



THE INCLUSIVE LINK

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BETTER COMMUNICATION WITH PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN!

Good interactions develop between adult and child when we understand the child's needs and wants and are able to take the appropriate action to meet these needs and wants.

Try to judge accurately the child's abilities and level of knowledge so that you give new information and the right kind of help at appropriate times. In order to do this, you must know what the child understands or is able to follow and how he is trying to communicate it. He will be showing you what he has not yet fully understood through non-verbal cues (i.e. eye contact, gestures, body language) and perhaps speech. By observing closely, you can better understand him i.e. if he is following the lesson. What he is showing you with his gestures is likely the information he has difficulty expressing in words. Therefore, interpret his non-verbal cues using the words that he would have said if he could. This lets him know that you have understood him thus giving him a good model for when he is ready to say it on his own!

Directing the child's attention by first getting his eye contact and then pointing to the task at hand will help him follow instructions. Such non-verbal cues increase the chances that this information will be remembered next time.



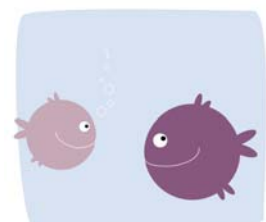
However, do not be surprised that children from the age of six, will avoid looking at you directly when trying to concentrate on difficult problems. This gaze aversion shows that they are thinking about the response or trying to work out an answer. It is good and appropriate! A six-year-old who continues to stare at the questioner probably does not understand the question or finds the given task too difficult.

If a child shows fewer positive facial expressions, he is more likely to be rejected by peers and judged to be less socially competent by his teachers. Therefore, if a child is having trouble making or maintaining friendships, it is possible that he is having trouble reading and sending non-verbal cues (like facial expressions). Coach him on the use of facial expressions to improve social competence as and when the opportunity arises (i.e. "You are angry when your friend took your toy").



Did you know?

The way you say things matters more than what you say... non-verbal signals of friendliness have more effect than what we actually say. Are we conscious of our posture, facial expressions and our use of volume/ pitch? Maintain a friendly pose (lean forward & closer to the child); smile more; use a higher pitch with upward lift instead of lower or louder pitch and volume.



STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN WITH POOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Approach the child by getting down to his physical level and maintain this until he breaks the greeting and moves away. Make mutual eye contact but don't stare. Smile!

Adapt the level of closeness (touch, orientation, gaze) to how well you know the child or the situation. Look for signals that he is uncomfortable (i.e. he distances himself or averts his gaze). Speak warmly, listen attentively when he speaks to you.



2. Set up **Small Group Learning Stations** to encourage each child to work at his/her own level of ability. Adapt your response to meet their needs. Promote group interaction by keeping your groups small (4-5 is ideal). Be sure to separate quiet and noisy areas in your classroom so the children can engage in both energetic play and quiet play or reading/looking at books.



3. For non-attenders, encourage them to try new experiences by explaining at the level they can understand. Call the child using a puppet or in an animated voice, simplify your language, be at his eye level and do something interesting with props or materials then wait to see what he does.



4. For non-participating children, give them a place to work with materials they can handle. Demonstrate what to do with the materials and encourage them to try it for themselves. Avoid asking too many questions!

5. For participating children, encourage by imitating them and joining in the activity using your own materials. Watch for subtle initiations such as small gestures, quick looks or soft sounds made (take them as a turn). Be sure you comment about what's happening and use questions that spark creative thinking (i.e. what could we do with this box?).



6. As a teacher, begin by joining in the play. Give a reluctant child a role to play, model the interaction for him and then fade out of the activity as soon as it is going well.

7. Act as a mediator if necessary while encouraging the children to pay attention to each other or address their peers more directly. Direct the conversation away from yourself; focus on encouraging interaction between the children, drawing quieter children into the conversations.



(References: Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon (2003) *Children's Unspoken Language; Enhancing Caregiver Language Facilitation in Child Care Settings* (2002) pub. by The Hanen Centre; *Teacher Talk Series, The Hanen Program*)

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