



# Educator Interactions and Relationships with Children in Children's Services

## Self-Guided Learning Package

This resource was developed by Community Child Care (CCC) with funding provided by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (2008-12).

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

## About Self-Guided Learning Packages

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Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Gowrie Victoria Leadership and Learning Consultants are available to support you while working through the package. Feel free to phone or email if you require any assistance completing the tasks within the package. Phone 1800 103 670 (freecall) or (03) 9347 6388 or email [psc@gowrievictoria.org.au](mailto:psc@gowrievictoria.org.au)

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## Educator Interactions and Relationships with Children

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You have chosen to complete the 'Educator Interactions and Relationships with Children' package. The aim of this package is to understand the importance of communication in facilitating effective interactions with children and educators. The learner will be able to identify the characteristics of effective communication and develop strategies to enhance teamwork and mutual respect amongst educators. The package will also enable the learner to describe and implement ways of creating positive and inclusive relationships with children.

Successful completion and assessment contributes to the following competencies from the nationally accredited Community Services Training Package:

### **CHCORG303A Participate effectively in the work environment**

- Work in a manner that complements that of others according to policies and rules of workplace practice

### **CHCCS405A Work effectively with culturally diverse clients and co-workers**

- Contribute to the development of work place and professional relationships based on acceptance of cultural diversity
- Show respect for cultural diversity in all communication and interactions with co-workers, colleagues and clients

### **CHCIC301D Interact effectively with children**

- Communicate positively with children on an ongoing basis
- Promote positive behaviour
- Respect similarities and differences and encourage children to respect these differences

The following learning outcomes are addressed:

- Describe the benefits of positive communication
- Describe a range of strategies to foster effective communication with staff
- Describe a range of positive communication strategies to enhance relationships with children

## **Introduction**

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Effective communication is the key to developing and maintaining positive interactions and relationships with others. Educators working in children's services need to demonstrate mutual respect towards each other and value the contributions made by each educator. This enables the work group to maintain positive relations and model the type of communication they want children to develop. Educators also need to use positive communication with children in order to create a responsive and inclusive environment for all.

The EYLF, FSAC and VEYLF Outcome 5: *Children are effective communicators*, focuses on the different ways communication is conveyed and the importance it has to the development of children's life skills.

**What is communication?**

Verbally, through words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• spoken</li><li>• face to face or telephone</li><li>• one to one or group situation</li></ul>
Non verbally, through body language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• facial expression</li><li>• gestures</li><li>• physical appearance</li><li>• distance</li><li>• tone and pitch</li></ul>
Use of graphic symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• written</li><li>• pictures</li><li>• signs</li><li>• objects</li><li>• use of technology</li></ul>

Communication can broadly be defined as any verbal or non-verbal behaviour that is perceived by another person. Communication is more than just the exchange of words; all behaviour conveys some message and is, therefore, a form of communication.

***Elements in the communication process***

- a sender
- a message (verbal or non-verbal information)
- a receiver

***Communicating with words and gestures***

- people give meanings to words and gestures on the basis of their experience and the context in which communication is used
- each person's experience is unique and different to another person
- different experiences can result in different meanings given to words and gestures
- it's easier to understand communication when there is a meaningful context

**Self Help Question 1**

Think of someone you know whom you would describe as an effective communicator. What are the characteristics that make this person an effective communicator?

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## The importance of positive communication

The use of positive communication with educators, children and families creates an environment where individuals feel valued and respected. Positive communication has many benefits for the children's service, including the following;

- creating a sense of belonging
- feeling included and valued
- developing trust
- fostering self esteem
- promoting open, honest communication
- feeling comfortable to express ideas and opinions
- modelling positive communication styles
- sharing ideas
- providing support
- providing a consistent approach to care
- providing clear expectations and guidelines for behaviour
- determining roles and responsibilities
- positive resolution of conflict
- creating a harmonious work environment

### Self Help Question 2

List other benefits of positive communication within the workplace

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### Positive educator interactions

Educators need to practice positive and respectful communication with each other in order to communicate effectively with each other. This helps to build a consistent and cohesive team approach within the service and provides a role model for the type of communication they want children to develop.

