

# THE PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is probably the most important aspect in all human relationships. The ability to communicate in our relationships affects the quality and existence of our relationship. When communication skills are inadequate, the nature and existence of the relationship is in danger. Relationships are based upon the ability of people to interact appropriately. The most common interaction we have with other people is usually communication. However, all of our interactions communicate something to others. Communication is a two way process, involving a sender and a receiver. The information that is communicated is influenced by the perceptions of both the sender and the receiver of the information. Effective communication involves the ability to clearly express, interpret, and clarify the meanings of messages we send or receive. Effective communication is a skill that is learned. In order to learn to communicate effectively, we must know and understand how to do it and practice so that we can achieve it. Effective communication is vital in all of our relationships. It can also be the single most important skill used in parenting.

In looking at effective communication, it is important to know that we communicate in many different ways. We communicate in both direct and indirect ways. When we communicate directly, we send out a message straight to an intended receiver, or the message we send is stated clearly. We communicate indirectly by sending a message through someone else or to someone else other than the intended receiver of the message, or the message we intend to send is hidden somehow or somewhere in what we say. Usually, the more direct the communication is, the more effective it is. Most of us have played a game that emphasizes this point. A message is passed along in a whisper from one person to another person. The last person to get the message repeats it out loud.

The person who began the message tells what was said at the beginning and everyone laughs at how different it is at the end.

We also communicate verbally and nonverbally. Verbal communication is what is spoken. Nonverbal communication refers to any way that information is sent between people without speaking. Verbal communication is a two way process that involves talking and listening.

Both talking and listening require skill, concentration, and thought if they are to contribute to communication. Obviously, the speaker must know what they want to say and select the right words and right tone to accurately express that. They must also determine if the message they intended to send is what was received. To be a good listener, a person needs to do more than just hear what is said. They must also think about and interpret what was said. If either person is unsure of the message that was sent or received, they need to communicate that and attempt to clarify the meaning. Parents need to be good communicators. It is important for parents to be both good at expressing what they want to say and good at listening.

It is helpful for parents to know about the nonverbal ways in which we all communicate. Four of the main nonverbal ways to communicate include body posture, facial expression, voice tone, and body movements. Body posture is the position our body is in and what that means in communication. For example, leaning forward slightly shows interest, while turning our back on someone usually means we are not willing to listen or consider them. Crossed arms and legs may mean skepticism, doubt, distrust, or impatience.

Facial expressions also say a lot. Eye contact is looking someone in the eyes. Eye contact can express interest, care, concern, love, and even anger or threat if done with a strong stare. Dislike, distrust, insecurity or fear can be expressed by refusing to make eye contact. A frown, a smile, a scowl, and a laugh all send important messages.

Voice tone can add to or completely change the meaning of what is said. A voice can be stern and controlling or soft and pleasing. A

stronger or more intense tone can add emphasis to the meaning of words.

Tone can also be used to change the meaning of words or imply a different meaning than what the words convey. Tone is such an important part of communication that people can often listen to a conversation in a language they do not understand and know if the conversation is an angry or loving, or serious or light, just by the tone. To understand the difference tone has on the meaning of words try this exercise. Say the following sentence out loud and emphasize the first word of the sentence. Say it out loud again emphasizing the second word of the sentence. Repeat until each word has been emphasized in a separate sentence. Pay attention each time to how the meaning of the sentence, "COME OVER HERE AND SIT DOWN BESIDE ME", changes. Example: "COME over here and sit down beside me"; or, "Come OVER here and sit down beside me."

The next nonverbal method of communicating is body movement. Pacing back and forth can express worry, or impatience. Fidgeting, wringing hands, and rubbing the forehead all give important messages. Other common movements include tapping a foot or fingers, a deep breath, shaking the head, jumping around, and looking around the room.

It is important for parents to be aware of these nonverbal ways of communicating, both in their own behavior and their children's. These are all clues about what is being communicated. Clues can have different meanings in different situations or for different people. Sometimes, it is a good idea to check out these nonverbal clues and not just assume that the meaning of them is known.

Parents also need to know how to listen effectively. There are several things involved in effective listening. When listening, parents need to be supportive, set a good example, listen attentively, and repeat key ideas. To be a supportive listener, parents need to give their child the idea that what they have to say is important, it will be valued and that it is OK for them to talk. They need to let their children finish talking without interrupting or correcting

their speech, especially when they are sharing something important or difficult.

Don't overreact to what children say. Parents need to set a good example of listening for their children to model. If children are treated respectfully when they talk, they learn how to be respectful listeners when others talk. Listening attentively involves paying attention to what is being said, maintaining eye contact, and focusing on the speaker.

