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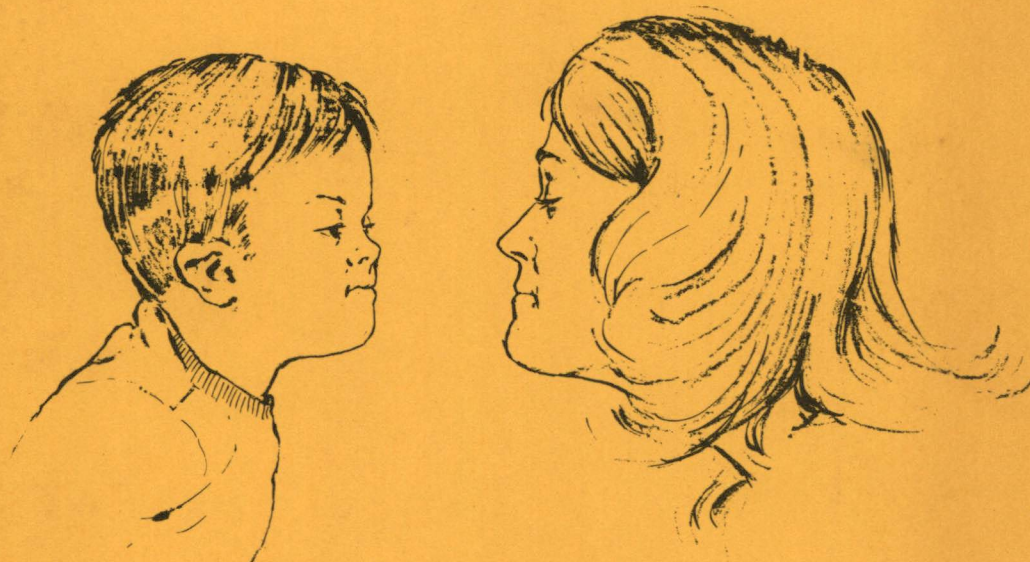
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SELF ✓
INSTRUCTION

COMMUNICATION

UNIT 6



PARENTAL SKILLS PROGRAM
HANDICAPPED CHILDREN



SELF-INSTRUCTION WORKBOOK

UNIT VI

COMMUNICATION

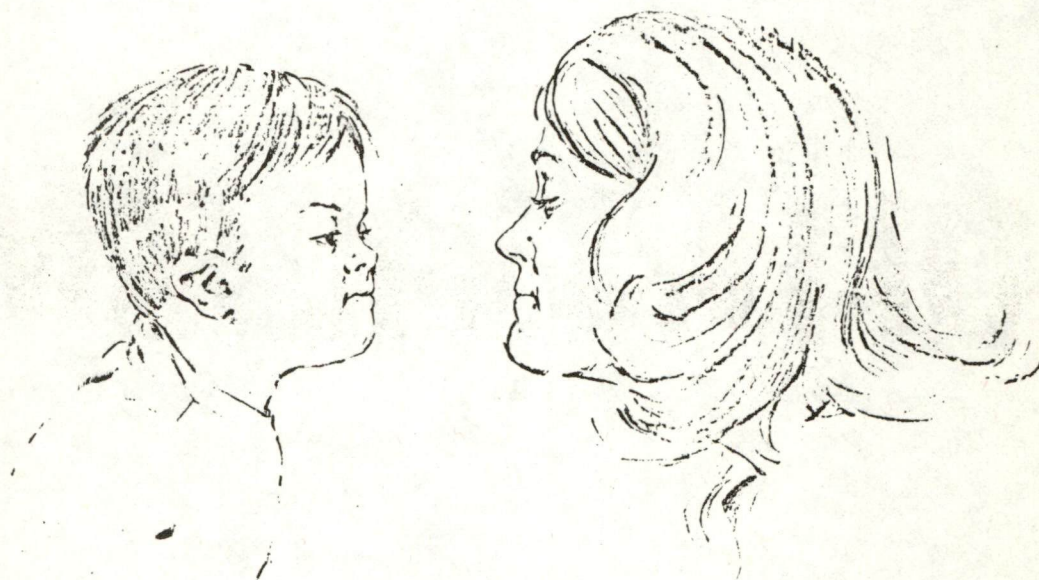
PARENTAL SKILLS FOR PARENTS OF
HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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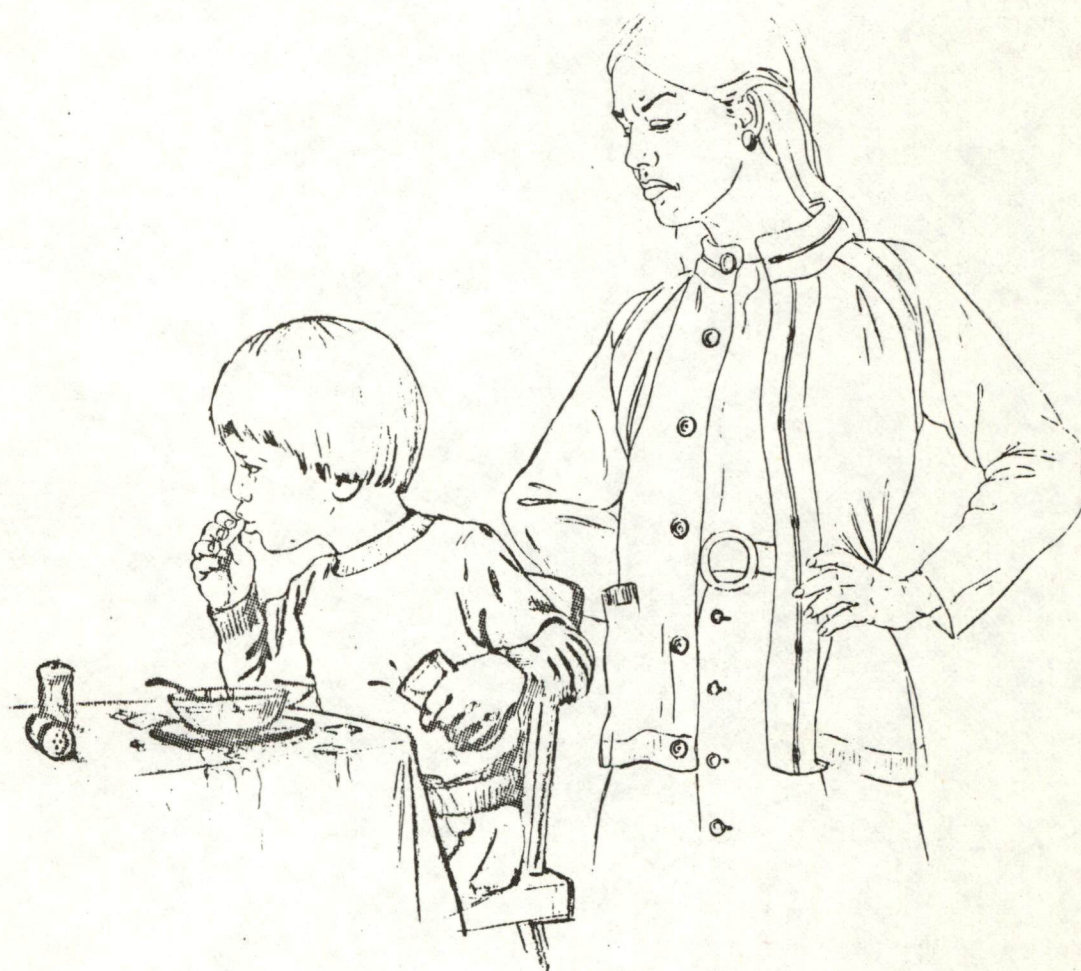
COMMUNICATION



INSTRUCTIONS: Turn the page and begin reading. Take a sheet of paper and slide it down the page as you read. Throughout the unit, you will come to exercises marked with a big circle. You should complete each exercise as you come to it. Then slide the paper down and check your answer with the answer provided immediately following the exercise. If you are not satisfied with your answer, go back and read the part just before the exercise and then redo the exercise. When you are satisfied with your answer, proceed with your reading.

UNIT 6

THIS IS THE SIXTH UNIT IN THE PARENTAL SKILLS PROGRAM. THIS UNIT DEALS WITH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPING PARENTAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS.



COMMUNICATION

IT IS EASY TO SEE EVIDENCE OF POOR COMMUNICATION IN MANY FAMILIES. PARENTS AND CHILDREN HAVE DIFFICULTY IN COMMUNICATING IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. THEY DO NOT ALWAYS COMMUNICATE IN WAYS THAT GENERATE COOPERATION, MENTAL HEALTH AND GROWTH.

