

SOUTH FENTRESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



BUILDING BETTER COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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What is Communication?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, communication is defined as follows:

- An act or instance of transmitting information verbally or nonverbally
- Exchange of information
- Technique for expressing ideas effectively

Communication is any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or nonlinguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes (Valenzuela, J.S., 2002).

In order for any group of people to work together, they must develop methods of communication. Without communication, collaboration cannot occur at any level of the school system (Schumacher, Jr., 2008).

Effective Communication...

Learned skill

Helps us better understand a person or situation

Understand the emotion behind the information

Enables us to resolve differences

Build trust and respect

Improves relationships by deepening your connections to others and improving teamwork, decision making, caring, and problem solving

Create environments where creative ideas, problem solving, affection, and caring can flourish

Enables to communicate even negative and/or difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust

Combines a set skills of skills (i.e. nonverbal communication, attentive listening, ability to manage stress in the moment, capacity to recognize and understand emotions of you and the person you are communicating with)

Effective Communication Skills

1. Listening

Successful listening means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding how the speaker feels about what they are communicating

Effective listening can:

- i. The starting place for effective communication is effective listening.
- ii. Make the speaker feel heard and understood which can help build a stronger, deeper connection between you.
 - a. Active listening is listening with all of one's senses
- iii. Create an environment where everyone feels safe to express ideas, opinions, and feelings, or plan and problem solve in creative ways.
 - a. Make sure both parties are sitting or standing and eliminate barriers
 - b. Eliminate background noise
- iv. Save time by helping clarify information, avoid conflicts and misunderstandings
 - a. You have to listen in order to understand
 - b. Avoid confusing and ambiguous language
 - c. Avoid vocabulary that people will not know
- v. Relieve negative emotions. When emotions are running high, if the speaker feels that he or she has been truly heard, it can help to calm them down, relieve negative feelings, and allow for real understanding or problem solving to begin.

Tips for effective listening:

- i. Focus fully on the speaker: body language and other nonverbal cues
 - a. Be prepared to listen
 - b. By daydreaming, checking text messages, or doodling, you will miss nonverbal cues
- ii. Avoid interrupting or trying to redirect the conversation to your concerns
 - a. Manners count
 - b. Avoid distractions
 - c. Do not try and think of your next question while the other person is giving information
- iii. Avoid seeming judgmental
 - a. In order to communicate effectively with someone, you do not have to like them or agree with their ideas, values, or opinions.
 - b. Be objective
 - c. Emphasize the positive
 - d. Keep a positive tone and open mind
 - e. Do not stereotype
- iv. Show your interest
 - a. Nod occasionally, smile at the person, and make sure your posture is open and inviting.
 - b. Encourage speaker with small verbal comments
 - c. Allay fears and give reassurance
 - d. Reduce shyness and nervousness in ourselves and others

Effective Communication Skills

2. Nonverbal communication:

Nonverbal communication includes body language, facial expressions, body movement, gestures, eye contact, posture, tone of voice, muscle tension, and breathing

Enhance nonverbal communication by:

- Using open body language: arms uncrossed, standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat, and maintaining eye contact
- Use body language to emphasize or enhance verbal communication: pat someone on the back while you are complimenting successes

Tips for improving how you read nonverbal communication:

- Practice observing people
- Be aware of individual differences
- Looks at nonverbal communication signals as a group

Tips for improving how to deliver nonverbal communication:

- Use nonverbal signals that match up with your words
- Adjust your nonverbal signals according to the context
- Use body language to convey positive feelings

Types of Body Language

- Hand movements
- Blank faces
- Smiling
- Tilting the head back
- Parting the lips
- Lip compression
- Crossed arms
- Eye contact

Effective Communication Skills

3. Managing stress:

Small doses of stress can help you perform under pressures, constant and overwhelming stress can hamper effective communication by disrupting your capacity to think clearly and creativity, and act appropriately.

Quick stress relief for effective communication

- a. Recognize when you're becoming stressed
- b. Take a moment to calm down before deciding to continue a conversation or postpone it.
- c. Bring your senses to the rescue and quickly manage stress by taking a few deep breaths, clenching and relaxing muscles, or recalling a soothing, sensory-rich image. The best way to rapidly and reliably relieve stress is through the senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.
- d. Look for humor in the situation. When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve stress when communicating.
- e. Be willing to compromise.
- f. Agree to disagree

4. Emotional awareness:

The way you feel motivates you to communicate and make decisions more than the way you think. Provides tools for understanding both yourself and other people.

- a. How emotional awareness can improve effective communication**
 - i. Understand and empathize with what is really troubling other people
 - ii. Understand yourself, including what's really troubling you and what you really want
 - iii. Stay motivated to understand and empathize with the person you're interacting with, even if you do not like them or their message
 - iv. Communicate clearly and effectively, even when delivering negative messages
 - v. Build strong, trusting, and rewarding relationships, think creatively, solve problems, and resolve conflicts
- b. Effective communication requires both thinking and feeling**
- c. Emotional awareness is a skill you can learn**

Barriers to Effective Communication and Active Listening

Barriers to Effective Communication

- Attitudes
- Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents
- Use of jargon, over-complicated or unfamiliar terms
- Physical barriers: poor or outdated equipment used during communication
- Physiological barriers: ill health, poor eyesight, hearing difficulties, speech difficulties, or pain
- Emotional barriers or taboos
- Problems with Structure Design: bad information systems, lack of supervision or training
- Cultural noise: stereotypical assumptions
- Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver
- Differences in perception and viewpoint
- Lack of common experience
- Ambiguity and abstractions overuse: leaving things half-said
- Information overload
- Assumptions and jumping to conclusions
- Expectations and prejudices, which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping. People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions.