Effective communication exists between people when the receiver interprets the sender's message in the way that the sender intended it. Effective communication skills include the following strategies:

**Reflective Listening** restates as clearly as possible what the other person has said. This helps the receiver to check if what they have heard and understood is accurate. The receiver should listen for the underlying emotion. Is the person angry, frustrated or upset? Ask clarifying questions to further understand the situation and to encourage the person to keep talking. This will assist the person to find a solution to their problem.

**Active listening**, is listening with the whole body through positive gestures and body language, e.g. leaning forward, appearing eager to listen, making eye contact, being attentive, nodding and making encouraging sounds. An active listener waits until the speaker has finished talking without interrupting them. It is important to avoid imposing your own views and comments. Ask questions and paraphrase what has been said to the speaker to further clarify the situation

**Paraphrasing**, restating the sender's statement in your own words. This also ensures that the meaning of the communication is clearly conveyed and understood.

**Empathy** stepping into the other person's shoes and trying to understand how they feel.

**Questions:** Open-ended questions encourage and follow up particular issues by probing and clarifying for further information. They avoid 'yes' and 'no' responses that are more common to closed questions. Open questions usually begin with: How? Tell me about, what did you do when? Why? Etc.

### Self Help Question 3

Describe an example of how **you** have used the following styles of communication;

a) Reflective listening

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b) Showing empathy

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Positive communication does not simply occur when individuals work together. Educators need to develop and use a range of strategies to promote positive interactions and minimise conflict. When educators work together as a cohesive team, the quality of interactions with children and families is also greatly enhanced. This leads to a harmonious workplace in which all involved feel valued and respected.

### Using positive communication to create a team approach

#### What is a team?

A team is more than simply a group of people working together. A good team works towards a common goal using a range of positive and professional strategies. When there are clear goals that can be translated into professional practice, the team is more likely to achieve their desired outcome(s).

#### Advantages of team work

- Establishing and maintaining good relationships
- Working towards common goals
- Effective team performance
- Open communication
- Sharing the workload and responsibilities

- Sharing ideas and resources
- Working together to identify goals and strategies
- Conflict can be dealt with more effectively
- A harmonious and pleasant work environment

**Specific strategies to enhance communication and teamwork between educators**

- Provide new educators with relevant information about the service and program through an Educator handbook, induction and daily communication
- Maintain confidentiality
- Treat each team member with respect
- Be sensitive to the feelings and needs of other team members
- Provide constructive feedback to each other
- Trust each other
- Value the role and contribution of each educator
- Provide opportunities for all educators to have input and evaluate the program
- Appreciate and utilise educator skills and interests
- Provide support and assistance to each other
- Share responsibilities
- Have a flexible attitude towards team roles and responsibilities
- Greet each other by name
- Show genuine interest in the other person by using active and reflective listening
- Communicate ideas and opinions clearly and professionally
- Use a communication book or daily diary to pass on messages and record relevant information
- Hold regular educator meetings
- Use appropriate conflict resolution techniques to solve problems
- Ensure policies and procedures are up to date regarding communication, expected behaviour and grievances
- Opportunities for professional development

**Conflict Resolution – When the team breaks down**

Team work is important for the running of a smooth efficient team. When teamwork breaks down the team is not functioning optimally, and people work as individuals moving in different direction. Morale becomes low, respect and trust dissolve. Open communication and transparency are vital for a team to function properly. If issues do arise, then educators need to feel comfortable in raising those issues with each other. There needs to be clear policies and procedures in place that outline the procedures to address concerns and grievances in the work place.

**Self Help Question 4**

List any other strategies used in your workplace to enhance communication and teamwork amongst educators.

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## Positive relationships with children

### Outcome 5: Children are Effective Communicators

*'Communication is crucial to belonging, being and becoming' (EYLF, 2009, p38).*

*'Children use their communication skills particularly as listeners and speakers to engage in relationships with others. Play in all its dimensions provides children with opportunities for communication. This is important to the development of self identity including sense of personal empowerment, a sense of purpose, being, a positive outlook, becoming, and community responsibility, belonging' (FSAC, 2010, p38).*

As children grow and develop, they begin to form attachments to their primary caregivers. When adults are responsive to the cues of infants, the child begins to develop trust and feel secure with the adult. This bond is enhanced throughout childhood when care is positive and consistent. These early relationships are essential to the ongoing relationships children develop as they move through childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Positive relationships during childhood enable children to develop appropriate social skills and behaviours, and learn the social rules of their culture and community.

