Communication Skills

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Introduction
The ability to express one’s self in verbal and written form is a fundamental skill in youth development. It also is increasingly a necessary skill for competent adults in our society (Nussbaum, 1989). Communication includes verbal, nonverbal, and written forms of sharing thoughts and feelings (Galvin & Brommel, 1991). It is the way youth stay in touch with their world, share their ideas, and respond to other ideas and feelings. Interactions between people are an important part of communicating. Communication helps define who we are and how we get along with other people (Galvin & Brommel, 1991).

Communication involves sending and receiving messages. Some messages are sent intentionally; others are sent without our being aware of how others are interpreting the messages. Two-way communication involves sending and receiving clear messages, understanding what others are trying to express, and being aware of how the communication occurs or does not occur. Problems in communication can create difficulties in solving problems and conflicts with others. It also can be disturbing when we are unable to express accurately to others what we are thinking or feeling (Galvin & Brommel, 1991).

Component Elements
Effective communication skills include:

- An understanding of the different ways of sending and receiving clear messages through verbal and nonverbal methods.
- Avoiding mixed or multiple messages, listening to responses, and making sure people understand what someone else is trying to say.
- A working knowledge of language and the ability to read and write.
- Working knowledge of the language combined with the development of logic and reasoning in the expression of thoughts and ideas.
- An awareness of people and settings around youth. This includes understanding different cultures, genders, ethnicities, ages, and the ways relationships get defined with messages. This also includes development of other aspects of messages such as trust and respect, and learning to look for these aspects in communication.
- An understanding of how feelings influence communication and how feelings are most effectively communicated.
- The development of skills to solve interpersonal problems and handle conflicts.
As children and adolescents develop, their ability to learn and understand concepts and develop skills becomes important in organizing age-appropriate programs. Educators need to teach communication skills at the level of development, understanding and experience of youth. Communication skills also become central as reduction or prevention factors for youth vulnerable to or at risk (Pittman, 1991). Communication skills are related to increased social competence and related to the ability to communicate with people of all ages.

References