WHY?

WE CAN ASK THE QUESTION, WHY? WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES PARENTS POOR COMMUNICATORS? LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE CAUSES OF POOR COMMUNICATION.

PARENT SCRIPT

USING A TRADITIONAL BUT INAPPROPRIATE PARENT SCRIPT IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF POOR COMMUNICATION. THESE ARE THE SCRIPTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN COPIED FROM ONE'S OWN PARENTS AND FAMILY. THEY ARE INAPPROPRIATE FOR TWO REASONS: FIRST, THEY INCLUDE FEW BEHAVIOR SKILLS FOR PARENTS TO USE IN ESTABLISHING GOOD COMMUNICATION, AND

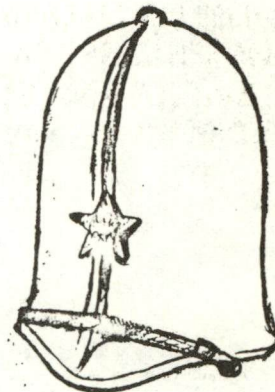
OBJECT OF CONTROL

SECOND THEY TREAT THE CHILD AS AN OBJECT TO BE CONTROLLED. BECAUSE THE CHILD IS CONTROLLED, PARENTS TEND TO TALK AT AND COMMAND THEIR CHILD. THIS KIND OF COMMUNICATION IS EXTREMELY ONE-SIDED.

OPEN — CLOSED

ACTIVATOR _____ CONTROLLER

CLOSED



OPEN ——— CLOSED

VI-3



"CLOSED"

IN THE CLOSED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, PARENTS JUDGE, EXCLUDE AND WITHHOLD INFORMATION FROM THEIR CHILD.

JUDGING

JUDGING IS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON PARENTAL BEHAVIORS IN A CLOSED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM. HERE THE PARENT'S COMMUNICATION WITH HIS CHILD IS FOCUSED ON JUDGING WHAT THE CHILD SAYS AND DOES. HE DOES THIS BY SAYING SUCH THINGS AS, "YOU NEVER DO ANYTHING RIGHT," OR "YOU SHOULD HAVE DONE IT LIKE I TOLD YOU," OR "YOU ARE A BAD BOY." THE PARENT PUTS THE CHILD DOWN AND EMPHASIZES HIS MISTAKES. THIS DAMAGES THE CHILD'S FEELINGS OF WORTH AND SELF-ESTEEM.

EXCLUDE

IN A CLOSED SYSTEM, PARENTS OFTEN EXCLUDE THEIR CHILD. THEY EXCLUDE BY FAILING TO LISTEN AND NEVER ASKING HOW THE CHILD FEELS, AND NEVER INVOLVING THE CHILD IN MAKING PLANS.

FAIL TO:

- LISTEN
- ASK
- INVOLVE

IN A CLOSED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM PARENTS FAIL TO LISTEN TO THEIR CHILDREN. WHEN A PARENT DOESN'T REALLY LISTEN CHILDREN EVENTUALLY QUIT TRYING TO COMMUNICATE. PARENTS ALSO EXCLUDE THEIR CHILDREN BY NEVER ASKING ABOUT THEIR IDEAS AND FEELINGS. BY FAILING TO ASK, PARENTS SHOW THEY ARE NOT CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THE CHILD THINKS OR FEELS. ANOTHER WAY PARENTS EXCLUDE IS WHEN THEY FAIL TO INVOLVE THEIR CHILD IN DECISION-MAKING AND PLANNING. WHEN PARENTS FAIL TO INVOLVE, THEY DENY THEIR CHILD A CHANCE TO CONTRIBUTE AND SHARE.

WITHHOLDING

FINALLY, PARENTS IN A CLOSED SYSTEM WITHHOLD INFORMATION FROM THEIR CHILD. THEY ACT AS CENSORS AND FAIL TO PROVIDE THEIR CHILD WITH ENOUGH INFORMATION SO THAT THINGS MAKE SENSE OR SEEM REASONABLE. THIS GENERATES MISUNDERSTANDINGS, CONFLICT AND STRESS.

INFORMATION:

- FACTS
- FEELINGS
- PROBLEMS

THREE TYPES OF INFORMATION TEND TO BE WITHHELD: FACTS, FEELINGS AND PROBLEMS. PARENTS WITHHOLD FACTUAL INFORMATION THEY THINK THE CHILD CAN'T HANDLE. FOR EXAMPLE, INFORMATION ABOUT SEX OR THE CHILD'S PHYSICAL CONDITION IS FREQUENTLY WITHHELD. PARENTS ALSO WITHHOLD INFORMATION ABOUT THEMSELVES. THEY NEVER TALK ABOUT HOW THEY FEEL OR ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS. THEIR WITHHOLDING GENERATES A COUNTER BEHAVIOR IN THE CHILD. HE LEARNS TO WITHHOLD INFORMATION FROM HIS PARENTS ABOUT WHAT HE IS DOING, HOW HE FEELS AND HIS OWN PROBLEMS.

PERSON FOCUS

WHEN CORRECTING THE CHILD, A PARENT IN THE CLOSED SYSTEM TENDS TO FOCUS ON REJECTING THE CHILD'S TOTAL PERSON RATHER THAN THE SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR THAT THE PARENT DISLIKES. THE PARENT SAYS, "YOU ARE WRONG", RATHER THAN "YOU ARE A GOOD BOY BUT IT WAS WRONG TO YELL." WHEN THE PARENT FOCUSES ON THE PERSON BY SAYING, "YOU" THE CHILD TENDS TO FEEL TOTALLY REJECTED, UNLOVED AND TOTALLY THREATENED.



Below is a list of statements which represent four kinds of "closed" communication behaviors. Match each statement to the appropriate behavior and write the statement numbers in the blanks beside each behavior. HINT: Each behavior should have two statements listed beside it.

"Closed" Communication Behavior

Statement

Judges _____, _____

Excludes _____, _____

Withholds _____, _____

Person Focused _____, _____

1. "You never do anything right."

2. "You did that exactly as I told you."

3. Parents who never talk about themselves

4. Not giving information the child needs

5. Rejecting the child's total person

6. Fails to listen.

7. Criticizing the child rather than correcting his behavior

8. Doesn't involve the child

(Judging 1 and 2; Excludes 6 and 8; Withholds 3 and 4 and, Person focused 5 and 7.)

"CLOSED"

- . RESTRICTED
- . LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- . THREATENED
- . BLOCKED

IN MANY WAYS THE COMMUNICATION OCCURRING IN A CLOSED SYSTEM IS DESTRUCTIVE TO THE CHILD. THE SYSTEM RESTRICTS EXPRESSION OF HONEST FEELINGS. IT FOSTERS FEELINGS OF UNWORTHINESS OR LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND THE CHILD FEELS THREATENED AND BLOCKED.

IMMATUREITY

- . DEPENDENT
- . PASSIVE
- . IRRESPONSIBLE
- . INWARD

THE NET RESULT OF A CLOSED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IS TO KEEP THE CHILD IMMATURE. THE SYTEM REWARDS THE CHILD FOR BEING PASSIVE AND INWARD, AND KEEPS HIM FROM BECOMING RESPONSIBLE.



List 4 possible effects a "closed" communication system has on a handicapped child.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(A "closed" communication system tends to (1) restrict the child's expression of honest feelings, (2) fosters feelings of unworthiness, (3) makes the child feel threatened and blocked and (4) keeps a child immature.)



"OPEN" SYSTEM

THE OPPOSITE TYPE OF COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IS THE OPEN SYSTEM. THIS IS THE SYSTEM USED BY THE ACTIVATOR PARENT. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD IS TWO-WAY RATHER THAN ONE-WAY.

"OPEN"

- ACCEPTANCE
- INCLUSION
- SHARING

THE OPEN COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IS A RELATIONSHIP WHERE THERE IS ACCEPTANCE, INCLUSION AND SHARING.

ACCEPTED

IN THE OPEN SYSTEM THE CHILD IS ACCEPTED. HE IS TREATED AS A PERSON AND NOT JUST AS A CHILD. HE IS RESPECTED AS AN INDIVIDUAL WITH RIGHTS, NEEDS AND PREFERENCES. HE IS NOT JUDGED AT EVERY TURN.

