Suggestions for positive communication

It is helpful to have a curious attitude when communicating with others and to show an interest in what the other person is saying. Asking questions shows interest and also helps to keep the conversation going. Some of the skills that are useful for communicating openly are:

- Being attentive.
- Listening carefully.
- Letting the speaker finish what they want to say.
- Being aware of a person's facial expressions, tone of voice and body language. These give clues to how the other person might be feeling.
- Asking some questions and restating what the person has said. This helps you understand what has been said and gives the other person a chance to explain if their meaning was different.
- Noticing how others respond will help you know if the conversation is going well or not.
- Identifying which language would be best to communicate in. If you speak a different language, check to see if there are others who may speak the same language and are willing to help.

It takes time and regular practice to build communication skills. Some things to consider are:

- Extending short conversations, for example, 'What did you do on the weekend?', ‘Isn’t this weather lovely?’. Sharing personal information can help with starting conversations.
- Sharing stories about how children are going, their accomplishments and strengths: ‘Jenna used her spoon on her own for the first time today to eat her yoghurt. I thought you might like to know as I remember it’s something you mentioned you were teaching her at home’.

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Providing feedback about your child’s experiences at the early childhood service, for example, ‘I was so pleased to see a photo of Katie playing dress-ups in the newsletter’.

Seeing things from the other person’s point of view. Avoid jumping to conclusions.

Trying to reflect on which communication style you are most comfortable with (e.g., face-to-face, email, phone, notes). Face-to-face communication is the most helpful but if you find this difficult, you can start with small steps. For example, if it takes you some time to warm to and become friendly with people, you may start with a smile and hello.

Having a go at communicating in a new way. You may need to try it a few times before you start to feel comfortable.

Choosing different ways of communicating for different situations is beneficial. Your preferred method of communication may be effective in some situations but not others (e.g., if you want to talk about an issue that is very concerning it is best to arrange a meeting to discuss this).

When communicating with someone, consider these simple steps:

- Pause and listen to what the speaker is saying before reacting or responding.
- Take some time to think about what has been said before responding. This is especially helpful when the conversation is about a difficult topic.
- Respond to the speaker by acknowledging what has been said (e.g., ‘I’m glad you talked to me about this’ OR ‘That is a really important question/concern. Let’s make a time to chat’).

It is good to remember that when someone wants to talk about something that is difficult or complex, it is ok to take some time to think before answering. It is also ok not to have an answer at all. Instead, say that you need more information or time to think before giving an answer or that you would like to work out an answer together with the other person.