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While the resources are available freely for these purposes, to realise the full potential of KidsMatter Early Childhood, it is recommended that the resources be used with the appropriate training and support under the KidsMatter Initiative.
Communication

What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- have an understanding of why communication is important to building positive relationships between early childhood services and families
- have an understanding of the importance of good communication skills and how to communicate effectively with families
- explore the elements that help to ‘set the scene’ for effective communication
- explore and practice using communication and listening skills such as attending, following and reflecting, empathy, open and closed questions and summarising
- have reflected on some of the barriers to effective communication
- be introduced to the Stop Reflect Act (SRA) model which supports educators to respond to families
- further understand how partnerships can support difficult or complex conversations.

Preparation for this session

Resources

- Component 3 Topic 3: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
- Video 3.1: Communication skills
- Video 3.2: Active listening skills
- Video 3.3: Effective communication with families
- Video 3.4: The Stop Reflect Act (SRA) model
Suggestions for how to run this topic

1 Introduce the topic to the group

Topic 3 focuses on the importance of communication as a part of relationships between early childhood services and families and how educators can communicate effectively with families.

Content includes:

- a video about communication skills
- a discussion about how communication skills support the development of partnerships
- a video outlining a range of active listening skills
- an activity about practising communication skills
- a video about effective communication with families
- a video introducing the Stop Reflect Act (SRA) model
- an activity and discussion about the Stop Reflect Act (SRA) model
2 **Video 3.1: Communication skills**

The video covers:

- why communication is an important part of relationships between early childhood services and families
- how to ‘set the scene’ for effective communication with families
- how services can work towards supporting effective communication with families.

**Tips for watching this video**

- There is space for participants to make notes about this video on page 2 of their *Participant Workbook*.

3 **Discussion: Communication skills supporting partnerships**

The aim of this discussion is for participants to explore how communication skills influence partnerships.

**Instructions**

1. Lead a discussion around the following questions:
   
   - How do you think communication supports the development of collaborative partnerships?
   - What can sometimes be challenging about communicating with families?
   - What are some of the skills that support effective communication?

**Tips for this discussion**

- There is space for participants to write notes on page 3 of their *Participant Workbook*.
**4 Video 3.2: Active listening skills**

The video covers:
- using listening skills such as attending, following, reflecting
- using effective communication skills, such as empathy, open and closed questions, and summarising
- how using these skills can improve effective communication and help build relationships.

**Tips for watching this video**
- There is space for participants to make notes about this video in their Participant Workbook on page 4.

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**5 Activity: Practising communication skills**

The aim of this activity is for participants to:
- practise their communication skills and the experience of being ‘listened to’
- build awareness of their strengths and areas for development in relation to communication skills.

**Instructions**

1. Ask participants to form pairs and to remember the communication skills they heard about in Video 3.2.

2. Ask one person to be the ‘story teller’ and the other the ‘listener’. If there are an odd number of people, allocate one person to be the ‘observer’.

3. Ask the ‘story teller’ to spend two minutes talking about one of the following:
   - a place they’ve travelled to
   - a hobby
   - their favourite place and why
   - a special person in their lives
   - another topic of their choice

4. Ask the ‘listener’ to practise their listening skills with the ‘story teller’

5. Ask the ‘listener’ and ‘story teller’ to swap roles after two minutes. If there are an odd number of people, swap roles again so all participants have a chance to be the ‘listener.’
6. As a whole group, ask participants to reflect on the following:

» What was it like being the ‘listener’?
» What was it like being the ‘story teller’?
» What did you notice as the ‘observer’?
» What communication skills did you use as the ‘listener’? What other skills would you have liked to use?
» What can you take away from this exercise to improve your communication?

Tips for this activity

- There is a space for participants to record notes and observations and answers to the reflection questions for this activity on page 8–9 of their Participant Workbook.
- This activity will be a refresher for those participants who have well developed communication skills and expertise in practising and using these skills. Encourage all participants to notice their strengths and areas for development, as it can take time to develop these skills and everyone benefits from practice.

6 Video 3.3: Effective communication with families

Tips for this activity

- There is a space for participants to record notes and observations and answers to the reflection questions for this activity on page 8–9 of their Participant Workbook.

The video covers:

- some of the barriers to effective communication and how early childhood services can address these
- how having a strong partnership with families can support educators during difficult or complex conversations with families.

Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 10 of their Participant Workbook.
**7 Video 3.4: The Stop Reflect Act (SRA) model**

The video covers:

- an introduction to the SRA model
- a mock scenario showing an interaction between a parent and an educator using the SRA model
- how the SRA model can support communication between educators and families.

Tips for watching this video

- There are reflective questions on page 11 of the Participant Workbook for participants to make notes while watching this video.
- Emphasise to participants that the SRA model can be useful to help educators respond to parenting queries. Remind participants that educators may not need to deal with queries on their own and they do not need to have all the answers. Further, a response does not need to be a solution to the issue but could also include listening to the parent or carer and acknowledging what they have said.
- Highlight that the SRA model can also be useful when dealing with challenging or complex conversations.
8 **Activity: Responding to families using the SRA model**

The aim of this activity is for participants to apply the Stop Reflect Act model to a scenario involving a question or concern from a parent.

**Instructions**

1. Inform participants that they will now have the opportunity to practise the SRA model. Break participants into groups of three people.

2. Emphasise to participants that this activity is not a reflection of their past practices or experiences and they should view the concern scenarios as hypothetical. Remind participants that family/child privacy should be observed.

3. Ask participants to read through the SRA scenarios on page 15 of their Participant Workbook and to choose a scenario.

4. Then ask participants to plan their responses to parents and carers on the ‘Using the SRA model’ planning sheet on page 16 of their Participant Workbook.

5. If time permits, participants can also perform a role play of their planned response in groups, with the roles of an educator, parent and observer. The role play should involve participants using their chosen scenario.

6. Return as a whole group to move into the following discussion.
9 Discussion: Reflecting on the SRA model

The aim of this discussion is to debrief the previous activity and for participants to reflect on their experience of using the SRA model and how they might use it in the future.

Instructions

1. Ask participants ‘How useful would the SRA model be for you? Why/why not?’

2. Lead a discussion around the following points and ask participants to make notes on page 17–19 of their Participant Workbook:
   - How might you use the SRA model differently for a question from a parent or carer that requires immediate attention and one that is less urgent?
   - How do you feel about using the SRA model to respond to questions from parents and carers about parenting practices and/or child development and learning?
   - How might your service incorporate the SRA model into your policies and practices?
   - Not all of the SRA scenarios were direct ‘questions’ from parents and carers. What are some other ways families can indicate they need support?
   - Do you spend time reflecting on how you handle queries from families? If so, how?
   - How often do you share your experiences of responding to parents with your colleagues? How can you model or support good communication practice with colleagues?
   - If you performed a role play, what was your experience of this process?

Tips for this discussion

- There is space for participants to make notes on page 17–19 of their Participant Workbook.
- Emphasise to participants that early childhood services may need to consider their own policies about responding to particular types of queries.
- The SRA concepts are similar to the STOP THINK DO Program by Peterson and Adderley (2002):
  - STOP look and listen first
  - THINK about options and consequences
  - Choose the best option to DO.
10 Activity: Moving forward

The aim of this activity is to have participants set some short and long-term goals for communicating effectively with families at their early childhood service.

Instructions

- Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
  - What is one thing I could do to communicate effectively with families at our service over the next week?
  - What is one thing I could do to communicate effectively with families at our service over the next 12 months?
- Ask participants to answer the following questions as a large group or in smaller groups if there are a lot of people:
  - What is one thing we could do as a service to communicate effectively with families over the next week?
  - What is one thing we could do as a service to communicate effectively with families over the next 12 months?

Tips for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 20.

7 Reflective questions

Reflecting on new content is a good way to wrap up each topic and summarise what has been covered. The following questions can support reflection, although you may wish to add your own questions to suit your team. Reflective questions can be considered during the topic, at the end of the topic or at a separate time. Reflective questions can be completed individually, in pairs or as a group.

- Do you think the communication practices in your service are effective? How do you know? Would you like to see any changes?
- What are some of the ways that body language can promote and act as a barrier to effective communication?
- How do you feel about silences in conversations and how might they impact a conversation?
- How does your service work with families who have special communication needs (e.g. English as a second language, hearing or vision impairments)?

Tips for this activity

- Reflective questions can be found in the Participant Workbook on page 21–22.