INCLUDED

IN THE OPEN COMMUNICATION SYSTEM THE CHILD IS, TO THE DEGREE POSSIBLE, INCLUDED IN DISCUSSIONS, DECISION-MAKING AND PLANNING. HIS IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE CONSIDERED BY OTHERS.

SHARES

IN THE OPEN SYSTEM, THE PARENT SHARES INFORMATION WITH THEIR CHILD. THEY SHARE IDEAS, FEELINGS AND KNOWLEDGE. IN TURN, THE CHILD LEARNS TO SHARE HIS IDEAS AND FEELINGS WITH HIS PARENTS.

BEHAVIOR FOCUS

WHEN A PARENT IN THE OPEN SYSTEM CORRECTS HIS CHILD HE FOCUSES ON THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOR RATHER THAN THE CHILD'S PERSON. "I LIKE YOU, BUT I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN YOU SPLASH WATER." IN THIS WAY THE CHILD'S PERSON IS NOT THREATENED AND HE TENDS TO SEE HIS UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR OBJECTIVELY.



Below is a list of statements which represent the four kinds of "open" communication behaviors. Match each statement to the appropriate behavior. HINT: Each behavior should have two statements numbers written beside it.

"Open" Communication Behavior

Statements

1. Parents talk about their feelings with their child.
2. Child's ideas are considered
3. The child is a person with rights
4. Children are encouraged to talk about their own ideas.
5. "I like you but I don't like what you did".
6. Child participated in decision-making
7. The child is not judged at every turn
8. Parent tries to see undesirable behavior objectively.

(The Accepts statements are 3 and 7. The Includes statements are 2 and 6. The Shares statements are 1 and 4. The Behavior focus statements are 5 and 8.)

"OPEN"

- . EXPRESSION
- . HIGH SELF-ESTEEM
- . CONFIDENCE
- . GROWTH

IN AN OPEN SYSTEM, COMMUNICATION HAS A HEALTHY EFFECT ON THE CHILD. THE SYSTEM ENCOURAGES PARTICIPATION, AND SELF-EXPRESSION AND FOSTERS A FEELING OF WORTH AND HIGH SELF-ESTEEM. IT ALSO DEVELOPS CONFIDENCE AND FACILITATES GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.

MATURITY

- . INDEPENDENCE
- . ACTIVE
- . RESPONSIBLE
- . OUTWARD

THE NET RESULT OF AN OPEN COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IS TO HELP THE CHILD BECOME MATURE. THE SYSTEM ENCOURAGES THE CHILD TO BECOME INDEPENDENT, ACTIVE, RESPONSIBLE AND OUTWARD.



List five possible effects an "open" communication system has on the handicapped child.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(An "open" communication system encourages (1) free expression of ideas, it fosters feelings of (2) positive self-esteem in the child, develop his (3) confidence, and facilitates (4) growth and (5) maturity.)

"OPEN"
COMMUNICATION
SKILLS

NOW LET US TAKE A LOOK AT THE SKILLS INVOLVED IN OPEN COMMUNICATION. SOME OF THESE SKILLS MAY BE NEW TO YOU BECAUSE MOST PARENTS HAVE NEVER HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN OPEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

SKILLS

- . EMPATHY
- . INVOLVING
- . SHARING
- . SENDING
- . LISTENING

OPEN COMMUNICATION REQUIRES SKILLS IN FIVE AREAS: YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO EMPATHIZE, HOW TO INVOLVE, AND HOW TO SHARE IDEAS, FEELINGS AND INFORMATION. YOU ALSO NEED TO KNOW HOW TO SEND CLEAR MESSAGES AND HOW TO LISTEN.

EMPATHY

TO BREAK THE HABIT OF JUDGING AND CORRECTING EVERYTHING YOUR CHILD DOES, IT IS IMPORTANT TO LEARN TO EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR CHILD. EMPATHY IS A MATTER OF PUTTING YOUR SELF IN YOUR CHILD'S PLACE AND TRYING TO LOOK AT THE WORLD AS THE CHILD SEES IT. TOO MANY PARENTS JUDGE A CHILD FROM AN ADULT VIEWPOINT RATHER THAN VIEWING THE CHILD FROM WHERE HE IS.

EMPATHY

- . IDENTIFY
- . INQUIRE

HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP EMPATHY? FIRST, MAKE A HABIT OF ASKING YOURSELF QUESTIONS LIKE, "HOW WOULD I FEEL IF I WERE HER AGE," OR "HOW WOULD I FEEL IF THAT WERE HAPPENING TO ME?" SECOND, MAKE A HABIT OF INQUIRING ABOUT HOW YOUR CHILD FEELS AND THINKS. ASK QUESTIONS LIKE, "HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN DADDY FUSSES AT YOU?" OR "WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST AT SCHOOL TODAY?" PUTTING YOURSELF IN YOUR CHILD'S PLACE AND KNOWING HOW HE FEELS WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HIM. WE ARE NOT SO LIKELY TO JUDGE WHEN WE UNDERSTAND.

INVOLVING

PARENTS OFTEN FAIL TO INVOLVE THEIR CHILDREN WITHOUT REALIZING IT. THEY FORGET TO SEEK THE CHILD'S IDEAS OR LET HIM HAVE HIS SAY. TO INVOLVE YOUR CHILD YOU NEED TO INCLUDE HIM IN MAKING PLANS, INVOLVE HIM IN MAKING DECISIONS, AND ENCOURAGE HIM TO EXPRESS HIS IDEAS. INVOLVEMENT HELPS A CHILD COOPERATE BECAUSE HE HAS HAD A PART IN A DECISION OR PLAN.

INVOLVING

- INCLUDE
- RESPECT

HOW DO YOU INVOLVE A CHILD? FIRST, YOU INCLUDE HIM WHEN THERE IS A DISCUSSION. ASK HIM HIS IDEAS, WHAT HE WOULD LIKE TO DO, HOW HE WOULD HANDLE SOMETHING. SECOND, YOU SHOW THAT YOU RESPECT HIS IDEAS BY USING HIS IDEAS TO HELP SOLVE A PROBLEM. YOU LET HIM DO SOMETHING THE WAY HE WANTS TO. WHEN A CHILD IS INVOLVED AND HAS INFLUENCE, HE BEGINS TO UNDERSTAND HE HAS SOME CONTROL OVER WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM.

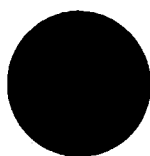
SHARING

SHARING IS IMPORTANT IN COMMUNICATION AND IT IS A TWO-WAY PROCESS. WHEN PARENTS SHARE IDEAS AND FEELINGS, THEY GIVE THEIR CHILD INFORMATION ABOUT THEMSELVES. THEY ALSO SET THE STAGE WHERE THE CHILD IS FREE TO TALK ABOUT HOW HE FEELS AND THINKS.

SHARING

- TELL
- ENCOURAGE

HOW DO YOU SHARE? FIRST, SEEK OUT CHANCES TO TELL YOUR CHILD HOW YOU FEEL. THE IDEA IS TO LET YOUR CHILD KNOW THAT YOU ARE HUMAN, THAT YOU FEEL SAD, GLAD AND AFRAID AS MUCH AS HE DOES. SECOND, ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TALK ABOUT HOW HE FEELS. THIRD, BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVERREACT WHEN YOUR CHILD REVEALS INFORMATION THAT UPSETS YOU. THIS CAN CAUSE YOUR CHILD TO LIE OR WITHHOLD INFORMATION. CHILDREN LIE BECAUSE THEY ARE PUNISHED FOR TELLING THE TRUTH.



Below is a list of examples of three kinds of "open" communication behaviors. Match the example to the behavior it represents and write the number in the blank.

"Open" Communication Behavior

EMPATHY

Identify _____
Inquire _____

INVOLVE

Include _____
Respect _____

SHARE

Tell _____
Encourage _____

Examples

1. "How do you feel when someone does this to you?"
2. "It really makes me mad when you just throw your clothes on the floor."
3. "Where would you like to go today?"
4. "How would I feel if this happened to me?"
5. "Let's do what Jimmy suggested today."
6. "You look sad; maybe you'll feel better if you tell me why."

(The answers are: Identify = 4; Inquire = 1; Include = 3; Respect = 5; Tell = 2; and Encourage = 6.)

SENDING

SENDING CLEAR MESSAGES IS IMPORTANT IN OPEN COMMUNICATION. MANY PARENTS SEND CONFUSING AND CONFLICTING MESSAGES. THEN THEY WONDER WHAT IS WRONG WITH THEIR CHILD WHEN HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, DOESN'T RESPOND OR REFUSES TO COOPERATE.

