



National Training and Development Curriculum

FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

FACILITATOR CLASSROOM GUIDE

Modified January 2022

PREPARATION

To prepare for this class, you should:

- Review the facilitator preparation information included in this **Guide** along with the handouts.
- Review the Resources for this theme found on CapLEARN (<https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>) or NTDC website (<https://ntdcportal.org/>).
- Develop an agenda that includes this theme and any other themes you will be conducting along with it during the class.
- Ensure that participants have a copy of the **Participant Resource Manual** and that it is accessible to them. This **Manual** will be used during all themes and will have handouts needed by participants. Facilitators should have copies of the handouts for the theme available in case participants do not bring their **Manual** to class. If the theme is being taught on a remote platform, facilitators should have the handouts available so that they can share in the chat and/or email to participants who do not have their **Manual**
- Bring any materials you need for the activities.
- Review any videos or other electronic media used in this theme, if any, and plan the mechanics of how you will present them. Media for this theme are listed in the Materials and Handouts slide. Review the instructions for each media clip (e.g., to pause or stop at a particular time stamp). The videos can be played in different ways, including:
 - Play them from a flash drive or the computer's hard drive using a media player app
 - Link to them from CapLEARN or the NTDC website.
- Practice playing the media for the theme. Ensure that you have the files and apps you need, that your links and connections work, and that you know when to pause or stop the media clip if appropriate.
- If training on a remote platform, make sure all participants have the link available to access the class and that you have all videos, PPT's and handouts ready for use.
- If training in person, ensure that a room is available and set up, with the following:
 - Enough tables and chairs for all participants
 - Projector and screen (check that it works with the computer you will be using)
- Classroom-based activities have been adapted so that they can be done on a remote platform. Adaptations will be marked as follows so that they can be easily spotted throughout the Facilitator Classroom Guide: **[Adaptation for Remote Platform](#)**



MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

- Participants are expected to have the **Participant Resource Manual** available for every session.

MATERIALS NEEDED

You will need the following if conducting the session in the classroom:

- A screen and projector (test before the session with the computer and cables you will use)
- A flipchart or whiteboard and markers for several of the activities. A flipchart with a sticky backing on each sheet may be useful and will allow you to post completed flipchart sheets on the wall for reference.
- Name tent cards (use the name tent cards made during the Introduction and Welcome theme)

You will need the following if conducting the session via a remote platform:

- Access to a strong internet connection
- A back-up plan in the event your internet and/or computer do not work
- A computer that has the ability to connect to a remote platform- Zoom is recommended

HANDOUTS

Have the following handouts accessible. Participants will have all handouts listed below in their **Participant Resource Manual**:

- Handout #1: The 4P's
- Handout #2: Case Study for Effective Communication
- Handout #3: Case Study for Effective Communication for Kinship Caregivers

VIDEOS AND PODCASTS

Before the day you facilitate this class, decide how you will show/play the media items, review any specific instructions for the theme, and do a test drive. You may wish to set up the media to the start point. Unless indicated otherwise below, all videos and podcasts can be obtained on CapLEARN (<https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>) or NTDC website (<https://ntdcportal.org/>).

The following media will be used in this theme:

- Video: *Effective Communication with Children and Teens* with Heather Forbes (5:36 minutes)
- Video: *Being Parallel to Allow for Effective Communication* with Bruce Perry (2:40 minutes)

EVALUATION

There is a pre- and post-survey available for every theme. If the facilitator wants to use these evaluation tools, they will need to be downloaded from the NTDC website or CapLEARN and provided to participants. Participants will need to complete the pre-survey prior to the theme and the post-survey upon completion of the theme. If conducting the class on a remote platform, the facilitator will need to put the surveys into an online format such as survey monkey.



THEME AND COMPETENCIES

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Prior to the theme, review the theme and competencies. You will not read these aloud to participants. Participants can access all competencies in their **Participant Resource Manual**.

Theme: Effective Communications

Understand the definition of effective communication including both verbal and non-verbal language; understand how to use open communication with children; recognize the importance of authentic listening skills; aware of strategies to convey compassion and attunement; recognize how to talk to children about difficult and/or sensitive issues with openness; know how to develop and maintain open communication.

Competencies

Knowledge

- Aware of strategies to discuss difficult/sensitive issues with children in a supportive manner.
- Know strategies to convey empathy.
- Aware of the components of effective communication, including both verbal and non-verbal language.
- Identify empowering and inclusive language.
- Able to describe what effective listening skills are for parents.

Attitudes

- Believe it is important to communicate with children about sensitive topics even when I am uncomfortable.
- Feel it is important to be open to learning about ways to be a better communicator with children.

Skill

- Demonstrate ability to talk with children about difficult and/or sensitive issues in an empathetic and empowering manner.



SUGGESTED AGENDA

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This slide shows a suggested agenda and timing for this theme. Before the theme, please review this agenda and incorporate it into your overall agenda for this and any other themes you are conducting along with it.

AGENDA

This theme is divided into five sections. This content is based on approximately 1 hour of classroom material.

