

Parent/Carer communication Toolkit

A resource for parents & carers to help support their child or young person to communicate better.

STEP (Swindon)

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About this toolkit

Communication

There are many ways that we communicate with each other, some more effective than others and at times we struggle to communicate at all. Young people often don't realise that communication is of such importance.

Children are often unaware of the variety of ways they can communicate and some will avoid communicating at all. At times children can find themselves in trouble at school or in other settings due to not knowing how to communicate effectively.

Similarly a lack of effective use of communication can have an adverse effect on relationships. Those relationships could be at home, school, with friends, in the community ,etc.

Throughout this toolkit we will look at the different types of communication, how effective some of these types of communication are. The struggles with ineffective communication and how to encourage and help your child with communication.

*The ability to listen
is as important as
the ability to speak.*

If your child is struggling with communication, there are things that parents and carers can do to help. STEP have put together this toolkit to help you understand a little more about communication and how you can support your child to use communication effectively.

Communication

Types of communication

Verbal communication:

Verbal communication can also be called as Oral communication. In very simple terms, any communication that happens orally between people is known as verbal communication. The objective of such communications is to ensure that people understand whatever you want to convey. Because of its very nature, verbal communications is quick and precise than other form of communication such as email.

Non verbal/ interpersonal communication:

Is the use of body language, gestures and facial expressions to convey information to others. It can be used both intentionally and unintentionally. For example, you might smile unintentionally when you hear a pleasing or enjoyable idea or piece of information. Nonverbal communication is helpful when trying to understand others' thoughts and feelings.

If they are displaying "closed" body language, such as crossed arms or hunched shoulders, they might be feeling anxious, angry or nervous. If they are displaying "open" body language with both feet on the floor and arms by their side or on the table, they are likely feeling positive and open to information.

Written Communication:

Written communication is the act of writing, typing or printing symbols like letters and numbers to convey information. It is helpful because it provides a record of information for reference. Writing is commonly used to share information through books, pamphlets, blogs, letters, memos and more. Emails and chats are a common form of written communication in the workplace. Written communication can also be effective if your child is unable to verbalise their thoughts and feelings., they will more than likely communicate a lot through text or apps etc.

Visual communication:

Visual communication is the act of using photographs, art, drawings, sketches, charts and graphs to convey information. Visuals are often used as an aid during presentations to provide helpful context alongside written and/or verbal communication. Because people have different learning styles, visual communication might be more helpful for some to consume ideas and information. Visual communication can also benefit the relationships between you and your child, there are lots of great ways you can communicate with each other through things like art, drawing and sharing of photographs.

Effective communication

It's often said that communication is the key to a healthy relationship. While it might sound like tired advice, it's a skill worth learning that will help us do better in all our relationships. As your child grows up, the way you communicate with them will need to change to reflect the new boundaries in your relationship created by their increasing independence. Discovering these new and different approaches to communicating effectively with one another will be a learning experience for you both. Effective communication with your teenager can help you both feel happier and more connected in your relationship, and more confident about having difficult conversations and resolving conflicts.

Effective communication can help if:

- you feel disconnected from your child
- you and your child don't speak
- you want to encourage your child to talk about what's going on for them
- you want to improve your relationship with your child.

What is effective communication?

You and your child are communicating effectively when:

- you both feel able to talk freely about your feelings, and you feel heard and understood.
- you talk about all the little stuff, and you feel comfortable talking about the tough stuff when you need to
- you have a close and easy way of sharing things, and you both know you won't be judged because you love and care about each other.

Communicating with teens can sometimes be difficult, in busy households, it's easy to overlook making time and space in your day to have a really good talk with your child and find out what's going on in their life.

When your child no longer depends on you as much as they once did, it's harder to know everything that's going on in their lives as the communication between parents and teenagers seems to decrease. They are more independent, and so you have to make time to check in with them to find out how they're doing.

Top Tip

Be available

Teens are more likely to talk during the casual, in-between times, such as driving to and from school and activities. Pay attention to when your teen is most prone to open up and be there

What can help in communicating effectively with your child?

Here are some tips that can help you have positive and constructive conversations with your child.

- Being genuinely interested and curious about what your child is telling you.
- Giving them your undivided attention.
- Show empathy – put yourself in your child's shoes.
- Avoid just giving them instructions or unwanted advice.
- Choose a quiet space without distractions for important conversations.