CLEAR MESSAGES

- CONSISTENT
- SIMPLE
- DIRECT

FOR MESSAGES TO BE CLEAR THEY MUST BE CONSISTENT, SIMPLE AND DIRECT. THE YOUNGER THE CHILD THE MORE CONSISTENT, SIMPLE AND DIRECT THEY MUST BE.

CONSISTENT

HOW DO YOU SEND A MESSAGE THAT IS CONSISTENT? FIRST, REMEMBER THAT YOU SEND EACH MESSAGE IN TWO WAYS: ONE IS BY YOUR BODY LANGUAGE, YOUR FACIAL EXPRESSION, TONE OF VOICE, GESTURES; THE OTHER WAY IS BY WHAT YOU ARE SAYING. YOUR BODY LANGUAGE AND YOUR WORDS SHOULD SEND THE SAME MESSAGE IF IT IS TO BE CONSISTENT. CHILDREN LEARN EARLY TO WATCH THEIR PARENTS' BODY LANGUAGE FOR MESSAGES. THEY ARE CONFUSED WHEN YOUR WORDS SAY ONE THING AND YOUR BODY LANGUAGE ANOTHER. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN YOU LOOK ANGRY BUT SAY SOMETHING NICE.

SIMPLE

CLEAR MESSAGES ARE SIMPLE. THAT IS, THE MESSAGE USES WORDS THAT FIT THE CHILD'S LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING. TO SEND CLEAR MESSAGES, PHRASE YOUR MESSAGE TO SUIT YOUR CHILD. THE YOUNGER YOUR CHILD THE SHORTER THE WORDS AND SENTENCES SHOULD BE. AS YOUR CHILD DEVELOPS, TAILOR THE MESSAGE TO FIT HIS ABILITY AND UNDERSTANDING.

DIRECT

THE MORE DIRECT A MESSAGE THE CLEARER IT IS LIKELY TO BE TO YOUR CHILD. DIRECT MESSAGES PROVIDE INFORMATION ON WHAT, WHEN AND WHY. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO PICK UP HIS TOYS, SAY, "JOHN, PLEASE PICK UP YOUR TOYS AND PUT THEM IN THE TOY BOX NOW SO I CAN SWEEP THE FLOOR." THIS MESSAGE TELLS WHAT YOU WANT, WHEN AND WHY. IF YOU HAD BEEN INDIRECT AND SAID "JOHN, IT SURE WOULD BE NICE IF YOU PICKED UP YOUR TOYS," HE MIGHT NOT GET THE MESSAGE.

INFORMATION

- DROP-OFF
- RESHAPING

REGARDLESS OF HOW CAREFUL YOU ARE IN MAKING YOUR MESSAGES CLEAR, SOME INFORMATION "DROP-OFF" AND INFORMATION "RESHAPING" IS GOING TO OCCUR. YOUR CHILD WILL FAIL TO PICK UP EVERYTHING YOU SAY. IN ADDITION, HE MAY RESHAPE THE INFORMATION IN HIS OWN MIND. THAT IS, IT MAY MEAN SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO HIM THAN TO YOU. THIS DROP-OFF AND RESHAPING PROCESS IS CHARACTERISTIC OF EVERYONE. IT OCCURS MORE FREQUENTLY IN YOUNGER CHILDREN, BUT IT OCCURS AT ALL AGES.

FEEDBACK

BECAUSE OF INFORMATION DROP-OFF AND RESHAPING, YOU NEED TO CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD UNDERSTANDS YOUR MESSAGE. THE BEST WAY TO DO THIS IS THROUGH FEEDBACK. IN FEEDBACK YOU SAY TO YOUR CHILD, "TELL ME IN YOUR OWN WORDS WHAT I HAVE JUST TOLD YOU." WHEN THE CHILD FEEDS BACK THE INFORMATION, YOU CAN SEE WHAT HE HAS MISUNDERSTOOD OR MISSED AND THEN CORRECT IT. IN SOME CASES, YOU MAY HAVE TO ASK YOUR CHILD TO SHOW YOU WHAT HE WOULD DO, OR HOW HE WOULD DO IT, TO BE SURE YOUR MESSAGE GOT ACROSS.



From the list of words on the left, choose the correct word needed to complete the sentence on the right and write it on the line.

Words

Drop-Off _____

Simple _____

Reshaping _____

Feedback _____

Consistent _____

Direct _____

Sentences

1. When you match your body language with your verbal language your messages will be _____.
2. Messages that fit a young child's level of understanding are _____.
3. Messages that tell what you want, when and why are _____.
4. Regardless of how clearly a message is sent, some information will not be received because of _____.
5. Parents can check to see how much information has actually been received by using a technique called _____.

(The answers are: 1 = consistent; 2 = Simple; 3 = Direct; 4 = Drop-Off and Reshaping; and 5 = Feedback.)

LISTENING

ANOTHER SKILL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR OPEN COMMUNICATION IS LISTENING. LISTENING DOES NOT COME TO PARENTS AUTOMATICALLY. IT IS A SKILL THEY MUST LEARN.

LISTENING

RECEIVE INFORMATION
ENCOURAGE TALKING
CHECK ON ACCURACY

MOST PEOPLE THINK THE PURPOSE OF LISTENING IS JUST TO RECEIVE INFORMATION. BUT THAT IS NOT ALL THAT IS INVOLVED. WHEN YOU LISTEN, YOU SHOULD ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO CONTINUE TALKING, AND YOU NEED TO CHECK ON THE ACCURACY WITH WHICH YOU ARE RECEIVING THE INFORMATION.

LISTENERS

- PASSIVE
- ACTIVE

MOST LISTENERS ARE ONE OF TWO TYPES. THEY ARE EITHER PASSIVE LISTENERS OR ACTIVE LISTENERS. PARENTS WHO ARE PASSIVE LISTENERS USUALLY STALEMATE THE CONVERSATION AND TURN THE CHILD OFF. ACTIVE LISTENERS TURN THE CHILD ON.

PASSIVE

- QUIET
- JUDGING

THE PARENT WHO IS A PASSIVE LISTENER IS QUIET, TENDS TO SIT STILL AND DISPLAYS LIMITED BEHAVIOR IN RESPONSE TO THE CHILD. THE VERY QUIETNESS OF THE PARENT TENDS TO INDICATE TO THE CHILD THAT THE PARENT IS JUDGING HIM, AND IT MAY INDICATE LACK OF INTEREST.

ACTIVE

- RESPONSIVE
- NON-JUDGING

THE PARENT WHO IS AN ACTIVE LISTENER IS RESPONSIVE AND NON-JUDGING. HE LEANS FORWARD, RESPONDS AND LISTENS WITH HIS WHOLE BODY. THE PARENT CLEARLY SHOWS CONCERN, INTEREST AND ATTENTION TO WHAT THE CHILD IS SAYING. THE GOAL OF THE ACTIVE LISTENER IS TO ENCOURAGE CONTINUED TALKING BY THE CHILD AND TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE CHILD IS SAYING.

ACTIVE LISTENER

- NODDING

ONE BEHAVIOR THE ACTIVE LISTENER USES IS NODDING. THE PARENT FREQUENTLY NODS HIS HEAD IN RESPONSE TO WHAT THE CHILD IS SAYING. THE NODDING EXPRESSES APPROVAL AND INTEREST AND ENCOURAGES THE CHILD TO CONTINUE TALKING. YOU SHOULD NOD YOUR HEAD "YES" WHEN YOU ARE LISTENING TO YOUR CHILD TO INDICATE THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED.

ACTIVE LISTENER

- NODDING
- UH HUH

ANOTHER TECHNIQUE THE ACTIVE LISTENER USES IS REFERRED TO AS THE "UH HUH." THE PARENT PERIODICALLY SAYS "UH HUH," OR "GOOD", OR "I SEE," OR "I AGREE WITH YOU." THE CHILD IS REWARDED BY THIS VERBAL RESPONSE AND IS ENCOURAGED TO CONTINUE TALKING. YOU SHOULD ALWAYS VERBALLY REWARD YOUR CHILD FOR TALKING TO YOU BY RESPONDING TO WHAT HE IS SAYING WITH "I SEE", OR "THAT'S RIGHT", OR "UH HUH."