Barriers to Active Listening

- Focusing on a personal agenda
- Experiencing information overload
- Criticizing the speaker
- Getting distracted by emotional noise
- Getting distracted by external noise
- Experiencing physical difficulty

Barriers to Effective Verbal Communication and Accurate Perceptions

Barriers to Verbal Communication

- Lacking clarity
- Using stereotypes and generalizations
- Jumping to conclusions
- Dysfunctional responses
- Lacking confidence

Barriers to Accurate Perception

Stereotyping and generalizing

Be careful not to hold onto the preconceptions about people

Not investing time

Making assumptions and ignoring details or circumstances

Having a distorted focus

Focusing on the negative aspects of the conversation

Assuming similar interpretations

Not everyone will draw the same conclusions

Experiencing incongruent cues

Strategies for Communication

Strategies for Effective Listening

Stop

Focus on the other person, their thoughts and feelings

Look

Pay attention to non-verbal messages

Listen

Listen for the essence of the speaker's thoughts

Be empathetic

Imagine how you would feel if the circumstances changed

Ask questions

Use questions to clarify understanding

Strategies for Accurate Perceptions

Analyze your own perceptions

Work on improving your perception

Focus on others

Strategies for Improve Communication

- Understand the second party well
 - Be flexible towards others
- The pitch and the tone must also be taken care of
 - Spice up your words to make communication interesting
 - Be genuine rather than manipulative
 - Use affirming responses
- Use visual cues to help explain your communication
 - Pictures, graphs, and other visual aids
- Never interact with individuals in noisy, crowded places.
- While sharing any information, do verify with the recipients whether they have understood or not
- Do not always depend on verbal communication
- Build a team culture
 - There should be transparency among all the team members
- Professional dress
- Be yourself and be very confident.
 - Value yourself and your own experiences
 - Present yourself as an equal rather than a superior
- Patience
- Be direct and to the point
- Use I statements

Tips for Better-Written Communication

1. Before writing, assess if your objective is more efficiently achieved with a meeting, call, office or workstation visit
2. Your parents, grandparents, guardians and teachers taught you manners. Please use them
3. Less is more
 - a. Keep sentences and paragraphs short and to-the-point
 - b. Minimize corporate jargon, acronyms and big words
 - c. Always use the spelling and grammar check tools
 - d. Clearly explain instructions, use simple words and delete words which may be open to misinterpretation
 - e. Numbering and bullet-pointing are effective
 - f. Eliminate hyperboles, do not exaggerate and refrain from over-promising.
 - g. Delete repetition
4. Write once, check twice
 - a. Proofread after you write and then several hours or days later
 - b. Putting some time between writing and re-reading you work can help you catch errors of tone that might otherwise escape you and cause trouble
5. Pay special attention to names, titles, and genders
 - a. Address the email recipient by his or her name
 - b. If you do not have a direct relationship with the recipient, state how you are connected or where you acquired their email address
6. Use the right format
 - a. Format refers to how your correspondence is laid out on paper or online
 - b. Usually writers choose their formats based on the method of delivery – letter, memo, or email
 - c. Each type has distinct format conventions (guidelines) for including and placing elements such as the date, addresses, subject line, salutation, message body, closing line, signature block, and company letterhead or logo.
7. Save templates
8. Be professional, not necessarily formal
 - a. Informal does not necessarily mean unprofessional
 - b. Be honest and write with integrity

Tips for Better-Written Communication cont...

9. Use a professional tone.
 - a. The readers will form an opinion from the content, style, and most important, the attitude and tone that come across in your writing.
 - b. Create a professional, positive tone by using simple, direct language.
 - c. When denying a request or sharing bad news, acknowledge the problem or situation and diplomatically explain the background and your position
10. Organize your information clearly
 - a. Arrange your thoughts so that your correspondence can be read quickly and comprehended easily.
 - b. Organize the information based on your purpose
 - i. Remember the 5 W's (and the H) Who? What? When? Where? Why? Hot?
11. Communication should answer all the questions relevant to the audience:
12. Know your audience.
 - a. Consider the audience's backgrounds, technical expertise and educational levels as well as their mindsets and possible reactions to your writing
13. What's in it for your readers?
 - a. Benefits engage readers, since they're naturally most concerned with finding out how they can make their lives easier or better
14. Do not give too many choices
15. Approach every email with the motivation of selling, optimizing or approving an idea, product, service, direction or recommendation.
16. Reply logically, sequentially and thoroughly
17. Use visual elements carefully
 - a. Visual elements (i.e. font size and type; underlined; italicized or bold text; and bulleted or numbered lists – help emphasize key points and make your correspondence more effective.
 - b. Avoid unnecessary upper cases, exclamation marks, repeated use of symbols, emoticons and chat abbreviations.
 - c. Do not go overboard
18. Remove all negative emotions. If a subject matter is contentious, write or respond professionally with facts, void of emotion.
 - a. Replace negative expressions such as 'do not forget' with engaging words such as 'please remember'
19. Start and end your written communications positively
20. Replace 'ASAP' with an exact date or time you require the work completed
21. Avoid sending 'URGENT' emails, unless they are truly urgent

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