
UNIT 3 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In course NES-102: Facilitating Growth and Development, Unit 3: Interpersonal Communication, we talked about effective, ineffective ways of communicating and attempted to develop the skills of effective communication in ourselves. Effective communication would be an efficient way to develop desired behaviour in children. In this Unit, we will examine the strategies/ techniques that are available to us so that we can help children become better communicators.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- locate the message underlying the verbal statements;
- help children understand their feelings and express these appropriately; and
- provide better 'models' of effective communication.

3.3 ACTIVE LISTENING AND 'I' MESSAGES

Let us look at a conversation between Prashant and his mother.

Prashant: That teacher is unfair. If Raju does not do his home work she does not scold him because he is her favourite. He will also get the highest marks in class this time."

Mother: You are angry about this and feel there is no point in studying hard."

What Prashant's mother did hear was listen-really listen-to the feeling beneath Prashant's comment and helped him identify these, (you may wish to revise, see Unit 3: Interpersonal Communication, Course NES-102: Facilitating Growth and Development on reflecting feelings).

In what way does such, (reflection of feeling) active listening help the child? What do you think would have happened if the mother had responded. "Don't worry. You just do your work, I am sure you will do well." Or, "I am sure you are only imagining things. She won't give him marks if he doesn't deserve."

Both these statements would have stopped further conversation. Prashant would have felt that his mother did not understand him. Perhaps he would even feel guilty about having such thoughts.

However, when mother listened and shared what she understood by doing so she was helping Prashant identify what he felt in-side. This response would also help him think about what he should do next.

Let us look at yet another situation. Sahil takes a long time to settle down in Ms. Prerana's Environmental Science Class and keeps fidgeting and looking out of the window in a distracted manner. How do you think Ms. Prerana should respond?

A) "Sit still if you don't pay attention, I will send you out of the class."

OR

B) "I get disturbed and find it difficult to explain when you move around so much."

Many of us, with the best intentions of teaching the child "correct behaviour" respond as in A. However, by doing or saying something similar we are accusing the child without knowing the complete situation (remember, what we studied about non-verbal behaviour and the different meanings that any one's behaviour could have depending on the context, (situation) perhaps Sahil needs to drink water or go to the bathroom. Also, the punishment may be too radical and hence not in keeping with our goals.

On the other hand, if we use response B, we are sending what is called an "I" message, i.e., a message that gives information about how the situation affects us; without blaming the child. It also provides the child a chance to explain why they are behaving in a particular way and to find a solution. This again raises his/her image/self-esteem and makes him/her feel capable. Can you remember situations when you may have said something like the following:

"You don't realize (understand) what all this is about". "Don't jump to conclusions."

"How can you just blame somebody without knowing their side?"

If we want children to understand, if we want them to consider a situation as a whole before drawing conclusions, if we want them to try and get all the information they need, we will have to show (demonstrate) our understanding as well as our ability to express our thoughts and feelings in a clear and balanced way. This understanding, this balance is exemplified in the mother's response to Prashant and also in response B of the teacher to Sahil.

Yet another way of encouraging children to communicate more effectively is to praise them; give them some kind of **reinforcement** either verbally or non-verbally for sending or receiving messages in an appropriate manner.

Let's consider the following situation:

Sarita and Reena share a desk, Sarita's books are taking up a lot of space and Teena is feeling uncomfortable. However, instead of pushing Sarita's books out of the way, she (Reena) looks at Sarita and says. "I need more space to write. Can you move our books a bit?" Teacher observes this interaction and encourages Reena by either smiling and nodding approval or verbally acknowledging the way the request was made, e.g., "Reena, you made that request very politely."

What we have to be careful about is the behaviour or communication that we reward, e.g., if Rahul is throwing a tantrum because he wants to bat first, you may think that it is not effective communication and want him to change. However, we often want to keep in mind while giving praise, or Do's and Don'ts.

DO

1. Be sincere. Don't say: "You've done a good job" if the child has made lots of mistakes; say instead of something like. "Your writing is very neat. Shall we go over it again and see if you need to work out again."