Barriers to effective communication

Try to minimise the following, which act as barriers to effective communication.

- Interruptions and distractions, which can make it seem like you're not interested in what your child is saying.
- Jumping in with advice, rather than listening to what your child has to say.
- Judging what your child has to say and not validating their point of view.
- Interrogating your child by firing questions at them.

Figuring out what's up with your teenager.

Ask them to answer this question: 'How are you on a scale of 1 to 10?' 1 is pretty awful and 10 is smiles all round

If they answered 7 or above, awesome! Ask them what's going well in their world and remind them of these things the next time their score is low.

If they answered 4 or lower, ask them what might need to happen to bring them up to a 7. Ask regularly, it will help you spot trends and act quickly.

Tips for creating a safe and trusting conversation:

Let them speak. Give them time and space to talk, and avoid interrupting them. Remove distractions. Put away your phone and give them your full attention. Acknowledge their feelings and respond with comments like 'That must have been hard' or 'Sounds like it was exciting' Give physical cues, nodding, making eye contact and facing the person you're talking with show that you're really listening. Plan for later, ask them if they'd like to chat about the issue again, and lock it in.

For some young children, trouble with conversation can be a matter of development, children develop at different rates, and some just need a little more time than others to gain the language and social skills needed to make conversation.

But what about Children who still don't have those skills long after their peers have developed them?

There are many reasons as to why some children may struggle to communicate more than others. Here are a few reasons why.

Struggling with social skills:

If you have strong social skills, you may not even realise you're using them when you make conversation, you just naturally understand how people feel about what you're saying by their body language and tone of voice. You can tell when it's time to stop talking, and when not to tell a joke and you recognize when the people you're talking with want to end the conversation.

You also know the unspoken social rules of talking with other people. You don't jump in and interrupt them, you don't ask inappropriate questions and you don't hog the conversation.

Most children forget those rules and miss social cues once in a while, but when kids have trouble with social skills, that can happen a lot. They don't have the tools they need to have successful conversations.

Difficulty with language skills:

When your child says something in conversation, does it tend to be logical and easy to follow? Or do you spend a lot of time saying, "What do you mean?" or "I don't understand."

Younger children sometimes use the wrong words or say things that don't make sense, they may feel so passionate about the topic that they talk faster than they can think.

But children who do that a lot may be struggling with spoken language, whether they're doing the talking or the listening. They may have trouble finding the words they want to use or using them in the right way they might also have a hard time processing what other people are saying.

Impulsivity:

People sometimes think that impulsivity is about physical action, but it can also impact how children interact with others and participate in conversation.

They might be so excited about the topic or an idea they want to share that they don't wait their turn to talk. or they say what pops into their mind without thinking about how others may react.

There are a few other reasons why children have difficulty with conversations. Anxiety is one, being slower at processing and responding to information is another.

No matter what's causing it, trouble making conversation can have a big impact on a child's self-esteem. It can also make it hard to fit in and make friends and it can make children targets for bullying.

Why teaching communication at a young age is important

- Teaching effective communication skills to children may help them to express themselves clearly and convey their feelings in a better manner.
- Communication skills can facilitate learning and meaningful exchange of information with others.
- Communicating well may boost your child's social IQ by helping them build sound relationships during interactions with other people.
- A child who can communicate verbally may be comfortable producing written communications as well, which is likely to help him or her perform better academically
- children with communication problems may develop behavioural disorders like depression, social withdrawal, low self-esteem.

If you have younger children, here are Some ways to help develop your child's communication skills:

Pointing Directions: Nonverbal communication activities for children can include this simple game. Ask your child to write down directions to their nearby favourite shop or park. Then embark on a journey along with your child following those written directions to reach the place. On the way, help them understand how can they make it better or things they may mention to communicate better.

Show and Tell: Show and tell activity can be a great verbal communication game for kids. Give your child a topic like their favourite fruit, a favourite book or a road trip with family. Have them exhibit an item related to the topic and ask them to speak five lines/sentences on it. This activity can assist in furthering your child's confidence and vocabulary

Picture Storytelling: Picture storytelling can be a very interesting activity as children love to tell stories. Provide your child with a set of pictures then ask them to arrange them in a logical sequence and spin a story from it. Alternatively, you can offer them just one picture and have them describe the things they perceive in the picture like the scenery, people, colours and other details.