ACTIVE LISTENER

- NODDING
- UH HUH
- LONG PAUSE

A FINAL TECHNIQUE USED BY THE ACTIVE LISTENER IS THE LONG PAUSE. WHEN THE CHILD STOPS TALKING, THE PARENT LOOKS AT HIM AS IF HE EXPECTS THE CHILD TO SAY SOMETHING AND THEN WAITS. WHEN THE CHILD THEN TALKS, THE PARENT RESPONDS BY NODDING AND SAYING "UH HUH."



Write the correct word in the blanks below.

1. Listening can serve three purposes. They are: _____, _____, and _____.
2. One kind of listener is Passive - his listening is usually _____ and judging.
3. The Activator listener uses three types of listening behaviors. They are: _____, _____, and _____.

(The answers are: 1 = to receive information, to encourage talking and to check on accuracy; 2 = quiet and 3 = nodding, uh huh and the long pause.)

MENTAL HEALTH

OPEN COMMUNICATION PROMOTES MENTAL HEALTH AND GROWTH IN A HANDICAPPED CHILD. AS PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN, YOU HAVE A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE YOUR PARENTING JOB EASIER AND MORE REWARDING BY DEVELOPING OPEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS. WHEN YOU EMPATHIZE, INVOLVE AND SHARE WITH YOUR CHILD HE WILL GROW. WHEN YOU SEND CLEAR MESSAGES AND LISTEN YOU CAN AVOID MANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

IN THE FOLLOWING SECTION, YOU WILL FIND
PRACTICE ACTIVITIES. THESE ACTIVITIES WILL
PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO APPLY
WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED IN THIS UNIT
TO PROBLEM SITUATIONS WHICH ARE SIMILAR
TO THE PROBLEMS PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED
CHILDREN FACE.

"THE ODD MAN OUT"

THIS EXERCISE WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY
FOR YOU TO ANALYZE THE COMMUNICATION
SYSTEM BEING USED IN A REALISTIC SITUATION.

The scene is a counselor's office where a mother has taken her handicapped son for a visit with his counselor. The son is sixteen years old.

Counselor: How are you feeling?

Mother: He's feeling fine. He has been bothered with having headaches lately.

Counselor: Headaches. Have you had headaches?

Mother: Yes, they are a kind of migraine. I told him the reason he has them is that he is so tense.

Counselor: What have you been doing lately?

Son: Well I've

Mother: He's been mostly watching television. I've asked him if he wants to sit out in the yard, but he's afraid he'll get sunburned.

Counselor: Well, have you done anything besides watch television?

Son: Well, one time I

Mother: That's right. One time he went for a ride with his father. They went out to look at the sailboats at the marina.

Counselor: Do you like sailboats?

Son: Well, I would like to paint....

Mother: That's right. He has expressed an interest in drawing pictures of boats. The problem is that it's so hard for him to draw with a hook.

Counselor: Now wait a minute. Let me follow up on this painting, and let me talk to him. Do you like to draw, son?

Son: I do but I need to learn. I need paper, pencils and....

Mother: We have those. Why I'll get you anything you want. I just don't want you to get in over your head.

Counselor: Have you ever been to an art museum?

Mother: This is the first I have ever heard of him wanting to go to a museum. Do you want to go, son?

Son: (silence)

IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS, TRY TO ANSWER EACH QUESTION BELOW.

1. What is occurring in this communication situation? _____

2. What kind of communication system is in operation? Open _____ Closed _____

3. What could be some of the long term results if this communication system continues? _____

(Check your answers with the answers on the next page)

ANSWERS

1. The mother in this scene is being a Controller. She is not allowing her child to participate. She is forcing the counselor to exclude the child by not giving the counselor a chance to listen to the child. She is not giving her son an opportunity to become involved in this meeting.
2. The mother is using a "Closed" Communication System.
3. This kind of system can be very destructive to the child. It's net result will be to keep the child immature. Such a mother probably wants her child to be passive and do as she says. This system also encourages the child to be inward by not allowing him to express his own thoughts and feelings. Because he is not encouraged to express his feelings and ideas, this child may develop low self-esteem. He may always be irresponsible and develop a need to be with a Controller parent at all times. If he does not receive a reward for his ideas, he may eventually stop trying to communicate.

"THE UNVACATION"

THIS EXERCISE WILL GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AN "OPEN" COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FOR DEALING WITH A SPECIFIC REAL SITUATION.

School is almost out and in a short time Mr. and Mrs. Wright and their 12 year old handicapped daughter, Ann, will be able to go on vacation. One evening at dinner, everyone starts talking about their ideas for a trip. Mr. and Mrs. Wright agree that the family will spend a week in a cabin by a lake not far away. Ann hates this idea, starts crying and yells that she would rather stay home all summer than go there. Both parents are surprised to hear this because Ann went to the cabin last year and never said she wasn't happy. They look at each other as if to ask, "What's with Ann?" Finally Mr. Wright says, "Ann, we're going to the cabin and that's final. You'll go where we go. Now stop yelling, or we'll really give you something to yell about."

Use what you now know about communication to answer the following questions.

1. Mr. and Mrs. Wight are both using a closed communication system. What makes their system closed?

2. If Mr. and Mrs. Wight were using an open communication system, how would this scene be different? Write a short description of Ann and her parents using the behaviors of an open system, such as sharing, active listening, empathy, involving, including, and respecting.

(The answers appear on the next page)

ANSWERS

1. There are many behaviors which Mr. and Mrs. Wright use which makes their communication system closed. First, they obviously consider Ann an object to be controlled. Whatever they say they expect her to do.

They have completely excluded her from any discussion or involvement with plans for a vacation. They tell Ann where they have decided to go. They don't expect any arguments from Ann and when she complains, they are surprised and angry with her.

They have refused to listen to Ann's reasons for not wanting to go. After all, Ann has to do what they tell her to do. Because Ann also knows she can't talk to her parents, she never told them why she hated going to the cabin last year. Ann has learned that her parents are not interested in how she feels or what she thinks because they never ask Ann about her ideas and feelings. The communication system between Ann and her parents is closed not only in this situation, but in all other situations as well.

2. If Mr. and Mrs. Wright were using an open communication system, Ann and her parents would be able to share ideas and feelings about their vacation. Ann would have been able to tell her parents why she didn't care about the cabin last year or why she doesn't want to go back this year. Mr. and Mrs. Wright would also talk to her about why they want to go to the cabin. Maybe they enjoy it or maybe they can't afford anything else.

When sharing ideas, everyone would be practicing active listening. Ann and her parents would not only be interested in each other's ideas, they would also look interested by nodding and saying "Yes" or "Uh huh".

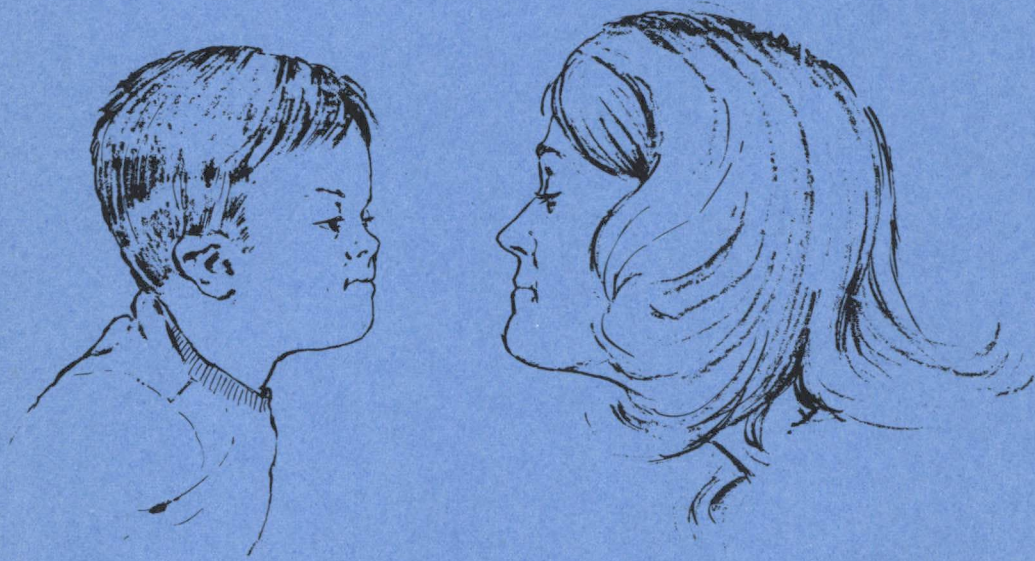
Ann and her parents could have used empathy in order to help them understand each other. Ann's parents might have considered why a 12 year old girl wouldn't want to spend her vacation at an isolated cabin. Ann could have used empathy to consider why parents with such heavy responsibilities at home would enjoy the peace and quiet of a mountain cabin.