3. Write down five sentences that you would use to praise a child for his efforts in different situations like
- Completing homework on time
 - Sharing, helping a peer
 - Being polite in front of guests, etc.

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3.3.1 Children Imitate Adults

When we listen carefully and share our understanding of what we have heard or when we put forth our ideas, thoughts and feelings in clear, logical ways, we are using a very common yet influential strategy for teaching/ guiding children about how to communicate. This technique/ strategy is called "modelling". Whether or not we like it (whether or not we want them to), children learn from the examples we set for them through our own behaviour.

Children will imitate. They will pick up tips from the way we behave and communicate. We can use this to guide their learning. We can use this to guide their learning. We can help them become effective communicators by demonstrating in our own way of sending and receiving messages the way we would like them to communicate.

Let us, for a minute, list out in what ways we would like children to communicate in different situations. List out situations in which you would like children to communicate more effectively (with reference to different situations).

- Express ideas in an organised manner.
(i.e., tell a story in its proper sequence.)
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-
-
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Your list may have included a wide range of situations. Some may have had to do with the expressions of ideas (e.g., logical expression, elaboration of ideas, reporting with accuracy what they have seen or heard, the ability to ask relevant question, etc.). Other situations may have been more in the context of expression of feelings and emotions (e.g., expressing feelings in a balanced, tactful way, the ability to see things from another person's perspective), you may have other situations or listed some of these in different words. We shall make use of these for our discussion.

Now, to go back to the concept of 'modelling'. In order to help the children become better communicators, we shall have to demonstrate to them how ideas should be expressed. If we can present our ideas in an organised sequence with the appropriate detail (not too much as to become boring and not so little as to become unclear), then we are facilitating/ helping them to also express their ideas with clarity and precision. We can do this in the way we explain a lesson, in the way we tell them our plans for the day.

2. Praise children for the effort they make.
3. Give praise for their behaviour or accomplishments.
4. Give it in a few words instead of gushing, e.g., "I am happy you did that so well", rather than, "how wonderful, great what a terrific job." Give a lot of attention to such screaming behaviour because we want it to stop. But by giving it attention we actually reward such behaviour. (Children want attention from adults and hence attention from adults and hence attention can be used as a reinforcer or reward.)

So, if we do not want to encourage a tantrum as a means of communicating a want, we have to ignore it. On the other hand, we should give praise when the child makes a reasonable request, politely and clearly. Even in the giving of praise there are a number of things we have to consider if it is to be useful. Some of these are listed in these points.

5. Give it when children show originality.

DON'T

6. Don't over use praise. If repeated too often, it is not as effective. So, decide when to use it.
7. Don't confuse it with flattery, to manipulate the child.

DO

8. Give praise discretely and directly to the child.

Sometimes, we may find it difficult to find things to praise and may have to create situations where children will be able to communicate more effectively so that he/she can be reinforced for doing so.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the block.

1. Which of the following are examples of 'I' messages?
 - i) I find it difficult to carry on a conversation when the radio is on at full volume.
 - ii) I can't hear myself talk because all of you keep making a noise.
 - iii) I feel you shouldn't do it this way.
 - iv) I cannot work when things are not in place.
 - v) I am concerned that you may fall ill if you get wet in the rain.
 - a) (i), (ii) and (iii)
 - b) (i), (iii) and (iv)
 - c) (i), (iii) and (v)
 - d) (i), (iv) and (v)
2. Indicate whether the following statements are true or false (guidelines to be followed in giving praise).
 - i) We must praise a child for his/her inborn qualities that have nothing to do with their effort. (T/F)
 - ii) We should specify what behaviour of the child qualifies him/her for the praise rather than giving praise in general. (T/F)
 - iii) Praise is not useful unless given for a genuine reason. (T/F)

Which of the following statements do you think is an example of “good” organization of thoughts?