Prior to the Session start time	Color Wheel of Emotions exercise
5 minutes	1: Introduction: Effective Communication
20 minutes	Section 2: What is Effective Communication with Children?
10 minutes	Section 3: Having Sensitive Conversations
20 minutes	Section 4: Practicing Communication Over the Ages
5 minutes	Section 5: Wrap-Up

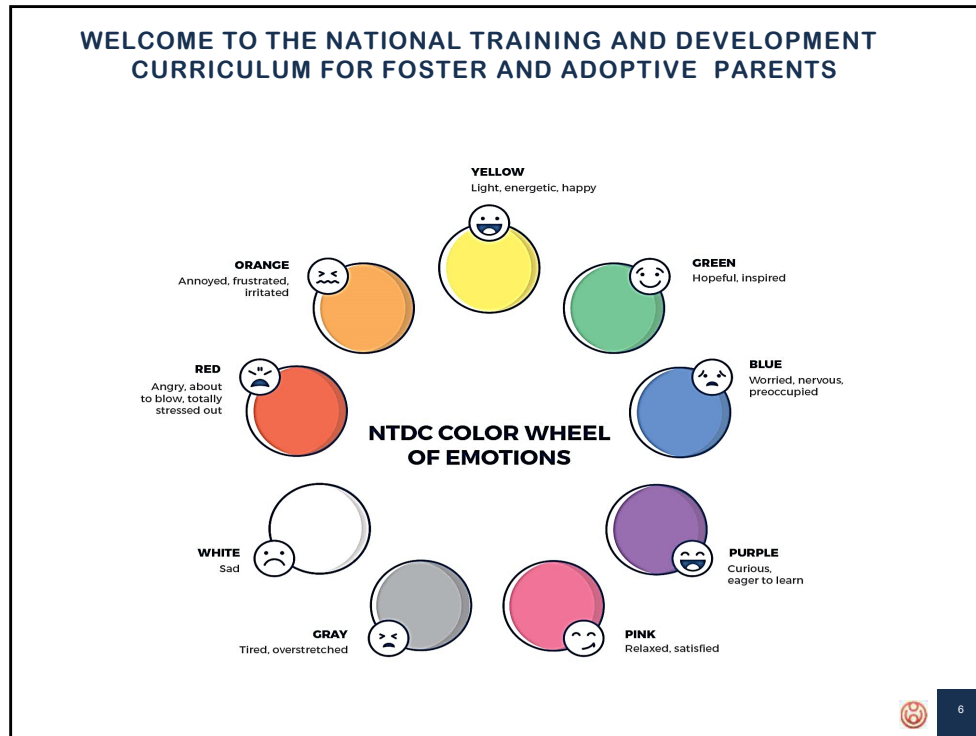


BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE CLASS

Before discussing the Color Wheel of Emotions and covering the content of this theme, you should do the following:

- Make any announcements that are needed regarding the training, timing of training, or process to become a foster or adoptive parent.
- Take out the **Participant Resource Manual** and direct participants to this theme in their **Manual**. Remind participants that the Competencies for today's theme are in their **Manual**.
- Review the agenda for the theme.
- Encourage participants to be engaged and active learners.
- Encourage participants to contact you in between classes with any questions and/or concerns. (Prior to class, list the name(s) of the facilitators on the board with contact information.)
- Remind participants to put out their name tents.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Have this slide showing onscreen as participants assemble for the first class of the day. As participants come in, welcome them back and ask them to take a few minutes to do a self-check using the Color Wheel. **NOTE:** The Color Wheel should only be done one time per day; before the first theme of the day. If combining several themes together on one day, facilitate the Color Wheel at the beginning of the first class of the day as participants are coming into the room.

SAY

Welcome back. We are so glad that you have taken time out of your day to join us for another exciting learning opportunity. As you recall, tuning in to how you're doing on a daily basis may not be something everyone here is used to, but this type of regular self-check is critical for parents who are adopting or fostering children who may have experienced trauma, separation, or loss, as it will be helpful to become and stay aware of your own state of mind. It may seem like a simple exercise but be assured that knowing how we're doing on any given day strengthens our ability to know when and how we need to get support and/or need a different balance. Doing this type of check in will also help us to teach and/or model this skill for children! Please take a moment to look at the color wheel and jot down on paper the color(s) that you are currently feeling.

DO

Wait a little while to give participants time to complete the Color Wheel.

SAY

Now that everybody has had the opportunity to do a quick check in, would someone like to share what color(s) they landed on today for the Color Wheel?



DO

Call on someone who volunteers to share their color(s). If a challenging emotion or feeling is shared, thank the person and acknowledge their courage in sharing, pause for a moment, encourage everyone to take a deep breath, and transition to beginning the theme.





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Development Curriculum**
FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Modified January 2022

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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Show this slide briefly just before you start the theme.

SAY

Let's get started! Welcome to the Effective Communication theme.