And finally, if Mr. and Mrs. Wright were using open communication they would try to involve Ann in decision-making by including her in discussions about their vacation and respecting her ideas by using them whenever possible.

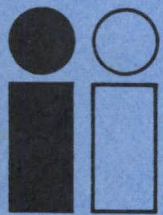
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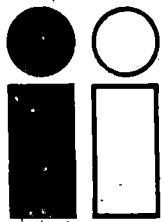
COMMUNICATION

UNIT 6



**PARENTAL SKILLS PROGRAM
HANDICAPPED CHILDREN**





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FIRST DRAFT

TEXT

UNIT VI - COMMUNICATION

PARENTAL SKILLS FOR PARENTS OF

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

PROGRAM

By

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UNIT VI

COMMUNICATION *

Communication between parent and child is often a problem. Parents seem to think that the reason they are having problems communicating with their children is because of the children. They feel the children won't listen to them, or ignore what they say. In this chapter we will look at the communication process - that is, we are going to look at how a parent's behavior has a dramatic effect on the quality of communication that occurs between a parent and child, and how children often copy parent communication behaviors. Sometimes parents with very good intentions create a communication fog where little communicating can occur.

*

As you read this chapter, please keep in mind that this section, as the other sections in the program, was written for parents regardless of the handicap of their child. For this reason, some portions of this unit may not be applicable to your child. For example, blind children cannot see body language as seeing children can, and consequently some of the things said about body language do not apply to blind children. Deaf children cannot hear the tone of voice or inflections in the voice, so that things said about this may not apply to a deaf child. Children who cannot speak, cannot be asked to repeat something back to a parent; so the things said in this section about getting verbal feedback from a child won't apply to a child who cannot speak. In the unit of the program which relates specifically to the handicap of your child, special emphasis will be placed on the unique problems related to communication between a parent and a child with your child's handicap.

On the other hand, much of what is said in this unit will apply to your handicapped child, to your other children and to your communication with your spouse and other people.

At one end of the scale there is closed communication. The major characteristic of closed communication is that the communication is one-way, from parent to child. That is, the parent talks at and commands the child. This parent is concerned with little other than controlling the child. Such closed communication generates conflict and dependence. It restricts expression and self-esteem and blocks growth.

At the other end of the scale there is open communication. The major characteristic of open communication is that it is two-way. The communication is from parent to child, and from child to parent. In open (two-way) communication the parent is not primarily concerned with controlling the child, but instead is concerned with providing information, receiving information, sharing and cooperating. Two-way, open communication encourages expression, learning, and cooperation between parent and child. It generates mental health, feelings of esteem and growth.

PARENT SCRIPTS - COMMUNICATION

Most communication between a parent and child leans toward one end of the scale or the other. Using a traditional or inappropriate parent script is the main cause for closed communication. (d) Some traditional parent scripts include few communication skills for parents to use in establishing open communication, and they focus on the child as an object to be controlled. Because the child is thought of as "to be controlled", parents talk at and command the child. This kind of communication is closed and one-way: parent to child.

Where a parent tends to follow the Controller, Martyr, or Abdicator script, communication leans heavily toward being closed. When a parent follows the Cavalier script, the communication tends to be slightly less closed. When a parent follows the Activator script, the communication tends to be open.

(d) See 16, 27, 29.

Because both parents do not necessarily follow the same script, a child and one of his parents may have closed communication, while the communication between the child and his other parent may be open. You see this in many families. Sadly, however, in many other families there is closed communication between the child and both of his parents.

CLOSED COMMUNICATION

Let us look at closed communication. What is it that parents do that tends to cause one-way, closed communication with a child? The answer to the question is that parents:

1. Judge
2. Exclude
3. Withhold Information

Judging (e)

Judging is one of the most common sets of parental behavior in a closed communication system. When a parent's main strategy is to control his child, he tends to judge the child all the time. He sets himself up as a judge of what is good and bad about what the child is doing and communicates his displeasure when the child does something wrong. Such parents rarely let their child know when he does something that pleases them.

Parents who judge all the time, send messages to their child indicating, "you never do anything right," or "you should have done it this way," or "you are

bad." They frown, glare, and in their own body language they let the child know they disapprove. Some parents yell and scream their disapproval. Some parents communicate their disapproval with physical punishment. Some communicate their suffering caused by the child's misbehavior.

The problem with the strategy of control and judging is that the messages sent tend to be damaging to the child's feelings of worth, competence and self-esteem. The child gets the idea that he does everything wrong, that he's always displeasing his parent. It adds to his failure backlog.

When parents focus on sending messages of their displeasure, such messages tend to be a physical or emotional punishment to the child. To avoid such punishment and threats to self-esteem, and because they know the parent is judging all the time, children tend to withdraw from the punisher and withhold information about what they do and what they think. They may do things behind their parent's back, they may lie, and in general they fail to communicate to their parents. In this way judging creates one-way communication.

Excluding ^(f)

Another major set of parental behaviors which cause closed communication is "excluding." Parents exclude their children when they fail to:

- . listen
- . ask
- . involve

^(f) See 11, 14, 17, 37.

Fail to Listen ^(g) - When parents make a habit of not listening to the child, it causes closed or one-way communication. When parents do not really listen, children eventually quit trying to communicate. Why should they try? They won't be heard. This is what happens with the Abdicator parent who is never around to listen, or who simply does not really hear what the child is trying to tell. It also happens with the Controller, who often does not listen because he believes he knows what the child is to think and what the child should do.

Fail to Ask - Failing to ask a child about his ideas, opinions and wishes causes closed communication. When parents do not think of their child as a person with rights, needs and preferences, they often fail to ask their child's opinions. By failing to ask, parents show they are not concerned about what the child feels, wants or thinks.

Fail to Involve - Parents often make the big mistake of failing to involve a child in deciding things for himself, failing to allow a child to contribute to making decisions or plans, and in general excluding the child from a large number of actions that could lead to his growth and self-esteem. Failure to involve is a major cause for lack of cooperation, and of closed communication.

^(g) See 1, 3, 30.

Withholding

The third set of parental behaviors involved in creating closed communication is withholding information. In a closed communication system parents act as censors and fail to provide the child with enough information so that things make sense to the child or seem reasonable. This withholding of information creates misunderstandings, conflict and stress.

Parents tend to withhold three types of information:

- . Facts
- . Feelings
- . Problems

Facts - Parents often withhold factual information which a child really needs in order to know about reality, to make good choices, and to learn. Some parents simply don't take time to answer questions. With handicapped children, parents frequently withhold information about the child's physical condition or about things the child can never do because of his handicap. For example: one blind girl said that she had no idea she was blind and that other people could see until she went to school at six years of age. Lack of information can result in fear about the unknown, restrict interests on the part of a child, and distort his view of reality.

Feelings - Parents often fail to talk about how they feel. They tend to keep their feelings hidden. Such parents usually do not know how to discuss what

they "really" think, what they "really" feel. They have not learned the behavior of sharing feelings, and are sometimes very uncomfortable if they try. Another reason a parent might not share feelings is because he does not trust the child to understand. A third reason parents can fail to share feelings is because they want to make the child think of them as a "super" person with no doubts, uncertainties, or negative feelings. When we fail to share our feelings, we withhold information about ourselves and thereby force our child to react to us with limited information.

We communicate not only with words; we also communicate with our facial expressions, our gestures, the rapidity with which we talk, the softness or loudness of our speech, how we sit, stand, etc. Sometimes when we try to hide our feelings by not talking about them or acting as if we don't have them, we tell them anyway with our body language. This can confuse a child. For example, we can say "I'm not angry", but everything else about us tells our child we are very angry.

Another problem with withholding feelings is that parents serve as models for their child. Parents who withhold information about their feelings, teach the child to withhold information about his feelings. When the child and the parent both withhold information about feelings, it creates a closed communication system.

Problems - Many parents withhold problems from their children. They assume that since a child can't do anything about the problem, why should they needlessly worry the child. There is some truth in this. There are things children can't do anything about, and perhaps shouldn't be burdened with; but parents often overprotect the child, especially a handicapped child, from sharing in and helping solve problems within the family. For example, if a family has financial problems, children should know it. They shouldn't be frightened or threatened, but they do need to know the facts so that they can understand what is going on in the family, why parents are perhaps upset. They can then share in helping the family stay on a budget, etc. Children sense when there are problems. Often if they don't have the facts they think they caused the problems, or let their imaginations run away and magnify them.

