

Communication II

What is communication?

- Communication between people is the sending (expression) and receiving (understanding) of messages.
- Communication involves two or more people. It cannot take place in isolation.
- We communicate using language. Language involves sending and receiving meaningful messages.
- These messages may be verbal, i.e. spoken, written, read, or non-verbal, i.e. signed, gestured, pictorial.
- “Body language” is also an important part of verbal and non-verbal communication. By body language we mean the other messages that we send through tone of voice, facial expression, body posture, etc.
- Effective communication uses a combination of verbal language, non-verbal language and body language.

Why do we need to communicate?

- Through communication we express our needs, our feelings, our ideas. We receive information and give information. In this way we establish ourselves as individuals, each with our own identity.
- Being able to communicate gives us a way of controlling what happens to us.
- Being able to communicate effectively is an important step towards building relationships and involvement in a community.

When does communication start?

- Communication starts at birth when a child first cries and the mother responds. It starts long before the child says his or her first words.

Verbal and non-verbal language

To use verbal and non-verbal language, we need certain tools:

- Spoken language uses the oral articulators (lips, tongue, palate, etc.), larynx (voice box), and lungs.
- Written/read language uses vision and hand control.
- Signed/gestured language uses arm and hand control, as well as the whole body.
- Picture language uses vision and hand control.

These tools alone are not enough for language; the most important tools we need are understanding and the ability to learn.

- Speech is the production of sounds and the putting together of those sounds in a sequence to make a word.
- Spoken language is the putting together of words in a sequence to make a meaningful sentence. Speech is the medium for spoken language.
- Teaching a person to repeat words without understanding is not language and it is not useful for communication. A person must be able to match the words she hears to the ideas or objects they represent for those words to be meaningful language.

Body language

Body language concerns the use of tone of voice, posture, facial expression, style of dress, etc. In other words, the unspoken messages that we send when we communicate. All of us use body language.

Body language is an essential part of the communication cycle. Having good body language skills means being good at:

- listening and being interested
- having eye contact
- taking turns sending and receiving
- using facial expression and tone of voice
- positioning appropriately
- talking the right amount.

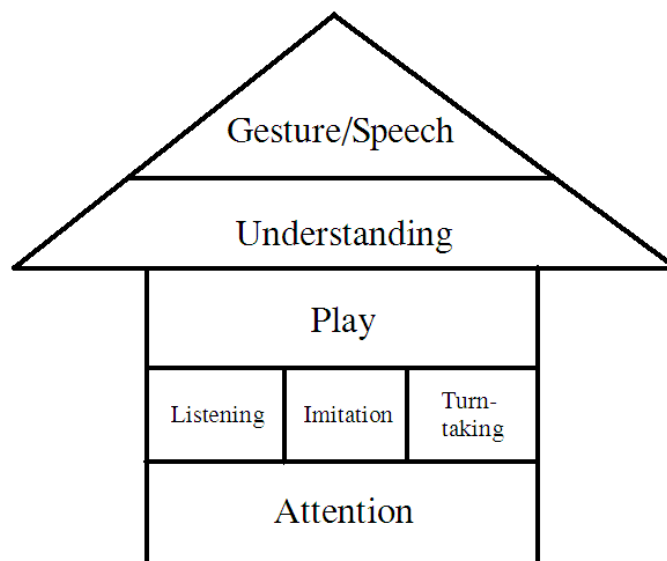
Important points to remember about communication

- Communication starts at birth.
- Communication between two people is a two-way process; it always involves two or more people.
- Communication involves sending a meaningful message and understanding the message received.
- To communicate we use language.
- Language can be verbal and/or non-verbal.
- Body language is an essential part of communication.
- Spoken words used without understanding are not useful for communication.
- Successful communication involves many different steps. Breakdown in communication occurs if either of the people taking part in the process has difficulty at any step of the communication process.
- For communication to be able to take place, we need someone to communicate with and something to communicate about.

Typical development of communication

- A child needs to learn many different skills to be able to communicate.
- These skills start to develop from birth when a child first cries.
- We can think of these communication skills as being like the bricks of a house.
- Just as bricks fit together to form a house, so the skills for communication develop together to enable a child to communicate using spoken language.
- The skills needed for communication are:
 - **Attention**
 - **Listening**
 - **Imitation**
 - **Turntaking**
 - **Play**
 - **Understanding**
 - **Gesture**
 - **Speech**

The communication house:



These skills do not develop in isolation from each other and are dependent on each other. Each skill follows through its own stages of development.

- **Attention** starts to develop when a child first looks at her mother's face and develops into the ability to spend time concentrating on a single activity.
- **Listening** starts to develop when a child becomes aware of all sounds and starts to respond to them, and develops into the ability to listen selectively.

- **Turntaking and imitation** start to develop when a mother copies her baby's actions and sounds, and the baby copies her in turn. It develops into the ability to take turns in conversation.
- **Play** starts to develop when a baby enjoys herself making and listening to sounds and watching and touching faces, and develops into the ability to play complex games with rules.
- **Understanding** starts to develop when a child begins to make sense of the things she sees and hears and develops into the ability to understand adult language and complex situations.
- **Gesture** starts to develop when a child cries and wriggles her body and the mother responds, and develops into being able to use more sophisticated gestures.
- **Speech** starts to develop when a child makes cooing and babbling sounds and develops into being able to say words and sentences clearly.

How a child learns the skills needed for communication

"I'm learning to communicate..."

- "... by getting a response..."
- "... by experiencing language in meaningful situations..."
- "... by hearing words spoken and seeing what they refer to..."
- "... by repeating words often in different meaningful situations..."
- "... by enjoying communicating..."
- "... by having someone to communicate with..."

Important points to remember about the typical development of communication

- A child starts to learn about communication as soon as she is born; long before she says her first words.
- There are many skills needed for the development of communication.
- A child develops communication skills through everyday interactions with the people around her.
- A child begins to understand situations and words before she is able to express herself.
- The development of large movements is easily recognisable, whereas the development of early communication skills is not so obvious. We need to be very observant.
- All areas of a child's development are interrelated. If a child has difficulty in one area, this can effect the other areas.
- A child might have difficulty in just the area of communication, sometimes though, all areas of a child's development might be delayed with some being more delayed than others.
- Each area of a child's development is equally important. If a child has difficulty in several areas of development they should receive help in each of these areas; none should be left out.

- It takes 5 years of more for a child to fully develop her communication skills, (typically at least from birth to five years of age (at least)).

Further reading:

World Health Organisation (1997). *Let's communicate: a handbook for people working with children with communication difficulties*. World Health Organisation.