1. We have many things to do today. First, we will make a list of things that we need to take on the field trip. Then we will see which of those things we have in the classroom. Finally, we must make a list of things that each one of you will bring from home.
2. Let us talk about our field trip to the zoo next week. You must remember to bring your caps and water bottles because it will be hot. Tell your mothers to pick you up from school at 3:30 p.m. And don't forget that all of you must bring a bag in which you can put the flowers and leaves you collect. Actually, we could take one big bag and put everybody's collections in that.

As you may have realized, the first instance is more organised. Now, let us take a look at the following situations:

Rohit snatches a book from Shyam's table and shouts, “Give it to me, I want it first.”
Teacher-Response A: “You bad boy! Give it back at once.” Response B (handing the book back to Shyam “When you finish, will you please give it to Rohit?”

Which of these two responses do you think models more appropriate behaviour? The teacher shouting (as in Response A) does not show Rohit a more effective way of expressing his want.

However, in Response B, the teacher (through her behaviour) takes care of the need of both children as well as sets an example of the way in which a request can be made.

3.3.2 Whom will a Child Imitate?

We have said earlier in this section that children imitate adults. However, they also imitate other children or even a character they watch on television or read about in a book. (Refer Unit 4: Influence of Mass Media on Child Development, *Classroom Discussion*, NES-102: Facilitating Growth and Development)

This means that children are in some ways being selective about whom they imitate. Why do they not imitate everyone they see? How do they choose whom to imitate? If we understand some of these aspects of modelling, we will be able to make better use of modelling as a strategy.



“Do as I say” and not “as I do” is not an effective way of modifying/changing children's way of communication

Have you seen children imitate their teacher's mannerisms or make comments like "My teacher said so" or "When I grow up, I am going to be just like my mother" or "Sheela and I will eat together". In each of these situations, the child has in some way "identified".

Children are more likely to imitate or model themselves on a person who:

1. is similar to them in some respect, e.g., age, comes from the same family, sex, etc.
2. they respect, e.g., hero worshipping a film star/cricket player, etc.
3. receives a reward for behaving in a particular way.

3.3.3 Ways of Providing Appropriate Models

Sometimes, we may not always be around or even be right kind of model. These are the situations in which our knowledge of whom a child is likely to imitate becomes useful. Our aim can still be achieved if we can provide one of those models. On many occasions, we may already be doing this, having children eat in small groups with the result that a child who may be a fussy eater may finish everything very quickly in the company of friends. Similarly, a class has been given arithmetic problem to solve. Sheela is working at her sums quietly and steadily. Karuna, however, is busy doodling and drawing on her book. The teacher ignores Karuna but makes it a point to say to Sheela, loud enough so Karuna can hear. "I like the way you are working hard at your sums. Sheela's "good behaviour" was rewarded but it also served the purpose of demonstrating to Karuna about her behaviour and giving rewards or praising for the hard work in an appropriate manner serves as a model for another child.

Another example is seeing another child's request to read a particular book being agreed to, while another child who demands something by shouting and screaming is ignored. Similarly, showing the children a film TV serial in which children are shown engaging in exploration, are curious, ask a lot of thoughtful questions, and try to put their information together after some kind of analysis, etc.

Using such alternative sources of providing appropriate models is particularly useful. Another aspect of modelling relates to the way we give messages, directions, information. We need to give messages that are clear so that misunderstandings can be prevented. A precise, clear message is after all 'good' communication. Look at the following statements:

A. Parent : "Your room is in a real mess."

B. Parent : "I want you to pick up your toys and put away your books right now."

Ten minutes later, "You have done a good job of cleaning the room. Thank you." Which of these is an example of effective communication?

Response B is clear – the parents expectations are clearly stated so there is no cause for confusion about what and when. Some behaviour is expected. There is also praise for compliance. In this process, the adult (parent or teacher) has modelled for the child how expectations can be appropriately communicated.

There are, however, some additional things we should consider while sending our clear messages.