Presentation: This exciting activity may not only promote your child's oral language skills but also aid them to become more comfortable with public speaking. You can propose various themes ranging from reading a favourite poem to expressing their views on current topics like saving water, recycling or the use of gadgets. Ask them to prepare a short presentation to present to yourself, a family gathering, etc.

Understanding an autistic person's communication

Communication happens when one person sends a message to another person. This can be verbally or non-verbally. Interaction happens when two people respond to one another - two-way communication.

Some autistic people experience difficulty with:

- interacting with others
- initiating interactions, responding to others, or using interaction to show people things or to be sociable
- understanding and relating to other people
- taking part in everyday family, school, work and social life.

Non-verbal communication

Some autistic children are delayed in their use of language, and some autistic adults don't use speech. In those cases, other methods of communication need to be established.

An autistic person may appear not to hear what you say to them, not respond to their name, or appear indifferent to any attempts you make to communicate.

They may use some of the following to communicate with you:

- gestures
- crying
- taking your hand to the object they want
- looking at the object they want
- reaching
- using pictures
- distressed behaviour
- echolalia (the repetition of other people's words).

Use the following link to access more information, advice and tips on communication

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication>

Resource Section

In this section you will find:

Useful Worksheets

Breathing Techniques

Mindfulness Activities

Online Support Links

Support Telephone Numbers

STYLES OF COMMUNICATION



There are four ways that we usually communicate our thoughts, feelings, and needs to others. These communication styles differ depending on the situation and the person that we are communicating with. Read the definitions below to learn more about the different styles of communication. Which style best describes you?

PASSIVE

Passive communication is when you do not share your feelings with others and you pretend as if everything is OK. For example, if a friend says something to offend you, rather than letting them know, you say nothing at all. You might even laugh along and say that it's not a big deal.

What's wrong with passive communication?

If you're a passive communicator, people might tend to "walk all over you" because they know that you won't say anything or stand up for yourself. Your thoughts and feelings also never get heard since you are not expressing them when they occur. Passive communicators tend to keep their feelings bottled up which can lead to moments of emotional outbursts.

AGGRESSIVE

Aggressive communication is when you express your feelings by trying to hurt others with your words or actions. Aggressive communicators stand up for themselves, but they respond in a way that is rude, disrespectful, or harmful.

What's wrong with aggressive communication?

Being an aggressive communicator can affect your relationships with others. People might not want to be around you because of your response when you become upset or offended. They might feel like they have to "walk on eggshells" when they are around you. Responding aggressively can also get you into trouble at home, school, or in the community.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE

Passive-aggressive communication is when you do not share your feelings directly with someone, but instead, you do or say certain things to get back at them or *show* them how you feel without telling them. For example, if someone says something to offend you, you might make a social media post about something related to the issue without ever saying their name.

What's wrong with passive-aggressive communication?

If you are a passive-aggressive communicator, people might have a hard time knowing how you are feeling. You are leaving it up to people to guess instead of just telling them directly. Because of this, it becomes hard to resolve conflict because your passive-aggressive behavior will more than likely anger the other person.

ASSERTIVE

Assertive communication is the best way to express your thoughts and feelings to others. When you are communicating assertively, you are standing up for yourself and sharing your feelings in a kind, firm, and respectful manner.

When we communicate assertively, the other person is more willing to hear what you have to say because you are responding in a way that is not offensive to them. You are also clearly explaining how you are feeling and asking what you need of them. Communicating assertively does not always guarantee that the other person will do what you ask or even listen, but it's the style that gives you the best chance for a positive response.

What changes do you need to make to be a more assertive communicator?

GOOD vs. POOR LISTENING

IDENTIFY WHICH ONES DESCRIBE GOOD OR POOR LISTENING SKILLS



GOOD LISTENING SKILLS ARE WHEN YOU MAKE THE OTHER PERSON FEEL LIKE YOU UNDERSTAND AND CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE SAYING.

POOR LISTENING SKILLS ARE WHEN THE OTHER PERSON FEELS LIKE YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY.

WRITE A "G" FOR THE GOOD LISTENING SKILLS AND A "P" FOR POOR LISTENING SKILLS!

- _____ Making good eye contact
- _____ Looking interested in the conversation
- _____ Interrupting as they are talking
- _____ Staying focused on the conversation
- _____ Being distracted by everything going on in the room
- _____ Making a comment that has nothing to do with the conversation
- _____ Smiling and nodding as they are speaking
- _____ Slouching in your chair
- _____ Remembering what they say and repeating some of it back to them
- _____ Yawning and telling them how bored you are
- _____ Encouraging them to keep talking
- _____ Ending the conversation quickly

DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE GOOD OR POOR LISTENING SKILLS?



