

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers

COMMUNICATION HELPERS

1. Door Openers (“Would you like to talk about it?” or “You seem upset”)
2. Encouragers (“I’d like to hear more about what you think” or “I’m here if you want to talk over your ideas”)
3. Open Questions (“what do you hope for in offering to serve on the Policy Council?” or “what are some of your ideas for our classroom?”)
4. Nodding, saying “yes” or “no” or “I hear you” or “uh-huh” or “tell me more”
5. Facial and body expressions that show interest

COMMUNICATION BLOCKERS

1. Blaming (“We wouldn’t be in this situation if you hadn’t...”)
 2. Saying “always” or “never” (“My son always loses the papers you send home”)
 3. Name-calling or labeling (“You’re such a workaholic”)
 4. Giving advice or commentary (“If I were in your shoes I would...” or “Something just like that happened to my sister. She...”)
 5. Lecturing or threatening (“Prompt medical attention is very important” or “This will be your child’s last week here unless you provide us with completed immunization forms”)
 6. Avoiding or belittling another’s concern (“It’s not really so bad”)
 7. Facial and body expressions that show lack of interest
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Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers (continued)

CONVEYING RESPECT

1. Giving people time to form thoughts, respond and complete their statements
2. Focusing on a concern that is expressed
3. Letting the others begin the conversation or do much of the talking

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT CULTURAL AND PERSONAL FACTORS

1. Each family may have its own ways of communicating. For example, in some families someone other than the parent (an elder, family member or community member) may be the key contact for family issues.
2. Body languages varies among cultures. For example, different cultures make different use of eye contact, physical distance between speakers, and unspoken gestures.
3. Consider the physical arrangement between all of the people in your conversation so that everyone shares control. Be aware of how this factor can affect a conversation if, for example, one person is behind a desk, at the head of the table or standing above the other. Also be aware of the seating arrangements for group conversations. Are staff and parents seated separately or together? Would the parties to the conversation feel more comfortable sitting in a circle of chairs rather than in rows?
4. Remember that people have different learning styles. For some people, being told information is not the best way for them to receive information. Hands-on demonstrations, handouts or visuals may work better for them.
5. Everyone has a culture. Being aware of the cultural lens through which you view the world is as important as trying to understand the culture of others.

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers (continued)

Find the Communication Helpers and Blockers

During a routine vision screening, Mary Goins, the Head Start health worker, discovered that four-year-old David may have an eye problem. She called David's mother, Rita Caras, with a referral to an eye doctor. Rita promised to make an appointment soon. She began putting money aside each week for the doctor's bill. She planned to call an eye doctor as soon as she had enough money saved up. She asked her neighbor and her sister if they knew of a good eye doctor, and wrote down the names they each gave her.

Two months have gone by. Mary noticed Rita when she came with David for Open House at the Head Start center. The following conversation took place:

Mary: Hi, I'm Mary, the Head Start Health Worker. Are you David's mother?

Rita: Yes, I'm Rita Caras.

Mary: I'm so glad to finally meet you in person! Would you like me to call you Rita or Ms. Caras?

Rita: Everybody calls me Rita.

Mary: How are you and David doing, Rita?

Rita: Fine. I was so glad I came tonight. This is the first time I've seen the Center.

Mary: Really? What are your impressions of this place?

Rita: There's just so much for David to do here.

Mary: To do here?

Rita: He's such an active boy. I have trouble keeping him entertained at home.

Mary: It's hard to keep him busy?

Rita: Lord, yes. I wish I had all the books and things teachers have here.

Mary: It sounds like you need more things for David to play with at home. Did you know you can check out books and toys?

Rita: Really?

Mary: You can take some home with you tonight. I'll show you how to do it right now, if you like. Come this way.

Rita (following Mary): That would be wonderful! Oh, by the way, I plan to call an eye doctor next week!

Mary (turns and stops): Next week! Oh dear! I'm surprised you haven't made an appointment yet.

Rita: I'm getting to it! It's not such a big deal!

Mary: But it is a big deal, Rita. David's eyesight is too important to neglect!

Rita: You don't understand...

Mary: I do understand this: if you can't get him to an eye doctor right away, I will have to take steps myself.