



twice as much as we talk.” There’s a great deal of truth in that remark that can help us improve our communicating skills. Active listening is difficult. Our minds tend to race ahead and think of what we are going to say next, or get sidetracked with wandering thoughts. Acknowledging responses, nodding, and reflecting back what the other person has said demonstrate that we are indeed interested and concerned and that we care. Restating in our own words what the person has said also clears up any misunderstanding in what was communicated.

Sensitive listening skills are rare, but if we are serious about opening communication channels, we must let others know that we are receptive to feedback. This does not mean that we have to agree with what is being expressed. It only means that we have to convey to others that we appreciate their openness and that they have given us a clearer understanding of the picture. Some phrases that might be helpful:

- “I understand how you feel now.”
- “Thank you for being so open with me.”
- “What would you like me to do?”
- “I am concerned about how you feel about...”

**Sometimes written communication is best:** Sometimes what we need to communicate can best be transmitted in a written memo. Written notes can also serve as useful follow-up by highlighting the main points of a conversation, noting deadlines and restating specific requests. In this way we are not relying on the person’s memory to follow through. But just as we take pains to be precise, thoughtful, and direct verbally, we need to exercise the same skills in written communication. It is imperative that we develop good habits of clear, concise communication. Clarity means shortness, simplicity, and precision in words. Covering too many topics and being too verbose overwhelms the reader. Given too much data to absorb or too many written communications, people are not able to distinguish the important from the trivial, and may end up rejecting or not reading it.

Before writing a memo, ask yourself what you hope to accomplish. Each sentence should bring you closer to that objective. The most important rule in written communication is to keep it simple. Don’t try to dazzle people with your vocabulary or your technical know-how. Organize your thoughts in a logical fashion, and stick to your salient points without catch-all phrases that are vague and not easily understood. Psychobabble benefits no one.

The essence of good communication is to say what you need to say in as direct a way as possible. Remember, The Lord’s Prayer has only 71 words, the Ten Commandments 297, and the Gettysburg Address only 268.

Keep sentences and paragraphs short, keep to the point, and remember:

***It is not enough to write merely to be understood. We must write so that we cannot possibly be misunderstood!***

— Robert Louis Stevenson

**Assessing Perceptions About Communication**

The following assessment tool focuses on staff’s perceptions of the effectiveness of communication at the center. Distribute the Communication Questionnaire and a blank envelope to all teaching staff who work at the center more than ten hours per week. Place a box labeled “Questionnaire Return Box” in your center’s office or staff room and ask staff to put their completed questionnaires in this box.

When all questionnaires have been returned, total the individual scores of respondents. They will range from 10–50. Then sum all respondents’ scores and divide by the number of staff completing the questionnaire. This will yield an average score.

Scores between 40–50 indicate that staff perceive the communication processes of the center to be quite positive. Scores between

10–20 indicate staff feel this is an area that may need some improvement. An individual item analysis will give you a clearer picture of what areas of communication staff feel need to be improved. By comparing communication scores from one year to the next, you will have valuable feedback about how successful you have been in your efforts to improve oral and written communication.

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**Communication Questionnaire**

This questionnaire assesses your attitudes about the effectiveness of different communication processes in our center. Your honest and candid responses to these questions are appreciated. When you have completed your questionnaire, please put it in the envelope you have received and place it in the “Questionnaire Return Box” in the office. There is no need to include your name.

Circle from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) how you feel about the following statements:

|  | Strongly disagree |   |   |   | Strongly agree |  |
|--|-------------------|---|---|---|----------------|--|
| Written communication at this center is clear.   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Staff seem well-informed most of the time.   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| The information I receive is usually accurate.   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Parents seem well-informed about issues and events.  | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Communication between teachers is open and direct.   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Communication between the director and staff is open.  | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Expressing my feelings is valued and easy to do here People feel comfortable to disagree with one another. | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| The director makes an effort to solicit feedback.  | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |
| Policy manuals and written procedures are clear.   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |  |

What suggestions do you have for improving communication processes at this center?

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