

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.

Communication Strategies Observation Checklist

This checklist is designed to be used to observe and identify basic communication practices. For each item, check each time you observe a practice in the box provided. Make notes in the space provided about examples you observed within each of the 3 broad categories.

Attending and Active Listening	
Body language Using posture, eye contact, gestures and other non-verbal movements to show openness, interest and concern.	Check Yes or No to indicate whether this occurs. <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
<i>For the following items, make a check in the box <u>each time</u> you observe an example.</i>	
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.	
Encouraging and affirming Acknowledging the speaker through simple verbalizations encourages the speaker to continue.	
Make notes about examples of attending and active listening you observed:	

Seeking and Verifying

For the following items, make a check in the box each time you observe an example.

Questioning Using different types of questions gives you information that helps to define preferences and strengths, as well as issues and concerns from the other's viewpoint.	
Silence Waiting patiently and quietly gives another person time to think before answering a question and lets the speaker know you want to hear from him or her.	
Clarifying and validating Restating the main message and asking if your understanding of what has been said is correct can help avoid misunderstandings.	
Summarizing Pulling together the main points of the discussion into a brief statement is a good way of obtaining closure.	
Make notes about examples of seeking and verifying you observed:	
What other communication strategies did you observe in this video clip? Check if observed and give examples. _____ Attending and Active Listening Examples:	

Joining and Supporting

For the following items, make a check in the box each time you observe an example.

Building

Adding to the speaker's ideas lets the other person know you value their input and that you have something to contribute.

Informing

Sharing information and knowledge enhances understanding and addresses needs of others.

Seeking consensus

Reaching agreement is important to ensure that families and practitioners understand the goals and the ways of achieving them together.

Make notes about examples of **joining and supporting** you observed:

What other communication strategies did you observe in this video clip? Check if observed and give examples.

_____ Attending and Active Listening

Examples:

_____ Seeking and Verifying

Examples:

Communication Strategies Observation Checklist – Answer Key

This checklist is designed to be used to observe and identify basic communication practices. The three-part conversation in [Video 3.3](#), [Video 3.4](#), and [Video 3.5](#) was used to fill in this answer key. Use this checklist to guide your own observation and reflection after viewing the videos.

Attending and Active Listening	
Body language Using posture, eye contact, gestures and other non-verbal movements to show openness, interest and concern.	Circle Yes or No to indicate whether this occurs. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
<i>For the following items, make a check in the box <u>each time</u> you observe an example.</i>	
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.	✓ ✓ ✓
Encouraging and affirming Acknowledging the speaker through simple verbalizations encourages the speaker to continue.	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Make notes about examples of attending and active listening you observed: <i>Teacher made frequent eye contact, nodded in an encouraging way and leaned slightly toward therapist to show interest.</i>	

Seeking and Verifying	
<i>For the following items, make a check in the box <u>each time</u> you observe an example.</i>	
<p>Questioning Using different types of questions gives you information that helps to define preferences and strengths, as well as issues and concerns from the other's viewpoint.</p>	<p>✓ ✓ ✓</p>
<p>Silence Waiting patiently and quietly gives another person time to think before answering a question and lets the speaker know you want to hear from him or her.</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Clarifying and validating Restating the main message and asking if your understanding of what has been said is correct can help avoid misunderstandings.</p>	<p>✓ ✓</p>
<p>Summarizing Pulling together the main points of the discussion into a brief statement is a good way of obtaining closure.</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Make notes about examples of seeking and verifying you observed:</p> 	
<p>What other communication strategies did you observe in this video clip? Check if observed and give examples.</p> <p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____ Attending and Active Listening Examples: </p>	

Joining and Supporting

For the following items, make a check in the box each time you observe an example.

Building Adding to the speaker's ideas lets the other person know you value their input and that you have something to contribute.	✓ ✓ ✓
Informing Sharing information and knowledge enhances understanding and addresses needs of others.	✓ ✓ ✓
Seeking consensus Reaching agreement is important to ensure that families and practitioners understand the goals and the ways of achieving them together.	✓
Make notes about examples of joining and supporting you observed:	
What other communication strategies did you observe in this video clip? Check if observed and give examples. _____ ✓ _____ Attending and Active Listening Examples: _____ ✓ _____ Seeking and Verifying Examples:	



Research Summary

on Communication Practices for Collaboration

RESEARCHERS at Case Western Reserve University conducted a review of the literature on communication practices between health care providers and parents.¹ A total of 15 studies examined the relationship between parent-provider communication and health care outcomes; eight additional studies examined the effects of strategies designed to improve communication between parents and providers.² Here is what the researchers learned from their review of these studies.

How were the communication practices defined and implemented?

Communication practices were defined and implemented differently across all of the studies in this review. A single, agreed-upon definition or list of effective communication practices did not exist in this literature. However, some of the most widely mentioned communication practices across studies involved providers listening in ways that demonstrated interest, attention, empathy, and support; reflecting others' feelings or concerns; and sharing information that parents perceived as relevant and useful.