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Assertive Communication

Assertive communication is when you are able to express your feelings in a kind, firm, and respectful way.



EXAMPLES

- A friend says something that hurts your feelings. You pull them aside and tell them how they made you feel and what you need them to do differently next time.
- When you are angry at someone, you tell them exactly how you are feeling in the moment.
- Someone asks you to do something that you don't feel comfortable doing, and you say, "No. I don't want to do that."
- You are working as part of a team. You have a great idea for the project and you are able to speak up and share it with others.
- Your little brother keeps bugging you while you're reading your book. You say, "I'm really starting to feel annoyed. Could you please stop doing that?"

WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION?

Assertive communication is the best way to communicate to let others know how you're feeling and what you need from them. It increases the chances that you are going to get your needs met.

Being assertive doesn't guarantee that the other person will respond how you'd like, but when you are assertive, they are more likely to listen to what you have to say and respond in a positive manner. This is because you are being kind and respectful as you are sharing your feelings.

One of the best ways to express your feelings to someone is to use an I-Feel Message.

I feel (how are you feeling?) when you (what did they do that made you feel this way?) because (why does it make you feel this way?). I would like it if you could please (what would you like them to do differently?). Thank you.

BEING ASSERTIVE











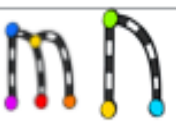









Place a ✓ next to the examples of assertive communication

Assertive communication means standing up for yourself and sharing how you feel in a respectful manner!



- _____ Cody asks, "Wyatt, can you please stop throwing the ball at me?"
- _____ Diane pushes Ryan because he called her a bad name.
- _____ Cheyenne says, "No. I don't like it when you do that."
- _____ Chris calls Bo a "chicken brain" because he's mad at him.
- _____ Ian doesn't say anything back to Hector when he makes fun of him.
- _____ Francis doesn't let Vivian play his game because he's mad at her.
- _____ Carol says, "I need you to stop calling me names behind my back."
- _____ Joann tells Brenda that she's the "worst friend in the world!"
- _____ Paul pulls Eva to the side and asks her to be nicer to him.
- _____ Sally is mad at Asher, so she counts to 10 before she speaks to him.
- _____ Cheryl says, "I'm tired of you picking on me. It hurts my feelings."

ABC Communication Calendar

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
 <p>Find an animal (real or stuffed). Can you find it in your AAC system? Find 1 word to describe it.</p>	 <p>Find a favorite book. Tell 1 thing that's in the book.</p>	 <p>Crazy Clothes - pick out a shirt & pants that don't match. Use your words to tell which ones you want.</p>	 <p>Dance: tell someone how to move! Find the describing words in your aac system.</p>	 <p>Emotions/ Feelings: Tell how you feel today. Find the words.</p>
 <p>Pick a game to play: tell when it's your turn.</p>	 <p>What makes you happy? Find the words in your AAC system.</p>	 <p>What kind of ice cream do you like? Find the flavor in your AAC system.</p>	 <p>Tell a joke. Don't know one? Say something kind to someone.</p>	 <p>Tell something you like. Where is it in your AAC system?</p>
 <p>Mine! Tell someone what is yours, what is theirs. Use "mine" and "yours."</p>	 <p>Orange day: How many things can you name that are orange?</p>	 <p>Have a picnic outside or in. What do you want to eat?</p>	 <p>Rainbow day: Wear as many colors as you can. Pick them with the color words in your AAC system.</p>	 <p>Act silly: What animal do you want to act like? What does it do?</p>
 <p>What's your favorite time of day? What do you like to do then?</p>	 <p>Find 3 things that are under something else. Tell someone what & where they are.</p>	 <p>Watch a video. Tell something about your favorite part.</p>	 <p>What is the weather like today?</p>	 <p>Yellow: How many things can you name that are yellow? How does yellow make you feel?</p>

How We Communicate

Use this worksheet to explore how you communicate with a member of your family.

