

Communicating with children



Fact Sheet

What does it mean to communicate?

Communication with children can be both verbal and nonverbal. Babies and children communicate through non-verbal means like eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and movement, as well as using sounds such as crying, laughing, gurgling, and babbling. Older children also use words and phrases to communicate.

All behaviour conveys a message, regardless of whether or not it is intentional, and can be considered as communication.

Why is it important?

Using communication styles that have a positive impact on children (positive communication) supports and promotes social and emotional wellbeing and future mental health.

Encouraging children's early attempts at communication can support the development of a positive self-concept. The self-concept is a mental image of how we see ourselves, and how we think others view us, and can range from being positive to negative. Having a positive self-concept can lead to the development of self-esteem and positive social and emotional wellbeing throughout later life.

Children learn by imitating others and receiving feedback on their behaviour. When adults model positive communication with others, children are more likely to learn good social skills and to foster positive relationships, which are supportive of wellbeing.

Early childhood educators and carers play a key role in supporting children through this process.

What can educators and carers do?

- Use positive communication at all times with adults and children;
- Use open-ended questions or statements which encourage children to communicate their thoughts, feelings and ideas;
- Smile and use positive facial expressions and other forms of non-verbal communication;
- Use supportive words and gestures to encourage the child;
- Get down to the same level as a child to gain their attention while talking to them;
- Keep instructions simple and specific when asking children to do something;
- Talk *with* children, not *at* them, and be patient as they communicate with you;
- Use more positives than negatives e.g. *More "Do's" than "Don'ts"*; and
- Respect the feelings and opinions of all children, regardless of their age.

Further Information

KidsMatter: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/family-matters/communication-schools-and-services/suggestions-positive

Early Childhood Australia:
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/emotional_foundations_for_learning/