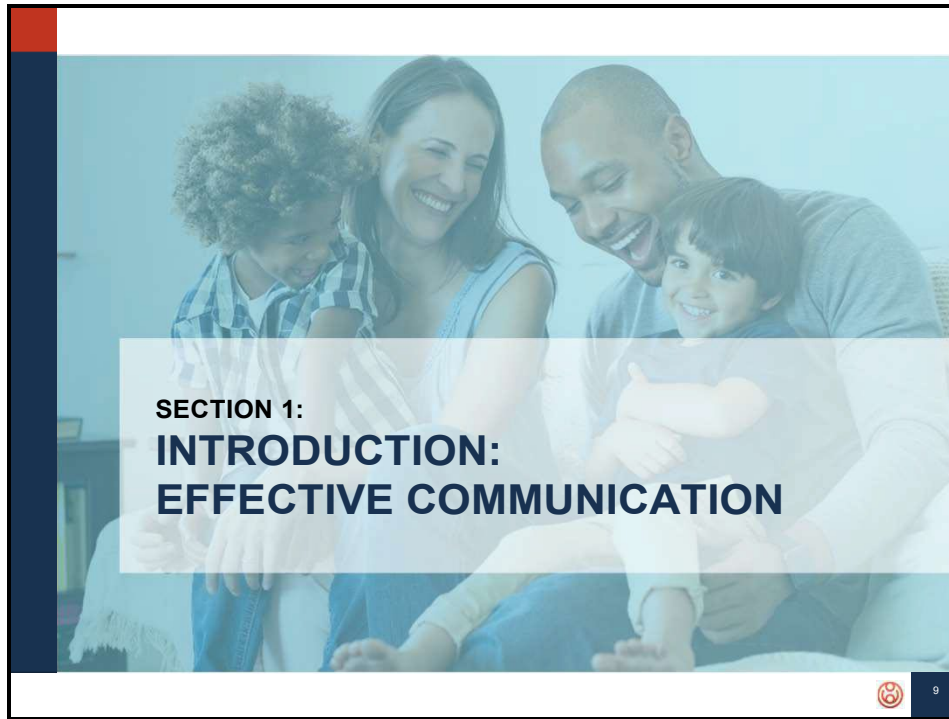


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The opening quote slide should only be used for the first theme of the day. If combining several themes together on one day, the opening quote slide would only be shown after the Color Wheel at the beginning of the first theme. It is important to always emphasize with this slide that this type of parenting involves lifelong learning and it will be critical for families to be invested in their own learning before and after a child is placed in their home.

PARAPHRASE

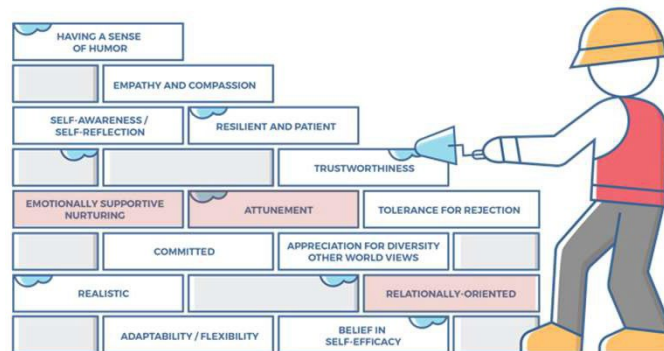
We are excited to share this lesson with all of you today. We are going to start with Effective Communication. As the slide states, this information will help to develop your capacity to support children and families. This type of parenting will require continuous learning. So, let's dive in and see what important information we have to share with you today.



PARAPHRASE

- Communicating effectively with children is a key skill for any parent.
- This theme will provide you with a variety of tools you can use to make your communications more effective, particularly during sensitive conversations with the child you are fostering or have adopted.
- We will focus on communicating in a way that is empathetic, empowering, and age-appropriate.
- Let's get started!

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This slide is shown at the start of each theme. Although the graphic will remain the same, the bricks that are colored in red will change based on the characteristics that will be touched upon in this theme. The characteristics were obtained from review of literature, stakeholder interviews, and review of existing curricula. We want families to become very acquainted with these characteristics throughout the training. It is important to note that in addition to the characteristics that are highlighted in red, there may be additional characteristics that are touched upon during the theme. Facilitators should try to connect these characteristics to the content they are sharing throughout the training. Remind participants that their **Participant Resource Manual** contains the definitions for these characteristics.

SAY

Before we get into the content let's look at the 14 characteristics of successful foster and adoptive parents. When you took your self-assessment, you were asked about these characteristics.



CHARACTERISTICS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing:

- Creating a supportive environment that gives the child a safe space to talk about their emotions
- Children feel heard and understood when they have a supportive space they share with a calming guide to listen and support them
- Listen more than you speak, allowing the child to find solutions for their problems

Attunement:

- Aware of, understand, and sensitive to the responses and needs of a child, even when the child does not directly express needs
- In tune with child's moods, rhythms and responses
- In tune with child's needs for physical contact, affection, security, stimulation and movement
- Remaining calm in moments of stress as you help child manage their emotions



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SAY

The Effective Communication theme will cover the following characteristics:

- Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing
- Attunement
- Relationally-Oriented

Take a moment to think back to the report that you received after taking the self-assessment and how you assessed yourself with these characteristics. It is important as you start this journey to assess your characteristics as they are qualities that can strengthen your ability to successfully parent a child who is in foster care or has been adopted.