What were the characteristics of the participants and settings in the research on communication practices?

The communications between health care providers and parents all took place in health care clinics or hospitals that served pediatric patients ranging in age from infancy to 14 years of age. The children were under the care of a pediatrician or health care provider for a variety of reasons including well-child visits and sick-child examinations and treatment. Some of the children also had diagnosed developmental delays or disabilities.

What factors were associated with improved communication practices and positive outcomes related to these practices?

The review found that the following factors in at least some studies were associated with improved communication between parents and health care providers: sharing information in multiple ways (e.g., restating information, asking parents to repeat information, providing both written and verbal forms of information); requesting that parents share information prior to or during a meeting (e.g., completing a checklist); and involving children and parents in mutual problem-solving. The review also found that the use of effective communication led to the following positive outcomes: increased parental satisfaction with health care services (in the majority of studies) and improved

adherence to providers' recommendations and a greater likelihood that parents would disclose children's problem behaviors (in a few studies).

Bottom line

Research on parent-provider communication in health care settings has shown that certain practices such as listening to parents and sharing information with them in ways that demonstrate empathy and support can lead to increased parental satisfaction with health care services and possibly better compliance with treatment recommendations.

¹Nobile, C., & Drotar, D. (2003). Research on the quality of parent-provider communication in pediatric care: Implications and recommendations. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 24*, 279-290.

²These studies used a correlational research design. This means that the findings can inform us about factors that may be related to communication practices, but provide little evidence about which specific practices work best, for whom, and under what conditions.



Policy Advisory

The Law Affecting Communication Among Professionals

Effective communication among professionals is critical to building collaborative relationships. Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Head Start Program Performance Standards contain policy related to communication among professionals. IDEA is the federal law that governs the education of children with disabilities, including developmental delays. Part C of the IDEA authorizes the federal government and state governments to act on behalf of infants and toddlers (birth to three) (20 U.S.C. Part C). Part B authorizes them to act on behalf of young children (three to six) with disabilities (20 U.S.C. Part B). The Head Start Program Performance Standards have been designed to provide Head Start programs with expectations, guidance and support related to the quality of services they provide.

Considerations pertaining to communication

IDEA and Head Start Performance Standards both focus on the importance of collaboration. To comply with these policies it is important to do the following:

- (1) Learn about the eligibility and Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) processes and actively participate in these processes especially if requested by families or required by law.
- (2) Use effective communication practices to build and sustain collaborative relationships with families and other professionals serving children with whom you work.
- (3) Include at least one regular educator of the child on the evaluation team and the IEP team. Early educators have the right to be part of IFSP teams, if requested by the family.

What does IDEA require with respect to communication?

Significantly, neither Part B nor Part C of IDEA directly and explicitly addresses communication among professionals. But both do so indirectly by providing that professionals must be on teams that evaluate children for IDEA eligibility and teams that develop their IEPs/ IFSPs. The statutory requirement for teams consisting of identified professionals gives the implicit message that team members must communicate

effectively. This policy advisory identifies the requirements for membership on evaluation and IEP/IFSP teams. If you want to know more about the qualifications of team members and the standards and procedures they must follow, you will need to review the requirements regarding evaluation and development of an IEP or IFSP.

What does Part B require?

Who Are Members of the Evaluation Team?

Two teams bring their talents to bear for the young child receiving Part B services. The first team evaluates the child. The second develops the child's individual education program (IEP).

No child may receive special education and related services until a team determines the child meets the eligibility criteria (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1413(a)(1); 1414(a), (b), (c), and (d)(4)(A); 34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.320 and 300.321). Thus, evaluation must precede program and placement. Who does the evaluation and makes the program/placement decision?

The evaluation must be conducted by "a team of qualified professionals and the parent of the child" (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(b)(4)(A); 34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.531). This provision does not define the individual professionals of the team; instead, it simply says these professionals must be "qualified."

Another provision of the statute, entitled "additional requirements for evaluations and re-evaluations," provides that "the IEP team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, shall review existing evaluation data on the child" (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(c)(1)). The related regulation (for implementing the statute) provides that "a group that includes the individuals described in Sec. 300.355, and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, shall review existing evaluation data on the child." The statute and regulation use the same language in identifying the nature of evaluation data, namely, "evaluations and information provided by the parent, current classroom-based, local, or State assessments, and classroom-based observations, and observations by teachers and related service providers" (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(c)(1) and 34 C.F.R. 300.533).

The statute (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(a), (b), and (c)) and the related regulations (34 C.F.R. 300.320 and 300.321) make it clear that the results of the evaluation are the basis for the child's IEP; the regulations provide that the evaluation results "must be used by the child's IEP team in meeting the requirements" for developing the child's IEP (34 C.F.R. 300.320 as to

the initial evaluation and 34 C.F.R. 321 as to any re-evaluation).

Curiously, the statute and regulations are circular: the "qualified professionals" on the team conducting the evaluation are the people on the child's IEP team. Yet the team is not constituted or convened until the evaluations are completed.

