAYS

"I messages" tell how a situation makes you feel. "I messages" are statements about how other people's actions seem to you.

A. Imagine that you have received the following messages. Role-play an "I message" response to each situation. You will need to make up a specific reason for your response. Present to the class and have the class evaluate the role-play to be sure it meets the requirements of an "I message."

1. One of your teachers says, "Your work in my class has really gone downhill that last month or so. What seems to be the problem?"
2. Your friend says, "You haven't seemed very friendly lately. What's up?"
3. One of your parents says to you, "If you're going to live here, you've got to do your chores. You haven't swept the floor in over a week now."
4. Your mother says, "If you can't get in by 10:00 tonight, a school night, don't plan on going out at night for two weeks."
5. Your friend tells you she told a mutual friend a secret you had shared.

B. Imagine a situation that would bring the responses below. Role-play the situation but this time using an "I message" to share feelings about the situation. Present the role-play to the class as above.

1. "Not now. Can't you see I'm busy?"
2. "You'll just get in the way; maybe another time?"
3. "The answer is NO! Period! No more discussion."
4. "You have to clean up that mess before you can go anywhere."
5. "Where have you been?"