CHARACTERISTICS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Relationally-Oriented:

- Parents recognize and value the relationships the child has with others including their family.
- Parents show respect for the child's family and previous relationships, and to the child.
- Parents move beyond any anger or jealousy they may feel toward the child's family in order to help the child resolve relationship issues with their family members and former foster families.
- Parents are able to help a child grieve losses, maintain connections, and feel good about themselves.



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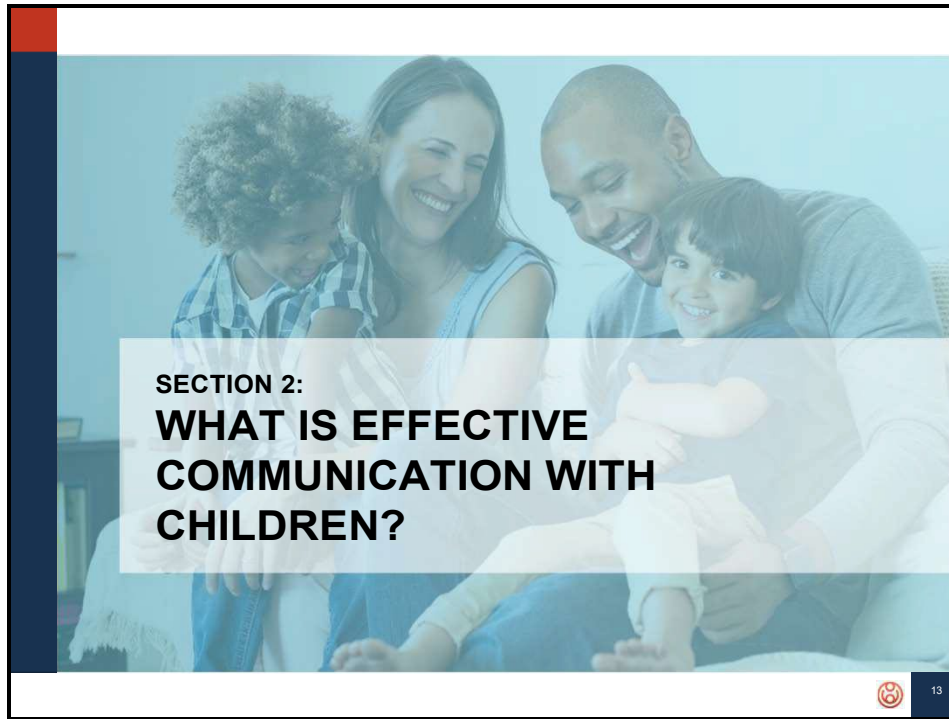
ASK

Now that we have reviewed the definitions, why do you think these specific characteristics are important to effective communication?

Reinforce:

- Emotionally Supportive/Nurturing
 - It will be especially important for parents who foster or adopt to be supportive when children talk about their past experiences and people they miss. By doing so, parents show that it is ok to have and express these feelings.
 - Even though it may be hard to listen to sensitive subjects or the child's pain, it will be healing for the child to have the support of a caring person who is willing to listen.
- Attunement
 - Parents will need to be understanding and validating of the child's point of view.
 - Even when topics are challenging to discuss, children need parents to stay calm to help a child become calm.
- Relationally-Oriented
 - Because children have experienced separations, loss and trauma in their relationships, parents who foster, adopt need to prioritize keeping the relationship with the child strong above all else.
 - It will be important to value the relationships children have with any or all families they had before. This may include birth families, former foster families or extended family members.
 - Honoring relationships the child had before they came to your home makes the connection the child has with you stronger, not weaker.





SECTION 2:
**WHAT IS EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION WITH
CHILDREN?**



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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take approximately 20 minutes.

PARAPHRASE

Authentic listening conveys empathy and allows the child to feel validated and heard. This is especially important when talking about sensitive or painful topics with children.

It is also important for you to remain calm and empathetic as you listen to the child talk about their story. This lets the child know that their feelings and experiences are important, that they are respected, and that they matter. Children who have experienced trauma and loss may never have been given these messages, so your attention and validation of their feelings is very important.

As we talk about communication today, remember, communicating with children is different than communicating with adults. How we can communicate effectively depends a lot on the age and stage of the child. While we may like to do a lot of talking because it is what comes naturally to us as adults, it is not always the best way to communicate with children if we really want to understand them or have them understand us.

And, communicating with children who have experienced loss, grief, and trauma can make it even more complicated as they may not receive and process information in a way that might be expected for their age.



So, even if you consider yourself a strong communicator, try to see where you can grow your communication skills today. This will help all us be more effective in interacting with children in a way that is **relationally-oriented**, an important characteristic for parents who are fostering and adopting.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



Validate the child's feelings and point of view.