1. Obtain child's attention (before you give the message)
2. Use language that the child can understand
3. Use your non-verbal behaviour to emphasise your message (looking direct) at a child, giving a pat on the shoulder to focus his/her attention, etc.
4. Help him/her clarify messages he/she sends.

Children can be helped to clarify messages even through a game, e.g., "Tap water theme meet". Can be decoded to read, "Meet me at the water tap" which is a meaningful statement. Children can have a lot of fun "deciphering" and clarifying such jumbled up messages. In the process, their attention also focuses on the need to communicate clearly if a message is to be understood.

Activity 3.3.1 (continued)

4. Write appropriate answers with those given at the end of the block.

5. Which of the following statements/situations constitute appropriate modelling:

- (a) Look at Ramesh. He always stands first in the class.
- (b) Shilpa is having trouble reading the simple story book she has selected. Rad is a more fluent reader. Teacher's comment: "Shilpa and Rad, perhaps both of you can sit and read this story together."
- (c) Reading a story to the children about 8-year-old boys and girls and the way they took responsibility for keeping their class surroundings clean.

6. Which of the following messages would you say are clear and unambiguous?

- (a) There are 5 minutes to lunch time; all of you should put your books and pencil boxes into the bags.
- (b) Why cannot you write more neatly? Or, your hand-writing is very untidy.
- (c) Doing your addition sums will be easier if you use one square for writing one number.

3.4 QUESTIONING AND SEEKING INFORMATION

You need more information: How do you get it?

Quite often, being able to arrive at the 'correct' solution depends on our being able to ask the 'right' questions, e.g., if I want to know how does a toy with a spring action work, but ask "what is this called? Why is it called that? I am unlikely to get the information I want.

Thus, 'questioning' is important element of effective communication. We need to use this skill, with reference to (i) modelling effective questioning when we need information; (ii) encourage children to ask a range of relevant questions, and (iii) ask questions that promote analysis, and considered/reasoned thought which can then help children to express their ideas more logically; in an organised manner.

Let us take a look at the kind of questions that are often asked by children while just talking to them or even as a part of class activity. Which of these do you think will help a child to think analytically and then express those thoughts?

1. What are some 'domestic animals'?
2. In what way are they 'domesticated'?
3. Why do we call them 'domestic'?
4. When did India become independent?
5. What were some of the reasons for this struggle?
6. What is this object called?
7. How does it work?
8. For what can it be used?

9. For what else can it be used?
10. What other names can you give to it?
11. Do you agree with? Why? Or why not?

If we are rigid about wanting one predetermined right answer worded in a particular way, it is unlikely that we will encourage reasoning. Collecting additional information available to us, all these are needed if we are to be able to express our thoughts and ideas in an organised way.

Let us, for a minute, return to one of the questions in our list. "Why do we call some animals?" It is quite possible that in the effort to provide a comprehensive answer (that we want children to 'repeat' at appropriate times, we might give them a sentence about how dogs guard houses and buffaloes give milk, etc. However, the relationship/connection between these two, i.e., they are in some way a help in our day to day living maybe entirely missed unless our questions are oriented towards eliciting/getting from the child information about his/her experiences, his/her ideas, his/her reasons for thinking in a certain way. It would also help if the teachers were to summarise all the points at the end so that the child can look at the information as an organised whole.

In doing so, we can model how to get more relevant meaningful information and also help children organise and present their information.

A game that can be played involves giving the child some statement, and asking the child to think of the numerous questions to which this could be an answer.

Similarly, games like 20 questions, etc., can be used to focus the child's attention on getting relevant/needed information within the limits of a fixed number of questions. All such activities encourage analytical thought and help the child communicate his/her thoughts/feelings in clear, logical ways.

Check Your Progress

Note: Compare your answers with those given at the end of the block.

6. Which of the following question are more likely to encourage reasoning and analytical thought?
 - i) In what ways are these two objects similar?
 - ii) Which poem did you learn in class yesterday?
 - iii) What do you think will happen if we let the cycle stand out in the rain?
 - iv) What other combinations of vehicles can we use to get from point A to point B?
- OR
- v) How can we reach the ball under the cupboard?
 - v) What odd numbers come between 10 and 20?