Repeating key ideas back to the speaker helps communication in many ways. It lets the speaker know that you are listening and paying attention. It lets them know what the listener is getting from the conversation. It creates an opportunity for the speaker to clarify what they are saying and to know if they are getting the intended message across.

Many obstacles get in the way of having a good conversation. Busy schedules every day often prevent parents and children from taking the time to communicate clearly about important things. It is important to make time for communication and to eliminate distractions such as the TV, phone, and other people's interruptions.

Communication is also affected by attitudes and expectations. Good communicators have a positive attitude about communicating. They have an attitude of openness. They are willing to make the effort to talk and listen. They are willing to hear and consider what others have to say. They also expect to have good results. Subtle attitudes and expectations can sway the effectiveness, and results of communication. Parents who can keep a positive open attitude set the foundation for effective communication. Parents who have positive and realistic expectations usually have better results, win cooperation, and feel better about communicating with their children.

Everything parents do and say to/for their children, communicates an attitude towards the child. Children need to have positive support from their parents. The most important message parents need to communicate to their children is that they are loved and cared enough about for the parents to get involved in their world. Children need to receive this message from their parents on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, many parents do not have good communication skills. Effective communication skills must be learned for the family to survive as a successful unit.

For parents, effective communication is vital to their ability to fulfill the role of parenting and developing a satisfying relationship with their children. Children need to learn to communicate effectively in order to thrive in their lives and feel comfortable in their relationships with others, especially their parents. Parents have a duty to learn to communicate well and to model that for their children.

Communicating well requires that we are aware of what we think, feel and want. Once we are aware of these things, we need some knowledge and techniques for expressing them and then lots of practice. It takes lots of practice to learn any new behavior. When we change a behavior from one thing to another, we need even more practice. We need to practice both stopping the old behavior and practicing the new one.

One of the most valuable and useful communication techniques is "I Messages". These are very effective ways to state our feelings, thoughts, perceptions and what we want. "I Messages" help us to keep our focus on our own reactions to things, and our wishes about how they could be different in a positive manner and without sounding blaming or controlling. They help us to express our feelings without getting caught in them and dumping them on others. Making use of, "I Messages" is a very responsible way to communicate with others. Below are some examples of statements and how they are rephrased using "I" statements:

<u>Negative Statement</u>	<u>I Message</u>
"Go away and leave me alone, you always pester me."	"I'm feeling tired and I need to rest ...".
"Don't bother me, you make me so mad."	"I'm feeling irritated and I'd like to be alone."
"You're always babbling on the phone and never thinking about any one else...you are"	"I have an important call to make, please finish your call so"



In dealing with young children, the selection of words is important. Young children often do not understand that one word can have several meanings or what those meanings are. For example, the word light, has several very different meanings. Light can mean illumination such as from a candle or light bulb. It can mean little weight, such light as a feather. It can also mean insight, such as, "I finally see a light of hope".

Be aware that children can become thoroughly confused by some of these types of words. Watch their facial expressions to see if they seem to understand what you are saying. Use words that you believe the child understands. If you believe that the child does not really understand the meaning, check it out with them by asking them if they understand.

A very accurate and helpful way to check out the meaning in a conversation is reflection. In communication, reflection is repeating back the meaning of a statement using different words. This can be done in several ways. Parents can ask a child to repeat back, in their own words, what they heard or understood. Parents then hear the child's version and can clarify the meaning if necessary. It does not work to say, "Do you understand what I mean?" The child may say yes, thinking they do understand what the parent means but not really understanding. If there is a misunderstanding, it is best to rephrase what was said. Rephrasing is saying it differently. If what was said wasn't clearly understood the first time, it usually won't be understood the second time either unless it is said differently. The idea is, if what you are doing isn't working, try doing something a little different.

When communicating verbally, the nonverbal messages should match the intended meaning. Say what you mean not only with your words, but also with your tone, body language, facial expression, and movement. When words say one thing and nonverbal messages say something different, children receive mixed messages. Mixed messages lead to confusion, and usually the child does not change their behavior. An example: A toddler has been repeatedly taking all of her clothes off and running out the door to play. If the parents laugh and giggle

while trying to seriously tell the child that she must keep her clothes on, the child gets mixed messages. One says, "Keep your clothes on." The other says, "This is funny and it is cute when you behave this way, and I enjoy what you are doing." The child will probably continue to take her clothes off and run outside to play. Parents need to be careful to accurately express what they intend. They also can use this same information in observing their children's communication.

If we recognize mixed messages from our children's communication we may be aware that we need to check out what is really being said.