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PARAPHRASE

Let's first talk about the important elements of effective communication with children who have experienced loss, grief, and trauma:

- Authentic listening
- Being conscious of triggers
- Using empowering language
- Expressing empathy.

The three steps for authentic, true listening are:

- 1) Listening attentively without interruption
- 2) Feeding back your understanding of what the child is saying and feeling
- 3) Checking in with the child to confirm that you understood correctly

Parents should practice authentic listening to acknowledge the child's feelings and point of view. Authentic listening is being **emotionally supportive and nurturing** (characteristic).

Let's think about how authentic listening might look different depending on the child.

For teens:

- You may be able to have straightforward conversations with an older child or teen depending on their developmental stage and communication skills
- You may not be able to cover a topic in one conversation, but instead allow the teen to take in and process what is being communicated, and perhaps come back to the topic



later.

- Don't insist on quick solutions, agreement, and closure. But check in on your understanding of what you hear the teen saying to get confirmation by feeding back what you have heard them say and asking if you have heard correctly.
- Authentic listening is about paying attention to the here and now. Really tune in to what the teen's body language and tone of voice tell you. Be sure to notice what they are *not* saying as much as what they are saying.

For Children:

- With younger children, know the "conversations" will happen in spurts, and occur less through words and more with actions. That is ok! Don't push the talking.
- It is important to realize that play is the language of younger children both in what they are telling us and how they begin to understand things. So "listening to what they're saying" could be more like playing with them and/or observing their behavior and helping them put words to their feelings and experiences over time.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



Learn the child's history to identify triggers, such as times in the routine or special days.



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PARAPHRASE

It's important to be aware of any triggers that are present or may come up while communicating with children who have experienced separations and loss. As a result, conversations could be derailed at moments that seem unexpected to you. Triggers could occur when talking about certain people or events, or even things that remind them of the people or events. They might be especially true around holidays, certain seasons, anniversary dates, and/or specific times in the routine that remind them of people or events in their past.

When we take the time to learn more about the child's history, we can identify possible triggers for the child. Communication about these behaviors can be eased by understanding the reason behind the behavior and by remembering that at one point in the child's life, they developed the behavior to feel safe and to cope with their situation. Keep this in mind and eventually you can help the child to understand this too. As you both make sense of this, it will help them to feel better about themselves and learn new ways to cope with stress and/or triggers.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



Example of triggered behavior:

Food hoarding

- Common among children who experienced early deprivation
- Potential health hazard



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PARAPHRASE

One example might be with children who have experienced food insecurity and early deprivation. It is not unusual for children who have had these experiences to be triggered by the fear of not having enough food. Even when the child is offered plenty of food in the home, a part of the child may still feel as if there won't be enough food to meet their hunger. The child may respond behaviorally by food hoarding, a behavior that is common among children who did not have enough food in the past. Food hoarding can be a health hazard if food is hidden in a child's room and left to rot, attracting bugs, and causing odors.

If hoarding or sneaking of food occurs, you can talk with the child about strategies to help them feel more secure, rather than creating consequences for the behavior. One strategy might be to give the child a plastic container with wrapped snacks that they can take to their room each day and bring back to the kitchen the following day to be refilled as needed. This strategy will help ensure that the child always has food available until they feel secure enough to let go of their "personal supply". Discussing possible solutions with the child, rather than giving consequences for behaviors can build your relationship and meet the child's underlying need.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



- Show no judgment, shaming, or blaming
- Be clear and direct.
- Comment on the action, not the actor.
- Encourage positive behaviors, hopes and dreams.
- Reinforce belonging.
- Express genuine affection.



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PARAPHRASE

Another key element of effective communication is to use empowering language when talking with the child. I'm sure you can think of examples when another person's language shuts things down real fast!

Here are some helpful tips:

- Communicate with no judgment, no shaming, or blaming.
- Be clear and direct.
- Comment on the negative action, not the actor.
- Notice positive behaviors often and compliment them. The brain is primed to hear the negative, so really focus on strengths.
- Notice, encourage, and support children's efforts and attempts. Change is hard for all of us and it takes time.
- Reinforce the child's belonging in your home regularly. Never threaten a child with leaving the family as a consequence to behavior. Moves are very serious and need to be discussed thoughtfully with professionals in the rare case it was necessary.
- Express genuine affection. All children need this even if they act like they don't.
- Encourage their hopes and dreams for the future in your conversation. It helps them to know you believe in them.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



Sonya, age 12, leaves her clothes on the floor and does not put them in the hamper for days.



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PARAPHRASE

Let's think about a parent's language in the case of Sonya. Sonya is 12 years old and has the habit of leaving her clothes on the floor when she changes to get ready for bed. She does not put her dirty clothes in the hamper so there are piles of clothes on the floor in her room for several days until her mother goes into her room and picks them up.

Her mother *could* say, "Sonya, you are very messy, and you don't take care of your nice clothes. I cannot always come into your room and pick up after you. You will not have clean clothes if you do not put your dirty clothes in the hamper, and I won't buy you new clothes if you cannot take care of them."