When children are protected from problems, they often get an unrealistic view of life, and get little experience in managing problems or seeking solutions. Often such overprotected children tend to panic when they do face a problem of their own for they have not had opportunities to see and understand how people solve their problems.

Results of Closed Communication

There are many negative results of closed communication. Such a system has

long range destructive effects upon the child's development. (h) The messages sent by the parent in a closed communication system tend to make the child feel judged, watched and guilty. The expression of honest feelings is restricted. Feelings of failure, unworthiness and low self-esteem occur. Emotional growth and learning are made much more difficult for the child. Closed communication obviously damages mental health.

For the handicapped child, closed communication can result in the child becoming dependent for lack of information. It can result in the child becoming inward and isolated. Under closed communication, a handicapped child may become passive and perhaps irresponsible. All of these factors contribute to immaturity. (i)

OPEN COMMUNICATION

At the opposite end of the communication scale there is open communication. In this system, communication between parent and child is two-way rather than one-way. Using Activator parent behaviors tends to create this kind of system. (i)

In open communication there is:

- . Acceptance
- . Inclusion
- . Sharing

(h) See 2, 27, 29, 32, 33, 35, 38, 42.

(i) See 12.

(i) See 34.

As noted previously, the strategy of the Activator parent is to develop his child's potential, and to help his child grow and become self-sufficient and mature. The open communication system fosters conditions where these goals can be accomplished.

Accepted, Not Controlled (k)

When a parent accepts his child as a person and respects his rights, needs, and preferences, he does not tend to judge the child at every turn. When the parent has realistic expectations for the child, the parent is not continually disappointed and displeased. Consequently, instead of concentrating on controlling and judging, the accepting parent tends to pass on messages of approval. When the parent is focusing on developing his child's skills, and is using words of approval as rewards, he tends to omit pointing out failures and getting upset when the child makes errors. Instead, he is sending messages of encouragement and approval for what the child has done well. When children are accepted they tend to be open and honest in their communication. They do not have to find means to avoid the punishing behaviors of a displeased, angry parent.

Includes (l)

Parents who include the child to the degree possible (depending upon the child's age and his level of development) make it a practice to ask the child his opinion, ideas and preferences during discussions, decision-making, and family

(k) See 8.

(l) See 39, 40.

planning. When these opinions, ideas and preferences are heard and are considered by the parent, the child develops a habit of self-expression.

Sharing Information (m)

Another factor which generates open communication is sharing. Parents who believe that children should know how others feel, how they think and that they should be given information as they mature and are able to manage it, usually share information with the child. Open communicative parents share ideas, feelings and information with their child. The child in turn learns from the parent how to share his ideas, feelings and information. With such understanding there tends to be a good deal of mutual trust. Parents who know and trust their children are rarely afraid that some bit of knowledge will harm the child. Instead they feel that the child needs to have as many facts as possible in order to make decisions and thus develop in the direction of maturity.

Benefits of Open Communication (n)

In an open system, communication has a healthy effect on the child. It makes him feel accepted; it encourages participation; and it helps him express his feelings, fears, likes and dislikes. Open communicating fosters feelings of worth and self-esteem. It reduces fears, generates interest, and facilitates growth and

(m) See 3, 7, 32.

(n) See 15, 32.

self-confidence. It encourages the child to become independent, active, responsible and outward. The long-range result of open communication between parents and their child is that the child develops maturity.

OPEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

There are some specific skills which parents need to know in order to be open communicators. (o) As we said before, many parents may not have learned these skills as they were growing up. If they follow an old parent script, perhaps they have never thought about how they communicate.

Let's look at the skills a parent needs in order to be an open communicator:

Open Communication Skills

- . Empathy
- . Involving
- . Sharing
- . Clear Messages
- . Listening

Empathy (p)

Empathy is a matter of putting yourself in your child's place and trying to look at the world as your child sees it. Too often parents judge a child from an adult viewpoint rather than viewing the child from where the child is.

(o) See 18.

(p) See 26.

If you have a habit of judging your child a lot, one way to break the habit is to learn to empathize with your child. How can you do that, especially if you have no idea how it feels to have your child's handicap?

Identify - First, you can make a habit of asking yourself questions like, "How would I feel if I were her age" or "How would I feel if that were happening to me?" Ask yourself, "I wonder if my child feels the way I would feel?"

Inquire ^(q) - Second, you should make it a practice to inquire about how your child feels and thinks. Ask questions like, "How do you feel when daddy fusses at you?" or "What did you like best at school today." You can also inquire without asking, by carefully observing your child's reactions. You can soon learn about the things that upset him, or the things that make him sad or happy.

Involving ^(r)

Parents often fail to involve their child without realizing it. They forget to ask the child his ideas or let him have his say. They forget to let the child have a choice. To involve your child you need to include him in making plans. You need to have him help make decisions and encourage him to express his ideas. Involvement helps a child become cooperative because he has had a part in a decision or plan.

^(q) See 34.

^(r) See 34.

How do you involve a child? First, include him when there is a discussion, especially when the discussion concerns him or affects him. Ask his ideas, what he would like to do, how he would handle something. Second, show that you respect his ideas by using them to help solve a problem. Let him do something the way he wants to. When a child can influence what happens to him, he begins to understand he has some control over his world.

For small children you can involve them in decisions concerning what happens to them during the day. They can decide when to play and when to do a task. You can let them decide what they want to wear or what they want for lunch. If you often let your child help decide when and what to do, such involvement will help communication remain open. When you involve a child in overall plans for the family or have a family council where your child, or children, can express their feelings and wishes, there will be more of an air of openness. People tend to communicate to others when they feel their communicating has some influence. Children are no different than adults in this regard. Far too often parents of handicapped children make all the decisions for the child. They decide and speak for him.

Counselors often tell how they try to involve a handicapped child in a plan which concerns him, and how the parent will not let the child talk. Such parents tell the counselor what the child wants and do not let the child contribute to the conversation.

Sharing ^(s)

Sharing is a two-way process. When parents share ideas and feelings, they give the child information about themselves. They also set the stage where the child is free to talk about how he feels and thinks.

Tell ^(t) - How do you share? First, seek out chances to tell your child how you feel. The idea is to let your child know that you are human, that you feel sad, glad, and afraid much as he does. You share your feelings with him, and you might tell him what made you sad or glad. If your child makes you angry by something he has done, you might explain exactly what made you angry and why.

Explain that it is a certain behavior you dislike, but that you like your child. When sharing your feelings you might say such things as "When I'm hungry, I sometimes get fussy," or "When I'm so rushed, sometimes I don't have as much patience as I could have," or "When I work hard at my job, it makes me feel tired some days." You can say such things as "This nice weather makes me happy," or "Sometimes I just get sad, but I know it will always go away before long." You can also say such things as "I'm glad you are my little boy; I always wanted a boy," or "I'm glad you are my little girl; I wanted a little girl more than anything." You can say, "I like you just the way you are." or you might say, "I like most everything you do, but when

^(s) See 3.

^(t) See 34.

you yell and scream it makes me very jumpy. Please stop."

If you are in a bad mood, worried about something which does not involve your child and which he would not understand because he's too young, you can say, "I know you've noticed I'm a little fussy today. I want you to know it is nothing you have done. It's just a bad day." Telling your child your ideas is also important. Remember, your child has to learn to live with you. The more he knows about what you think and what you feel, the better he will be able to get along with you.

Asking ^(u) - Sharing is a two-way matter. So you need to know what your child thinks and feels. The more you know about your child, the better you will be able to get along with him.

You should encourage your child to talk about how he feels, what he thinks, and what his fears and worries are. Children often have fears and worries that a parent can quickly help the child understand and overcome. When parents talk about how they feel, they provide a model to their child of how to talk about feelings and ideas. They create an atmosphere in which it seems only natural to talk about ideas and feelings and worries and fears. It is sad that in many families this atmosphere does not exist. When children do not hear how others feel or what others worry about, they can think they are the only ones in the world who think or feel as they do. This is especially a

^(u) See 34.

problem with a handicapped child who does not have a lot of friends with whom he can talk.

You can ask your child about his feelings in any number of ways, but here are some: If you notice your child's body language saying "I'm worried," you might say, "Sue, come talk to me a few minutes. Is something I've done bothering you, or is it something else? Maybe it would help if you talked about it. I know if I'm worried, it always helps me to say it out loud to someone."