Who Are Members of the IEP Team?

The IEP team consists of (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(d)(1)(B)):

- the student's parents
- at least one regular educator of the child
- a representative of the local education agency (LEA) who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction and is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and availability of resources in the LEA
- a person who can interpret the results of the evaluation
- at the parent's discretion, other individuals with knowledge or special expertise regarding the child
- the child "whenever appropriate."

What does Part C require?

Infants and toddlers who receive Part C services are entitled to an evaluation that is the foundation for an individualized family support plan (IFSP) (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1435(a)(4) and Sec. 1436). As in Part B, standards and procedures implicitly address inter-professional communication.

Who Are Members of the Evaluation Team?

- The evaluation team must consist of "appropriate qualified personnel" with no fewer than two professionals (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1435(a)(3)-(6); Sec. 1436(a), (c), and (d); 34 C.F.R. Sec. 303.321(b)).
- The evaluators must be trained to use appropriate measures and procedures to conduct a timely, comprehensive and multidisciplinary assessment of the child's unique strengths and needs and must base their evaluation on informed clinical opinion (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1435(a); 34 C.F.R. 321(c)).

Who Attends the Meeting to Develop the IFSP?

The meeting to develop the IFSP must occur no more than 45 days from the referral. The regulations implementing Part C require that the IFSP team must consist of:

- the parents
- other family members as requested by the parents and if feasible
- an advocate or person outside the family if the family requests the presence of such a person
- the service coordinator
- a person who was directly involved in conducting the evaluations and assessments
- a person who will be providing service(s) to the child or family as appropriate.

Unlike Part B, Part C does not provide that the evaluation team will be the IFSP team; it simply requires that the IFSP team must consist of “a person who was directly involved in conducting the evaluations and assessments.” A family’s team is determined after the outcomes and services are decided.

What policies on communication exist for those within the Early Head Start and Head Start?

Head Start Program Performance Standards outline the importance of communication and collaboration among professionals in relation to family partnerships, general program management, community partnerships, and the coordination of disability and health services.

Head Start program procedure requirements

General communication standards for Head Start programs emphasize the need to “establish and implement systems to ensure that timely and accurate information is provided to parents, policy groups, staff, and the general community.” Head Start agencies must also have a method for ensuring regular communication among program staff to promote high quality experiences for children and families (45 C.F.R. Sec. 1304.51 (b) and (e)).

Many children and families who will enroll or are currently enrolled in Head Start programs have partnerships with other agencies and receive services from multiple community resources. In an effort to streamline services and limit duplication of services, Head Start Program Performance Standards require programs to communicate with other agencies to support these preexisting plans and services. In addition, programs must work collaboratively with other agencies and families to identify resources, either through referrals or directly, that serve the child and family’s interests and goals (45 C.F.R. Sec. 1304.40 (a)(3) and 45 C.F.R. Sec. 1304.40(b)(1)).

While Head Start Program Performance Standards outline the importance of comprehensive and effective communication and decision making with families, the standards also identify a strong importance for community collaboration as well. Head Start programs have a responsibility in community planning to encourage collaboration and effective communication across agencies to share information that will improve service delivery for children and families. (45 C.F.R. Section 1304.41 (a)(1) and (2)). Similarly, Head Start programs must also take steps to establish ongoing collaboration with community agencies to support families’ access to services and to be responsive to the needs of the community. This includes services from:

- Health care providers
- Mental health providers
- Nutritional service providers
- Individuals or agencies that provide services to children with disabilities
- Child protective services
- Educational institutions such as schools, libraries, and museums
- Child care service providers

For children with disabilities and health needs, the standards stipulate that the health coordinator and the disabilities coordinator must work together to ensure children’s needs are met. There must also be communication between the disabilities coordinator and the other professionals responsible for disability and health services to work closely with the child’s teacher in identifying concerns and needs (45 C.F.R. 1308.18 (a) and (b)).

References

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), Pub.L. No. 108-446. For complete source of information, go to <http://idea.ed.gov/>

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities. 76 Fed. Reg. 60140 (2011). For complete source of information, go to <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-28/pdf/2011-22783.pdf>

Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations. (2006). English. 45 CFR 1301-1311. For complete source of information, go to <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

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How Am I Doing?

Questions to Elicit Feedback on Communication Practices

One way of learning about areas of strength and improvement in communication practices is to ask colleagues or families for their feedback after a conversation or meeting. Below are some sample questions to ask.

Attending and Active Listening

Do I seem engaged and interested when we meet and talk?

Am I able to grasp the meaning and feelings underlying the information shared?

Seeking and Verifying

Am I able to pull together main points of discussion to clarify issues?

Do I seem open to divergent ideas and perspectives?

Joining and Supporting

Am I able to convey support and appreciation for others' efforts to address problems?

Do I demonstrate a willingness to learn from others?

Am I able to provide information in a clear and non-judgmental fashion?

Am I able to achieve consensus when we are making decisions about goals, strategies, and plans?