OR

Her mother *could* say, "Sonya, I know you like to have nice, clean clothes to wear to school. We can be sure your clothes get washed if they are in the hamper when I am ready to do laundry. Let me help you hang up your clothes when you are ready for bed and put the dirty clothes in the hamper. This way you will get into the habit of doing this for yourself after a while."

ASK

Which of these examples uses empowering language?

DO

Facilitate a brief discussion.



FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The first example is NOT empowering because it focuses on the shortcomings of the child. The second example is much more empowering because the parent focuses on the behavior itself without judgement. In the second example, the parent offers to help as necessary, which is likely because the child is acting at a much younger age developmentally and parental support may better set her up for success.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Authentic listening

Be aware of triggers

Use empowering language

Express empathy



- Express both verbally and non-verbally.
- Respond with empathetic statements.
- Stay calm and relaxed.
- Make eye contact (as appropriate).
- Gently touch (if appropriate).



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PARAPHRASE

Empathy is putting yourself in the shoes of another person and showing them that you're trying to understand what they're going through. It is different than feeling sorry for them. It means you are joining with them in whatever they are feeling and acknowledging it.

Express empathy through both your verbal and non-verbal language. Respond with empathetic statements such as, "That must have made you feel sad/scared/confused," or "I understand how upsetting that must have been for you." Stay calm and relaxed in these conversations. Sit with the child, lean towards them if that feels comforting to them, and gently touch the child, if appropriate, by holding their hand, putting a hand on the child's arm, or putting an arm around the child's shoulder. Some children do not want to be touched, so be aware of the child's boundaries and what they consider safe or culturally appropriate. Some children may feel that direct eye contact is too intimate, or it may not be culturally appropriate, so be considerate of how to use eye contact as well.

Don't make assumptions based on the child's age when it comes to how you express empathy. Some younger children may not want any cuddles and prefer a simple kind look, while some older children will really love to crawl up right next to you. Follow their lead and they will see you understand them.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS



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SAY

Now let's listen to adoptive mom, Heather Forbes, talking about communicating with children and teens. Heather is a licensed clinical social worker and the owner of the Beyond Consequences Institute. She has worked in the field of trauma and healing for over 20 years and much of her insight comes from her direct mothering of children impacted by trauma.

DO

Play the video *Effective Communication with Children and Teens*. This will run approximately 6 minutes.

Process video with questions like:

- What did you learn about children's ability to communicate about their emotions?
Reinforce:
 - Children learn from modeling
 - Children will need help to use language to describe their emotions
 - Parents need to communicate clearly
- Why is it important to give children a voice, especially when they have experienced trauma?
Reinforce:
 - Decisions have been made for them/choices have been taken from them
 - The child's viewpoint needs to be validated



- What did you think about Heather Forbes saying that the parent needs to communicate at an emotional level? Why is this so challenging for parents?

Reinforce:

- This is not how most of us were socialized/raised
- It is important that communication is reciprocal and not one-sided

PARAPHRASE

We can't emphasize the importance of listening enough. It is true for all effective communication, but especially for children who have not been listened to. Do you remember what Heather Forbes said about listening? Parenting takes a lot of listening and it is important to let children have their own viewpoint. Especially as children get older, conversations are not just about parents giving directions. Communication is a two-way street. Even if you don't change course with your parenting decisions, it is important for the child to feel really heard by you. And remember, real listening is focusing on the child, not thinking about what you are going to say next!



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS



- ✓ Stay curious and open
- ✓ Speak at a level the child understands
- ✓ Have a calm attitude
- ✓ Pay attention to your body language, face & voice
- ✓ Acknowledge what the child is communicating, including feelings
- ✓ Remember a sense of humor without minimizing seriousness
- ✓ Talk in person if you can
- ✓ Practice!



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To keep communication, use a curious attitude, even tone of voice, and calm demeanor. Don't talk too much or too long and observe when the child has had enough. Be sure to use words the child can understand.

Let the child lead the pace of the conversation both verbally and non-verbally. In addition to paying close attention to the child's body language, pay attention to your own. Children who have experienced trauma are very sensitive to non-verbal communication such as use of hands, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Children (and adults) often get more from your body language and tone than from the words.

It will be important for you to remain calm in conversations, even when the information is upsetting. This is especially true when communicating with younger children who understand and will remember so much less of your words. If needed, take a moment to calm yourself before conversations. Keeping your breathing even or consciously relaxing your face or shoulders may help you calm yourself before and during difficult conversations.

