

3. The KISS Principle: Keep It Short and Simple

At a Glance...

Children require simple and direct instructions in order to complete tasks properly. Parents should remember to keep instructions short and simple to help their children remember and understand.

Time Required

30 - 45 minutes, depending on number of participants

Core Concept

Parents will give instructions to their children in a manner that is appropriate to the child's age and that is easy to understand.

Objective

Participants will be able to create clear and simple directions for children.

Materials

- "Communication Activity" (handout C-3-a)
- "Clarify and Simplify Worksheet"(handout C-3-b)
- "Clarify and Simplify Worksheet Key" (handout C-3-c)
- Recommended Supplemental Handouts:
SP 489-B Principles of Parenting: Communication – A Strong Bridge Between You and Your Child — available from your county UT Extension Office



Icebreaker

Ask for two volunteers to participate in an activity with you. *(If there is only one student, the class facilitator may serve as an activity participant.)* Ask the volunteers to sit in chairs back-to-back. Follow the instructions for the “Communication Activity” (handout C-3-a.) Allow other participants to move around the pair where they can see what is happening. Instruct them not to talk or to give assistance to either participant. After the activity has been completed, ask the following questions to the rest of the class.



Facilitator Script

What did you see when you observed this activity?

Were the instructor’s directions clear?

Did the listener follow the instructions as given?

What can you learn about communication from this process?

(Bring out the following points in the discussion:)

- Instructions must be very specific and detailed for unfamiliar tasks;
- Listening carefully is important to get the correct message;
- Lots of our communication comes from seeing what is being communicated as well as hearing it;
- Too many directions at one time can be confusing;
- Even when we think we are being clear, sometimes others understand things differently than we do.

Sometimes children don’t do what we ask because we don’t give clear directions. We give too many directions at once. We don’t make sure the child understood what we said. We don’t get their attention before we start to speak. Each of these problems can be corrected with a little work and practice. Here are some tips for giving clear messages to children.

- A. **Get the child's attention.** Children get very absorbed in what they are doing and often don't hear when we speak to them. Have participants brainstorm ways to get a child's attention. Possible responses include:
- Go to the child – don't yell from another room.
 - Speak the child's name.
 - Get down on the child's level – squat or sit so that you are eye-to-eye with the child.
 - Gently touch the child on the arm or shoulder.
 - Get rid of other noisemakers, such as the television or radio – turn them down or off during your conversation.
- B. **Give clear directions.** Your child may not understand what you mean by the statement "clean your room." To a child that may mean shove everything under the bed or in the closet to be put out of sight. Instead of saying clean your room, say "Put your dirty clothes in the basket in the closet; hang or fold your clean clothes and put them away; put your toys in the toy box; and make your bed."
- C. **Give simple directions.** The previous instructions may be clear, but there are too many commands strung together. Instead of listing four or five things that need to be done, give the child one direction such as "Put the dirty clothes in the basket in the closet and come back to me when you finish." After that chore is finished, give the next direction and go in that fashion until the job is complete. As children get older and have done those chores several times, you will be able to give directions such as "Clean your room" and know that they understand what you mean.
- D. **Make sure the child understands what you said.** A simple way to check for a child's understanding is to ask him or her to repeat what you just said. If the child can repeat what you said, chances are, he or she will remember what you expect. This is a good practice to follow when taking children somewhere you have had trouble in the past, such as the grocery store. Before you go in the store, have the child tell you what the rules of behavior are for going to the store. If you have consequences for misbehavior, have the child tell you what will happen if he or she does not obey.

Give participants the “Clarify and Simplify Worksheet” (handout C-3-b.) Ask participants to pair off and work together to try to make the statements on the page simpler and clearer. If the class had more than two participants, have each pair share their changes with the rest of the group. Refer to the “Clarify and Simplify Worksheet Key” (handout C-3-c) if they need help. Remember there is more than one correct response.

Final Thoughts



Work Tip

When family members communicate effectively problems that arise from misunderstandings are reduced (e.g., not having a ride when needed, forgetting things at home, problems with teachers.) This can result in less time off from work to handle those unplanned situations.

Homework

Ask participants to think of a task they expect their children to do, such as cleaning their room or setting the table, and think about how they give instructions. Have them do the following:

- think about how the task can be broken into smaller segments for a young child.
- write the instructions on a paper in steps.
- next time you ask your child to do that task, use the new step-by-step instructions and see if there is a difference in how well the task is completed.
- listen as you give instructions to your children and try to give clearer and simpler directions.
- note instances where you had problems or where your children failed to do as they were asked.
- at the next class meeting, we will check on how everyone is doing giving directions.