Communication is a vital part of developing and maintaining positive relationships.

*'From birth, children communicate with others using gestures, sounds, language and assisted communication' (EYLF, 2009, p38).* Children's communication skills develop rapidly during the early years. During this time children need communication partners who:

- Are responsive to their efforts to communicate
- Understand and adapt to their individual communication styles
- Adapt their language so children can understand
- Form positive relationships with them through frequent and consistent interactions.

Adults form positive relationships with children when they value the time they spend interacting and talking to children. The following strategies can assist educators working in children's services to develop positive relationships with children.

- Responding sensitively and appropriately to children's conversations
- Making children feel secure and welcome in the service
- Encouraging children's confidence as communicators
- Providing play experiences and environments that encourage communication and positive interactions with others
- Providing an environment that genuinely reflects the cultures of the children – providing resources, books, images, posters, objects that are inclusive to the cultures represented at your service and the local community
- Valuing children's language, interaction styles and ways of communicating
- Encouraging and reinforcing positive social skills
- Having realistic expectations of children's communication skills and behaviour
- Listening to children
- Acknowledging and being sensitive to children's needs and feelings
- Showing genuine enthusiasm and enjoyment during play and interactions
- Giving consistent feedback and encouragement
- Providing assistance when needed
- Recognising and valuing the child's own forms of communication
- Being inclusive and responsive to diversity
- Using positive language and strategies to guide children's behaviour
- Collaborating with children about play experiences, routines and procedures

Adults who are not responsive communicators tend to:

- Control conversations with children
- Talk for or at children

- Chat with other adults while the child is talking
- Try to keep children quiet
- Respond to children in an insincere way. E.g. “That’s nice dear...”
- Ignore children’s efforts to communicate
- Nag, correct or make fun of children’s attempts to communicate
- Use negative language and strategies to guide children’s behaviour.

By behaving in this way, we reduce children’s confidence and self-esteem.

Relating to children effectively requires a democratic or authoritative approach.

This approach is responsive, fair and consistent and enables children to develop self-control in a safe, non-threatening atmosphere.

### Types of Approaches



The **permissive** approach lacks control and allows the child to ‘control’ the adult. Adults usually ‘give in’ to the child’s demands to avoid conflict or having to manage the child’s behaviour.

The **authoritarian** approach is directed by the adult, who attempts to control the child’s behaviour and attitudes. The adult is demanding and expects compliance from the child through punishment, rewards and other inappropriate communication strategies.

These two approaches reduce children’s self esteem as little respect or trust is shown towards the child. Children usually show minimal self-discipline and are reliant on adults to control and determine their behaviour.

Positive communication is an important element of a **democratic/authoritative** approach and interactions with children enable them to develop a strong self-identity, self esteem and appropriate social skills. They learn it is acceptable to have positive and negative feelings and to express these feelings in appropriate ways.

#### Self Help Question 5

Describe a situation when you have used positive communication with a child or group of children.

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## Effective communication strategies with children

### Principle 1 Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

*'Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them' (EYLF, 2009).*

*'Educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing and social competencies. Exhibiting qualities of fairness, humour, sympathy and understanding builds respectful and trusting relationships with children, families, colleagues and other professionals. Educators foster independence and initiative thereby nurturing children's agency and leadership skills' (FSAC, 2010, p11).*

The following strategies can be used to further enhance the development of positive relationships with children.