You can also ask such direct questions as "What happened at school today that was most fun?" It helps to ask direct questions about feelings, likes, and dislikes. You are more likely to get an answer. If you ask "how did it go today?" you may get a quick "okay" and you have not really communicated.

Be careful how you respond when your child is talking about how he feels, the ideas he has, or what he thinks. If you overreact, scold or fuss, you close down the communication. A child will soon learn that if he tells you how he feels, you'll get upset. So he will merely stop telling. Let's take an example: Mary comes home from play and is crying. Her mother says, "What happened?" Mary begins to tell a sad story of how the other children laughed at her because of her brace, and how they called her "Bracelet"

and made her feel terrible. If, as a parent, your reaction is to get angry at Mary for crying, and if you say something like "You shouldn't let some little thing like being called 'Bracelet' bother you," Mary might not tell you the next time she is hurt. On the other hand, if you said something like "I'll bet that did make you feel bad. It would have made me feel uncomfortable too. I guess some children are not very thoughtful about what they say. I sure know how you feel," then you have empathized with Mary and she will know it and appreciate it. The child will likely talk about her feelings again.

Clear Messages (v)

Many parents send confusing or conflicting messages to their children without realizing it. Then they wonder what is wrong with their child when the child doesn't understand, doesn't respond, or refuses to cooperate. Clear messages have some simple characteristics. Clear messages are:

- . Consistent
- . Simple
- . Direct

Consistent - For a message to be clear it should be consistent. How do you send a message to a child that is consistent? First, remember that you send each message in two ways. (w) The most obvious way is by words; the less obvious way you also send every message is by your body language. Body

(v) See 5, 12.

(w) See 0, 12, 19, 28, 41.

language is your facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, how you stand or sit, etc. (x)

Your body language and your words should send the same message if it is to be consistent. Children learn very early to watch their parent's body language for messages. They are confused when your words say one thing and your body language says another; for example, when you look mad, but say something nice. Under such circumstances, children don't know what to think. In some very interesting research, Bugental, Love, Kaswan, and April (1971), found that more mothers of disturbed children produced conflicting messages - critical statements spoken in a positive voice - in communicating with their children than did mothers of normal children; this puts the child in a "double-bind" as he is receiving conflicting messages.

Sometimes when you are aware that your child is watching your body language, you might explain why you are angry, happy or sad. That is an example of a clear message.

Simple - Clear messages are simple. That is, a message uses words that fit the child's level of understanding. To send clear messages, phrase your message to suit your child. The younger your child, the shorter the words and sentences should be. As your child develops, tailor the message to fit his ability and understanding. You need to think about how you say things to your child.

(x) See 13, 25.

Direct - The more direct and to the point a message, the clearer it is likely to be to your child. Direct messages provide information of what, when and why. For example, if you want your child to pick up his toys, say, "John, please pick your toys up off the floor and put them in this toy box now, so I can sweep the floor." This message tells what you want, when and why. If you had been indirect and said, "John, it sure would be nice if you picked up your toys," he might not get the message, because you have not told him when or why.

Information Drop Off and Reshaping

There is one other thing you need to take into account about getting your message clear. That is, regardless of how careful you are in making your messages clear, a lot of information "drop off" and information "reshaping" is going to occur. Your child will fail to pick up everything you say. In addition, he may reshape the information. That is, what you say may mean something different to him than to you.

This process of drop off and reshaping of information is characteristic of everyone. It occurs more frequently in younger children, but it occurs at all ages, even with adults. You can plan on some information drop off and information reshaping to take place when you send a message to someone else.

Feedback ^(y)

You may well ask, "If there is bound to be information drop off and information reshaping, how am I going to be sure my child understands what I'm saying; and furthermore, if I also will drop off information and reshape it, how am I ever going to be sure I get my child's full message?"

You can minimize this problem by the process of feedback. You need to check to make sure your child understands your message. In feedback you say to your child, "Tell me in your own words what I have just told you." When your child "feeds back" the information, you can see what he has misunderstood or missed and correct it. In some cases, you may have to ask your child to show you what he would do, or how he would do it, to be sure your message got across.

You should give your child feedback to see if you got his message right the first time. You can say such things as, "You are telling me you have to catch the bus early tomorrow and you need a note with permission to go on a field trip." Or you might say, "What you are really telling me is that you are hurt and unhappy." In this way, you can be sure you understand your child. He can correct you if you have misunderstood him.

Listening ^(z)

Most people think the purpose of listening is just to receive information. But

^(y) See 4, 16, 20, 21, 22, 32, 36.

^(z) See 1, 3, 30.

that is not all that is involved. When you listen, you should be hearing what your child is saying, but you should also be encouraging your child to continue talking. Also, as you listen, you need to check on the accuracy with which you are receiving the information.

Most listeners are one of two types. They are either passive listeners or active listeners. Parents who are passive listeners tend to stall the conversation and turn the child off. Parents who are active listeners tend to turn the child on and keep the child talking.

Passive Listeners

Are you a passive listener? A parent who is a passive listener is quiet, tends to sit very still and shows little response to the child as he talks. The very quietness of the parent tends to indicate to the child that the parent is judging him, and it may also indicate lack of interest.

Active Listeners

Perhaps you are an active listener. The parent who is an active listener is responsive as he listens to his child, and he is non-judging. He leans forward, responding and listening with his whole body. This parent clearly shows concern, interest and attention to what the child is saying. The goal of the active listener is to encourage continued talking by the child and to understand exactly what the child is saying. Here are some of the ways an active listener behaves:

- . Nodding (or Touching)
- . Uh huh
- . Long Pause

Nodding (or Touching) - One behavior the active listener uses is nodding (or for a blind child, touching). The parent frequently nods his head in response to what the child is saying. The nodding expresses approval and interest and encourages the child to continue talking. You should nod your head "yes" when you are listening to your child to indicate that you are interested. (If your child is blind, you can pat him in response to what he is saying to express your approval and interest).

Uh Huh - Another technique the active listener uses is referred to as the "uh huh". The active listener periodically says "uh huh" or "good" or "I see," or "that's right". The child is rewarded by this verbal approval and is encouraged to continue talking. You should be sure to verbally reward your child for talking to you by responding to what he is saying. For a deaf child, your rewards may need to be non-verbal gestures like a "thumbs up" sign, or some other gesture.

Long Pause - A final technique used by the active listener is the long pause. When the child stops talking, the parent looks at him as if he expects the child to say something and then waits. When the child then talks, the parent responds by nodding and saying "uh huh."

Check on Accuracy

The active listener periodically checks to see if he is getting his child's message. That is, he repeats back what the child has just said, or paraphrases what the child is saying. This is the active listener's way of giving the child feedback on what the parent is hearing to make sure there is no information drop-off and reshaping by the parent. In checking to see if he's getting the child's message, the active listener does not make negative comments and judgments about what the child is saying. He is only asking the child if that's what he means.

OPEN COMMUNICATION PROMOTES MENTAL HEALTH AND GROWTH

As a parent of a handicapped child you have a real opportunity to make your parenting job easier and more rewarding by developing open communication skills. When you empathize with your child and involve and share with him, your child will grow. When you send clear messages and listen you can avoid many misunderstandings.

SUMMARY

In this unit we indicated that in some families communication is closed and in some families communication is open; that closed communication has sad effects on people, especially children. It causes self-doubts, lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem. It creates tension and misunderstanding and often leads to conflict.

Closed communication is one-way, from the parent to the child. The most typical behaviors of parents which cause communication to be closed are: (1) judging; (2) failing to ask, listen and involve the child, and in general excluding the child; (3) withholding information about facts, feelings and problems; and (4) focusing on correcting the child rather than focusing on building behaviors and skills. Closed communication keeps children immature and rewards them for being passive and inward. It can keep a child from becoming responsible.

Open communication, on the other hand, is two-way, from parent to child and from child to parent. The most common behaviors used by parents which tend to create open communication are: (1) accepting the child as a person with rights, needs and preferences; (2) including and involving the child in problems and plans; (3) sharing ideas, feelings and information; and (4) focusing on building desirable behaviors and skills in a child rather than focusing on stopping undesirable behaviors. Open communication encourages good mental health and growth by encouraging expression, fostering self esteem, reducing fears, and helping the child learn. The skills parents use in open communication are empathy, involving, sharing, sending clear messages, and actively listening.

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