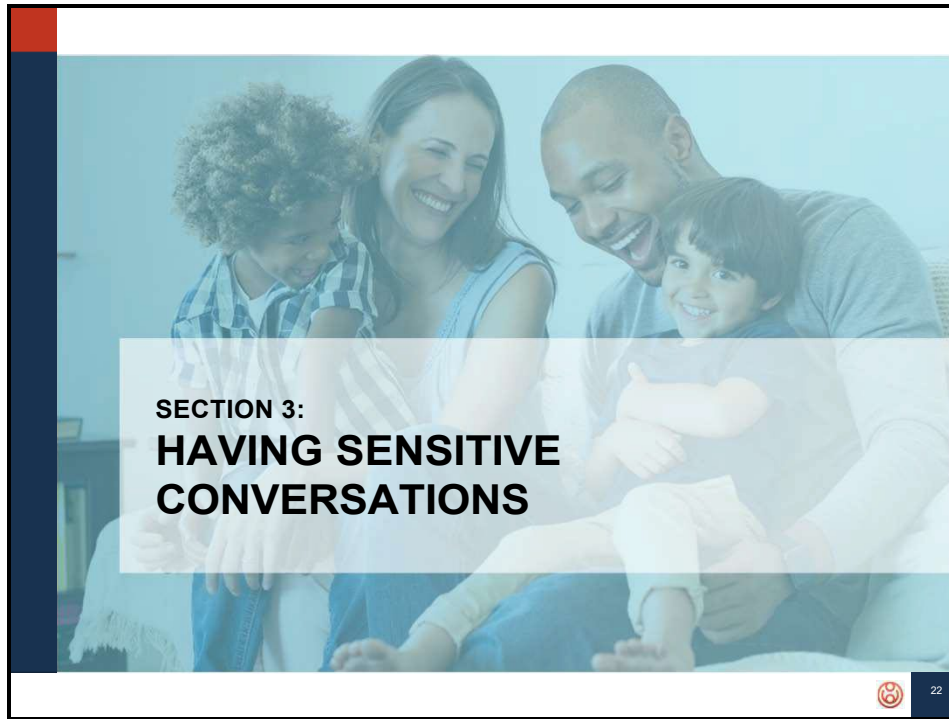
Although these interactions may feel intense, it is also important to maintain a sense of humor and use humor to lighten the mood when it is appropriate. Just be careful not to minimize the seriousness of the communication.

While texts, emails, or phone calls might be useful at times, they cannot take the place of in-person communication. Verbal and non-verbal communication are essential parts of effective communication with children so be sure to talk in person when possible.



It may be useful to practice talking with a friend, partner, or the child’s therapist or caseworker about any subject that might be difficult for you, before you approach the child. Children sense when adults are uncomfortable, and they will take their cues from us. To help children feel comfortable in talking about the hard stuff, parents need to feel comfortable with the “hard stuff,” themselves and practicing helps. It’s also okay and can be good modeling to acknowledge when something does feel hard to talk about.



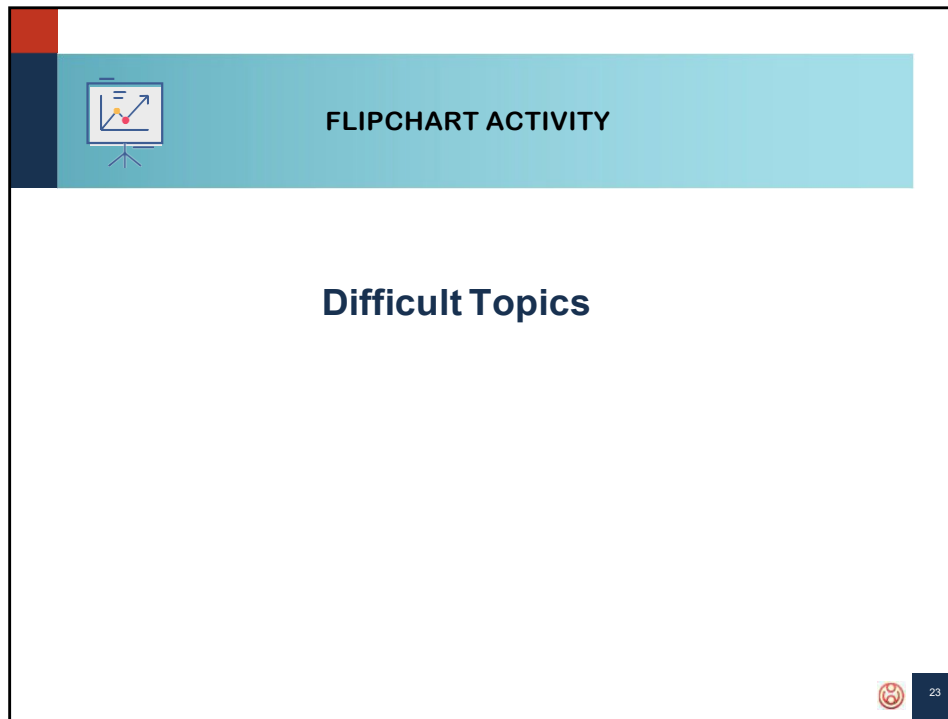


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take approximately 10 minutes.

PARAPHRASE

All parents will need to have sensitive conversations with the child they are fostering or adopting. In this section, we'll talk about ways to communicate effectively even during these sensitive conversations.



FLIPCHART ACTIVITY

Difficult Topics

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FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Next you will use a flipchart to facilitate a brainstorm on potentially painful or sensitive topics that children might bring up. Title the page “Difficult Topics”.

DO

Start a new flipchart page. Write “Difficult Topics” as a title.

