



Let Baby Tell You

Tips for parent-child communication (For parents of children under two years old)



Children are born to enjoy communicating with others; before they can talk, they are already expressing their needs and preferences through different non-verbal means (facial expression, body movements and voices etc). This “Tips for Parent-Child Communication” fact sheet and the video “Let Baby Tell You” were produced with the aim of helping parents to understand and equip with the essential skills of effective parent-child communication.

*This fact sheet complements the ‘Let Baby Tell You’ video and they are recommended to be viewed together to have a thorough understanding of effective parent-child communication. You can access the video by visiting the website of Family Health Service, Department of Health www.fhs.gov.hk or borrow a DVD from the doctors and nurses of the Maternal & Child Health Centre.

What is effective parent-child communication?

When we are communicating with our children, we tend to focus on our own ideas or the commands we give to children without attending to their responses or interests. Such “one-way communication”, like “you should put the rings here” or “bring the ball here”, is hard to elicit children’s response, and would not arouse their interest in talking.

Effective parent-child communication should be two-way and interactive in which both parents and child take their parts and enjoy the process. When you interact with your child, you can observe his facial expressions, voices and gestures. Try to guess the meanings of these non-verbal expressions and respond accordingly. In that way, your child will know that you try to understand him and he will in turn show interest and respond to you.

Parent-child communication takes place when you play with your child or when he expresses his needs to you. Play is an important part of children’s life. It is relaxing and creates opportunities for communication. Under this joyful atmosphere, children will be happy to explore and learn with you. You can make use of the time to teach him how to express his needs.

How to prepare for parent-child communication?

1. Feeling good

When you are feeling good, you will have the patience to observe your child’s behaviour during play and respond appropriately, so to achieve effective parent-child communication. When you are tired or in a bad mood, do not force yourself to play with your child. Instead, take a rest and relax yourself before playing with your child so that you will not miss the fun in it.

2. Understanding the characteristics of your child

Every child is unique and their pace of development varies. You should choose play activities tailoring to his stage and pace in development, temperament and interests. Games that are either too hard or too easy for your child will lower his interest to participate and take away the learning opportunity from him.

For more information on child development, please read the “Child Development” and “Parenting” series of leaflets published by the Family Health Service, Department of Health.

3. Timing and location

As long as your child is not too tired or feeling unwell, you can communicate and play with your child at any time by making use of daily situations you come in contact with.

Effective Skills for parent-child communication

With the preparation above, parent-child communication will be much easier when you apply the following skills.

1. Face-to-face

‘Face-to-face’ facilitates interaction. It allows you to observe your child’s behaviour while he can see your facial expression clearly. You may squat down or sit on the floor to adjust yourself to the child’s height.

2. Let the child take the lead

Letting the child take the lead during communication will increase his intent to communicate. He will be happy to explore and learn with you. You can first observe what the child is interested in or playing with, then follow his interest and be his playmate.

If your child does not show interest to the activity you choose, do not force him or you may annoy him.

Example: The mother wanted to play plastic rings with her daughter, but the child is more interested in throwing balls. So mother follows her interest and throws balls with her. At the same time, she describes her actions and teaches her related words.

3. Talking about the things in sight

Describing things in sight to children helps them understand more about objects and events, and also enhances their language development. Depending on the situation and children’s interest, you can use actions along with simple words to describe the objects or the actions involved. Use simple phrases to introduce vocabulary such as the names of objects, their characteristics or functions to children, so that they could easily understand the meanings.

Remember to make pauses when you talk. This will give the child a chance to respond and participate which increases the opportunity for him to express himself.

Example: When the father is playing with his son, he describes the situation to his son with simple words. While he hands the duck-shaped rings to his son, he says “Duckie”, “Put it through”, and describes its characteristics, “Here is a hole!”

4. Responding more and be appreciative

Praise and respond promptly to the child’s efforts in expressing himself. This encourages him to take part in the communication with you as well as motivate him to express himself. When the child expresses by making sounds or gestures, you could imitate his actions and guess what he means. At the same time, respond by describing his actions in simple words. Do praise him for his attempts.

Example: Father is playing plastic rings with his son. He praises the child for his participation. When the child shows impatience by his sounds, the father reckons he is no longer interested and responds, “You don’t want it? How about playing this one?”

Having reasonable expectation

Raising a child is full of joy and challenges. Every child has different pace and strengths in development; they may attain some skills in certain areas of development earlier while later in other areas.

Parents need to understand and accept that there will be individual differences in their children’s development. Sometimes, even you have used effective communication skills, his performance might not show significant improvement as you expected. When you can follow his pace in learning and guide him patiently, you will be happy to see your child developing happily in a relaxed environment.

If you have any questions about your child’s development, please feel free to contact the Maternal & Child Health Centre or other healthcare professionals.

Family Health Service, Department of Health 24-hour Information Hotline: 2112 9900

Family Health Service, Department of Health website: www.fhs.gov.hk

Child Assessment Service, Department of Health website: www.dhcas.gov.hk