Let us examine the following situations. Ram and Shyam are sharing a bench and a desk. Ram is a left-hander and Shyam a right-hander. Both are sitting in a way that their elbows clash every time they write.

The following conversation ensues:

Ram: "Move your elbow its coming in my space."

Shyam: "No, its not! You are always trying to take extra space by spreading your books around."

Ram: "What not! It's you who gives me such little space that I have to sit balanced at the edge of the bench."

This kind of conversation can go on till one manages to bully the other into compliance, meanwhile causing disturbance to other. In this case, the teacher can intervene either by scolding them (which would essentially leave the problem unsolved) or by involving them in a better formulation of a solution (which in this case could be changing the side they are sitting on).

Steps involved in finding appropriate feasible/acceptable solutions to conflicts:

1. Identify the conflict.
2. List out various possible solutions.
3. Decide which of those solutions is acceptable to all concerned and is workable/feasible.
4. Try it out.
5. Evaluate whether it works or not and modify or find another solution, if necessary.

The main point is that though all the conflict/problem took a long time and more effort to resolve, both the children are happy about the solution. Each one has understood the other's needs and helped to meet them. Hence, the solution is more likely to be effective.

Other advantages relating to guiding children's effective communication are two-fold:

1. The teacher has modelled concern for both the children.
2. Each child has also learned to look at the situation from a viewpoint other than his/her own.

Working through conflicts in such a manner combines all the different aspects of communication we have talked about so far, i.e.

1. Sharing feelings in a balanced way.
2. Sending messages clearly, expressing wants with clarity.
3. Asking the 'right' questions so that information relevant to permanent to the solution of the conflict can be got. Here, one must note that questions should be to the point and not accusing in their tone. Efforts should be made to get both the sides of the story in order to facilitate problem solving.
4. Giving praise/reward when feelings/ideas are communicated in a balanced constructive way.
5. And of course modelling such behaviour/communication for the child.

Check Your Progress

Note: Compare your answer with those given at the end of the block.

7. Which of the following aspects of communication are involved in working through conflicts:
 - i) Asking questions that elicit relevant information.
 - ii) Praising a child when feelings are expressed in a constructive-balanced manner.
 - iii) Asking questions to which you want children to give specific/correct answers.

(d) Encourage both needs and wants with clarity.

(e) Tell a child to be like you.

(a) (I) (II) and (III)

(b) (I) (II) and (IV)

(c) (I) (III) and (IV)

(d) (III) (IV) and (V)

3.5 LET US SUM UP

As you have seen, communication includes a lot of things. In this unit, we have focused on using a number of strategies such as providing a praise or reinforcement, modelling, and questioning to help children communicate their ideas, feelings in more effective ways. These skills can be used ourselves in order to establish better interpersonal relationship with the children. And, we can also guide children to express ideas, feelings. Children can also be helped to see things from other people's perspective by the use of the same strategies.

3.6 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Which of the following adult responses (statements) is/are more likely to help a child express feelings in a balanced way?

Teacher to child who is sitting in a corner and whimpering-sobbing.

- a) "Why don't you say what is bothering you? You sit around and cry whenever things don't go your way."
 - b) (Teacher to child who is withdrawn from the group because he was not given a chance to get). "Some times, when we do not get what we want, we like to be alone."
 - c) (Teacher to child who is jumping up and down in excitement incoherently mumbling something about going on a trip with his parents). My, my! You really seem thrilled about this trip you are going to take"
2. Many of the children in your class make a dash for the door the minute the lunch bell goes. Almost everyday somebody falls down; gets hurt in this process. You are tired of telling them to be careful. Not that punishing them by making them stay in their seats for a few minutes long had much effect.

Which of the statements, do you feel will appropriately reflect your concern. Write down your answer. (You could begin with: "I have noticed that while running out of the door").