- Get down to the child's level when you speak with them – make eye contact and engage in conversation
- Educators and children share decisions and collaborate with each other
- Make sure your facial expressions and body language match your words
- Encourage children to talk and express themselves
- Ask children open-ended questions
- Give children time to respond. Try not to answer your own questions.
- Role model clear and appropriate communication
- Use active and reflective listening techniques
- Show empathy by 'stepping into the child's shoes' and trying to understand how they feel
- Use children's names – avoid terms like "sweetie or dear"
- Use positive language to guide behaviour, e.g. "You need to walk inside" rather than "Don't run inside". Tell children what they can do rather than what they cannot do.
- Collaborate with children to develop guidelines and procedures
- Establish reasonable limits that the children are involved in developing and reviewing
- Use 'I' messages to let the child know how their actions or behaviour makes you feel
- Discuss and provide children with choices and involve them in the decision making process
- Use appropriate consequences to guide behaviour and follow through with them
- Reinforce positive interactions and behaviour
- Keep your promises to children
- Encourage children to use verbal language to communicate their feelings, problems and needs
- Use encouraging rather than discouraging statements
- Encourage pro-social behaviour – helping another person and not expecting anything in return

### Self Help Question 6

Reflect on your current practice on communicating with children. What changes do you need to make to enhance your communication with the children?

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Educators need to communicate effectively and respectfully with all children. When educators respect and value each child, they will begin to build trust and develop a positive rapport with each child. This is further enhanced by getting to know the individual needs, interests and abilities of each child through frequent and enthusiastic interactions. When educators show a genuine interest in children and respond to them with enthusiasm and sensitivity, and are culturally competent, they will begin to develop the foundations of strong and lasting relationships. The modelling of appropriate communication styles also enables children to learn positive ways of interacting with both adults and peers. This enables children to develop and maintain friendships within the group and feel a sense of belonging within the service. It also actively contributes to the development of a positive self-concept and healthy self esteem.

### **Using positive and effective communication strategies to guide behaviour and develop positive relationships with children**

Developing positive relationships with children is paramount to an engaging and positive environment. A child's behaviour can be affected by a variety of factors such as the environment, circumstances, other children, educators, their feelings and frustrations. Services should strive to create a welcoming environment, encourage communication and collaboration with children and families. Reflecting on the services practice regularly will ensure that the service is continually improving practise and providing quality care for the children.

Positive and effective behaviour management enables children to learn about the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others. It gives children the opportunity to be responsible for their behaviour, feel a sense of belonging to the group and develop positive self-esteem. Positive behaviour management occurs when educators use positive communication to monitor and guide behaviour.

1. Make sure your expectations are reasonable for child's age, needs and abilities. Have positive expectations of children. Put yourself in the child's shoes and consider how they are feeling.
2. Encourage the development of responsibility in children:
  - a. Provide opportunities for children to be responsible for themselves and others.
  - b. Model responsibility and leadership
  - c. Model empathy
3. Communicate your expectations clearly, positively and respectfully. Develop a positive rapport with children by taking a genuine interest in them. Model and encourage appropriate communication and interactions.

**Reflective listening** lets the children know you understand and have respect for the feelings they are verbally or non-verbally expressing. It is important to acknowledge children's feelings and help them express their feelings in a more appropriate manner.

**'I' messages** are useful when you need the child to understand the impact of their behaviour on themselves, other children and educators, the environment and/or yourself and you wish to focus on it.

They are non-blaming and expressed in a calm, non-threatening manner. 'I' messages consist of three aspects: **I feel** (stating your feeling) **when you** (describing problem behaviour) **because** (outline the consequences of the child's actions).

Let the children know what they can do, not what they can't do – use positive language to communicate with children.

4. Discuss and offer choices to children – within acceptable limits
  - a. Collaborate: Invite children to make and accept decisions by discussing appropriate choices. Allow them to accept the consequences of their choices – consequences should be reasonable and appropriate for the child.
  - b. Remember that having choices is a very useful technique with children. It gives them a sense of control over their actions.
5. Share the decision-making – children want to belong and be part of the group. The influence of peers can be very powerful in supporting children's decisions.
  - a. Encourage children to make their own decisions.
  - b. Actively involve children in group decisions that affect them.
  - c. Use group meetings to discuss issues and make decisions.

**Explore alternatives** assists the children in identifying and considering the options available to solve a problem. Encourage collaborative problems solving and negotiation.

- a. Clarification of problem (use reflective listening)
  - b. Brainstorming solutions
  - c. Choosing a solution and considering consequences
  - d. Obtaining a commitment from the child(ren)
6. Use appropriate consequences not punishment. Punishment should never be an option. See Education and Care Services National Regulations- Regulation 86-Protection from inappropriate activities or treatment.