One of the most important aspects in communicating with our children is respect. Children deserve to be spoken to and treated with respect. Children are often treated with disrespect by being called names. Name calling breaks down communication and is very hurtful to children. When correcting behavior, the focus should be on the behavior not the child. The child's behavior is bad, not the child.

One of the most common communication mistakes parents make when they are upset is lecturing. Lecturing does not work, and most parents actually know that, even though they keep right on doing it. One problem with lecturing is that it focuses on the problem rather than the solution. Another problem is that children quit listening. They tune their parents or any one else out when they hear the same harping, nagging thing over and over. Since it doesn't work and children don't even listen, it becomes a frustrating and an energy draining waste of time. Parents often fall into the trap of lecturing or arguing because they are frustrated and do not know what else to do. In a later study guide, workable solutions to managing behavior and alternatives to lecturing will be explored.



10. Body movements are important parts of \_\_\_\_\_:
- a) direct communication
  - b) verbal communication
  - c) nonverbal communication
  - d) voice tone
11. Parents need to \_\_\_\_\_ nonverbal ways of communicating between both themselves and their children.
- a) change
  - b) be aware of
  - c) ignore
  - d) never use
12. Nonverbal ways of communicating \_\_\_\_\_ about what is being communicated.
- a) are not important
  - b) support
  - c) are clues about
  - d) say nothing
13. When listening to children, parents need to be supportive, set a good example, listen attentively and:
- a) correct
  - b) interrupt
  - c) repeat key ideas
  - d) move around
14. If children are \_\_\_\_\_ they learn how to be respectful listeners when others talk.
- a) treated respectfully when they talk
  - b) not expected to talk
  - c) corrected
  - d) told to be quiet
15. Paying attention to what is being said, maintaining eye contact, and focusing on the speaker, are necessary parts of:
- a) verbal communication
  - b) nonverbal communication
  - c) listening attentively
  - d) being a good speaker
16. Good communicators have \_\_\_\_\_ about communicating.
- a) no attitude
  - b) a positive attitude
  - c) no expectations
  - d) many obstacles
17. Everything parents do for and say to their children communicates:
- a) an attitude towards the child
  - b) how the parent feels about
  - c) the self-worth of the child
  - d) very little towards the child

18. The most important message parents need to communicate to their children is:
- a) that children have to be taught everything
  - b) mistakes are a part of learning
  - c) they are loved and cared about enough for parents to get involved in their world.
  - d) children should be seen and not heard
19. Communicating well requires that we are aware of:
- a) what we think
  - b) what we feel
  - c) what we like about others
  - d) what we think, feel, and want
20. Making use of, "I Messages" is a:
- a) serious way to communicate
  - b) responsible way to communicate
  - c) good thing to use when people are not angry
  - d) positive attitude
21. In using "I Messages", the emphasis is on:
- a) who is at fault for the problem
  - b) what mistake was made
  - c) what consequence should be set
  - d) the solution rather than the problem
22. The parent's job is not to control their children's behavior:
- a) but rather to help children to manage their own behavior
  - b) but rather to force them to think appropriately
  - c) because children control their own behavior
  - d) but to instill correct thoughts and feelings in their children
23. The words can and could, tend to:
- a) ask if someone is willing to do something
  - b) tell someone to do something
  - c) are good ways to ask for help
  - d) ask if someone has the ability to do something
24. The words "will" and "would" imply that there is a choice involved and tend to:
- a) ask if someone is willing to do something
  - b) tell someone to do something
  - c) have nothing to do with how to ask for things
  - d) ask if someone has the ability to do something
25. \_\_\_\_\_ convey respect which is a key part of communication and good parent child relationships
- a) asking
  - b) telling
  - c) verbal manners
  - d) guidelines

26. In communication, \_\_\_\_\_ is repeating back the meaning of a statement using different words.
- a) rephrasing
  - b) reflection
  - c) asking
  - d) expressing
27. When communicating verbally, the nonverbal message should:
- a) be seriously clear
  - b) be the opposite of the verbal message
  - c) not be used at all
  - d) match the intended meaning
28. When words say one thing, and nonverbal messages say something different, children:
- a) don't understand
  - b) get mixed messages
  - c) don't have to behave
  - d) don't listen
29. When correcting behavior, the focus should be on:
- a) making the child feel ashamed of their behavior
  - b) the child not the behavior
  - c) the behavior, not the child
  - d) embarrassing the child into behaving properly
30. Which of the following is not a problem with parents lecturing children?
- a) only focuses on the solution
  - b) it focuses on the problem rather than the solution
  - c) parents get frustrated
  - d) children stop listening