

Communication Strategies to Build Collaboration

Attending and Active Listening

Communication Practice	Function	Some Examples
Body language	Physical posture is relaxed to show openness, interest, and empathy.	Leaning slightly toward the speaker while sitting, hands relaxed in lap. Respecting preferences for personal space and eye contact. Nodding your head in agreement.
Reflecting content and feelings	Using your own words to identify the content and feelings in a message is one way to let the speaker know you understand.	“I understand that you’ve been talking to Kathy about some ideas you have for what might work better at lunch time, but she hasn’t tried them yet.” (reflecting content) “Jose’s mother told you that they are trying some new medicine with Jose that could have some side effects.” (reflecting content) “Now that we’ve had a chance to talk, I understand that trying some of the new ideas we talked about has been both stressful and frustrating.” (reflecting feelings) “With the additional support you’re now getting from an aide, you’re feeling more hopeful about your ability to meet Isabella’s needs.” (reflecting feelings)
Encouraging and affirming	Acknowledging the speaker through simple verbalizations encourages the speaker to continue. Commenting about the strengths and accomplishments shows support.	“Yes.” “Uh-huh.” “Please go on.” “And then....?” “You have all done a great job of incorporating tube feeding into mealtime, making sure that Amand feels like a part of the group.” “Luke is doing so well using his communication device at mealtime. We all had a good laugh today when he pushed the ‘yucky’ button after trying the beans at lunch.”

Seeking and Verifying

Communication Practice	Function	Some Examples
<p>Questioning</p>	<p>Using different types of questions gives you information that helps to define preferences and strengths, as well as issues and concerns from the speaker's viewpoint.</p>	<p>"How are things going at home since we last talked?" (open-ended question)</p> <p>"You mentioned that field trips are a particular challenge. What are your specific concerns about taking Rashad on outings?" (open-ended question)</p> <p>"What sorts of things have you tried to encourage Elisha to play and get along with other children in the group?" (open-ended question)</p> <p>"How long does meal time usually take?" (closed-ended question)</p> <p>"What is Orlando's favorite outdoor activity?" (closed-ended question)</p>
<p>Silence</p>	<p>Waiting patiently and quietly gives the speaker time to think before answering a question and lets the speaker know you want to hear from him or her.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Clarifying and validating</p>	<p>Restating the main message and asking if your understanding of what has been said is correct can help avoid misunderstandings.</p>	<p>"So it sounds like you haven't been able to do the physical therapy exercises with Anya because it is too time consuming. Is that right, or is it something else?"</p> <p>"You have helped me understand so much about the ways that the classroom team can support each other. It sounds like the new volunteer has been particularly helpful, especially during circle time. Is that right?"</p>
<p>Summarizing</p>	<p>Pulling together the main points of the discussion into a brief statement is a good way of obtaining closure.</p>	<p>"Let's see. We've identified two main concerns today—helping Sayid navigate the playground, and making sure he doesn't miss out on any speech therapy time."</p> <p>"O.K. We've decided that Eva has met the first two objectives, but that we'll continue working on encouraging her to play with other children during center time."</p>

Joining and Supporting

Communication Practice	Function	Some Examples
Building	Adding to the speaker's ideas lets the other person know you value their input and that you have something to contribute.	<p>"You've mentioned things you've already tried to address Jorge's motor delays. I wonder if we could think about incorporating those ideas on the playground."</p> <p>"I'm glad to hear you found a way to get Elizabeth interested in books. Let's try to get her to point to pictures in response to your questions. "</p> <p>"So, you feel like Shan-Shan is spending too much time in the time-out chair. Let's think about some other strategies we can use to address her challenging behaviors."</p>
Informing	Sharing information and knowledge enhances understanding and addresses the speaker's needs.	<p>"It's not unusual for children at this stage of development to cry when they are separated from their parents."</p> <p>"Kim may need a little more encouragement and assistance to use the new communication cards. One way would be for you to demonstrate or 'model' the response."</p> <p>"It sounds like you would really like to talk with some other parents who are in a similar situation. Here is some information about the Parent Training and Information Center and the services they offer families including a parent to parent support program."</p>
Seeking consensus	Reaching agreement is important to ensure that everyone involved understands the goals and the ways of achieving them together.	<p>"Are we all in agreement that the best way for Luke to improve his communication skills is to help him use a dynamic communication device both at home and at school?"</p> <p>"It sounds like you would really like to take a break from some of the home-based therapy for Jake right now while your mother is recuperating. And are you O.K. with me checking in with you in a month to see how things are going?"</p> <p>"Given everything going on at home now, it sounds like we are in agreement not to move Tameka to a new classroom. We'll wait until after the holidays."</p>

Adapted from: Buysse, V., & Wesley, P. W. (2005). *Consultation in early childhood settings*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.