**Avoid using punishment.** Children are learning to be responsible and make appropriate decisions through experiencing the natural and logical order of life. Punishment is an external force that is ultimately harmful to the child and should never be used under any circumstance. Consequences encourage the child to take responsibility for their behaviour and accept the natural and logical outcome of their actions. Natural consequences occur 'naturally' without adult intervention, while logical consequences require the intervention of another person. Consequences should always be related to the behaviour that has occurred. Children need to be given the choice to change their behaviour, rather than have it always determined by an adult.

7. Use encouragement not praise
  - a. Encouragement is sincere
  - b. Help children feel good about themselves by using encouragement.
  - c. Focus on positive behaviour and offer genuine encouragement when children behave in positive ways.
  - d. Learn some phrases of encouragement to use spontaneously.
  - e. Show appreciation for children's efforts and emerging skills.
  - f. Encouragement means noticing the effort a child has put into a task and showing genuine interest in the process.
8. Establish limits with the children
  - a. Use positive language.
  - b. Involve the children in developing and reviewing guidelines/rules.
  - c. Display guidelines/rules and use visual cues for younger children.
  - d. Modify/review limits as required.
  - e. Be firm, fair and consistent when implementing limits – always follow through with limits and consequences.
9. Reinforce positive behaviour – acknowledge children when they co-operate, contribute and act responsibly. Focus your interactions on positive behaviour.
10. Understand reasons that motivate behaviour – children engage in particular behaviours for many reasons. They may be bored or frustrated with the experiences offered or feel their needs are not being met by the educator. When adults are aware of the reasons that

motivate behaviour, they are more likely to use appropriate strategies to deal with the behaviour or find ways of modifying the program to be more responsive to children needs. Reflecting on why the behaviour has occurred and modifying the program and practice is effective in alleviating the behavioural impetus.

11. Clear behaviour management policies and procedures – this ensures children, educators and families understand the expectations, limits and consequences of inappropriate behaviour within the service. It also enables educators and families to be consistent in the way they manage children’s behaviour.
12. Redirection – suggest alternatives to a child who is upset or angry before their behaviour becomes inappropriate.
13. Relaxation – it may be useful to help children relax or provide physical comfort to children who are experiencing stress in their lives.
14. Acknowledge feelings behind behaviour – give feelings ‘names’ and let children know it is okay to feel a range of positive and negative emotions. Help children find positive or alternative ways of dealing with their feelings.
15. Plan to minimise inappropriate behaviour
  - a. A well planned program and environment based on children’s needs and interests ensures children are stimulated and not easily bored or frustrated.
  - b. Involve children in program and environment design.
  - c. Actively participate in children’s play.
  - d. Ensure educators manage behaviour consistently.
  - e. Role model appropriate behaviour.

**Self Help Question 7**

Focus on a particular child in your care and identify which strategies from 1-15 above would be most useful in guiding his/her behaviour

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16. Be assertive – have confidence in your own communication skills.

It is easy to communicate with children but it can be challenging to communicate in a way that is always positive and respectful. By making a few simple changes to the way we interact with children and critically reflecting on our practice, we can then develop a more positive and responsive relationship with them. This can lead to children who have a healthy self-esteem and who interact with others in thoughtful and considerate ways.

## **Conclusion**

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Positive communication is a vital component of meaningful interactions and relationships. When individuals communicate effectively they are able to be positive members of the social and cultural groups they exist in. Adults caring for children in children's services need to demonstrate positive and respectful communication towards children, families and other educators. Good working relationships between educators create a harmonious atmosphere that influences the behaviour and communication styles of the children within the service. This leads to a positive environment where children and educators feel valued and respected.

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## Assessment Task

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1. Identify five benefits of positive communication
2. Describe a situation in which you have demonstrated effective communication with an educator. Why do you think it was effective?
3. Describe the orientation and induction processes in your workplace and reflect on how they may be improved.
4. Provide a detailed example of positive communication with a child or group of children from your recent work experience.
5. List five ways in which your team gather information about children's needs, interests and abilities. How is this information used to enhance relationships and inform program planning?
6. Identify four communication strategies that can be used to encourage children to respond positively to diversity?
7. What current practices are used at your service to guide positive behaviour management? How can this process be improved?