Family Member: _____

Rate how well you and this person communicate (1 - 10)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why did you choose this number? _____

What usually leads to an argument with this person? _____

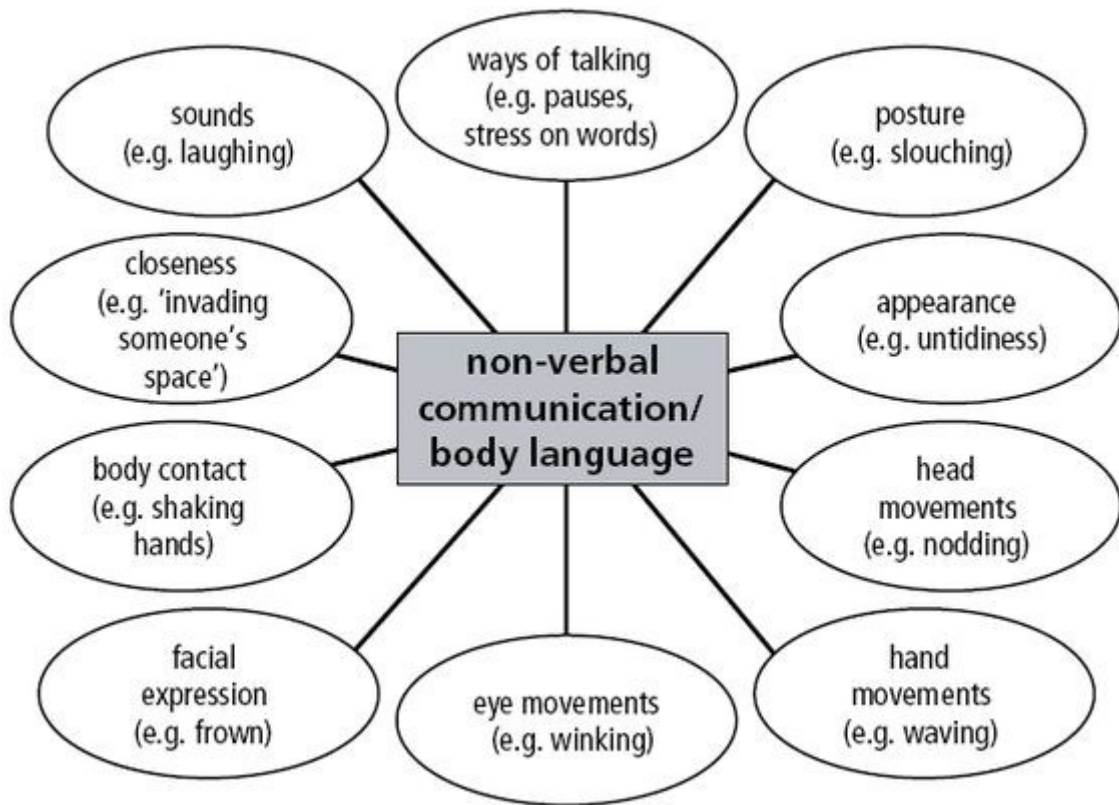
What is something this person does that makes it hard to communicate with them?

What do you wish they would do differently in how they communicate with you? _____

What can you say to get them to start communicating differently with you?

What do you think *you* need to do differently to improve communication?





Tips for Effective Communication

Use Active Listening

Demonstrate that you are listening by nodding, making eye contact and confirming what they have said, e.g. "I understand that you're frustrated and can see your point of view."

Empathise

Put yourself in the other person's position. Imagine how they feel and show that you respect their feelings and point of view.

Use "I" Statements

E.g. "I feel frustrated."
Rather than, "You make me frustrated."
"I" statements allow you to take responsibility for how you feel and what you want.



Be Humble

See yourself as you really are, with both strengths and weaknesses. Don't talk to people as if you think you're better than them.

Stay Aware

Be thoughtful of what you say and avoid offending people. Do not talk over people or dominate conversations.

Use Appropriate Language

Be aware of the company you are in and use language that is acceptable to those people.



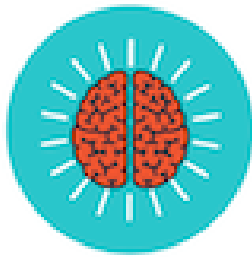
ATTENTIVE EYES



RESPECTFUL VOICE



LISTENING



OPEN MIND



KIND HEART



PATIENCE



EDUCATEEMPOWERKIDS.ORG

MAKE A "LOVE IS..." BOX



EVERYDAY TALKING



TELL STORIES FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD



6 MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR TEENAGER

USE DRIVING TIME FOR CONVERSATION



SHARE MUSIC



LUNCH DATES