Adaptation for Remote Platform:

Write directly onto this slide or use the Zoom white board feature.

SAY

Let’s take a few minutes to brainstorm about potentially painful or sensitive topics that children might bring up that could be hard to talk about. Who can name some?

DO

Facilitate the discussion.

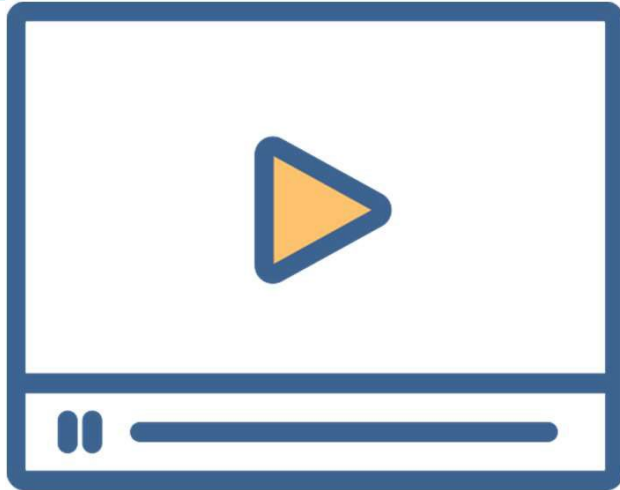
As participants name topics, write them on the flipchart.

Be sure to include:

- Abuse - physical, sexual, emotional
- Neglect - lack of food, lack of shelter, living in a car
- Abandonment by a parent

- Humiliation
- Domestic violence
- Observing drug abuse or sexual acts
- Arrest of a parent
- Wanting more information about their family
- Embarrassment that they live with their grandparent or relative (specific to kinship)
- Strained relationship between kinship caregivers and the child's parents (specific to kinship)

BRUCE PERRY: BEING PARALLEL TO ALLOW THE CHILD OPEN COMMUNICATION



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SAY

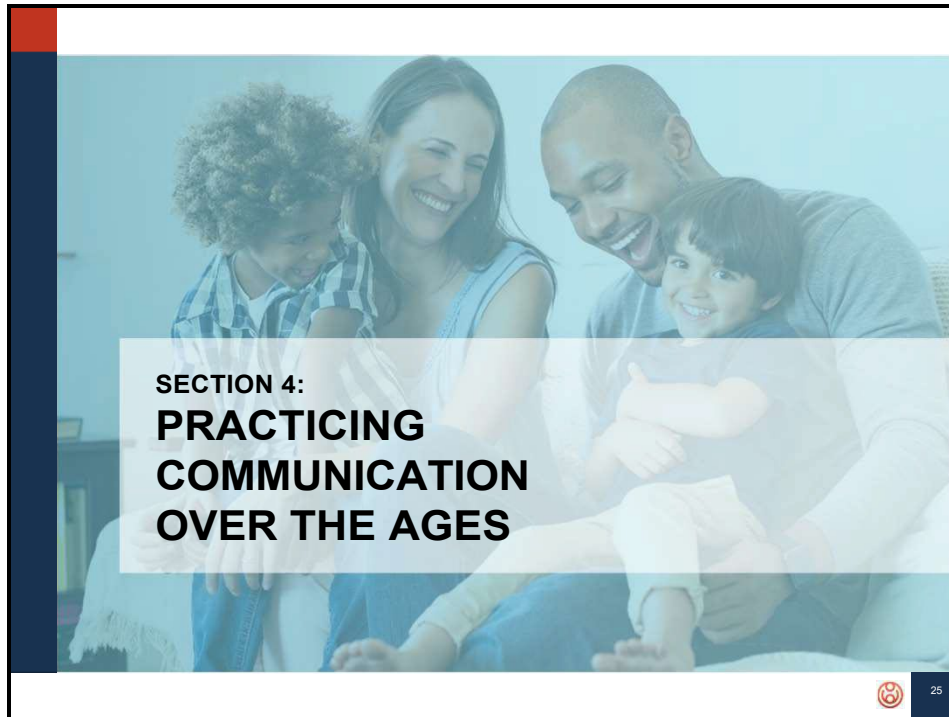
Both parent and child must be regulated and calm in order to have meaningful conversations.

Dr. Perry also gives us tips about the time, place and way to have these conversations. Let's watch Dr. Perry talk a little more about this and the time and place for these conversations.

DO

- Show the Bruce Perry video clip *Being Parallel to Allow the Child Open Communication*. This will take approximately 3 minutes.
- Take a few reaction comments to process the video if you have time.
- Refer to Handout #1: The 4P's and take a moment to review it to solidify the concepts.





SECTION 4:
**PRACTICING
COMMUNICATION
OVER THE AGES**


FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take approximately 20 minutes.

PARAPHRASE


When talking with a child, particularly about sensitive topics, it is important to communicate at a level that's appropriate for the child's chronological age AND their developmental level. Conversations about sensitive topics will not be "one and done" discussions. The child's understanding will change over time as they mature and different questions and concerns will come up over the years. For example, talking in great detail to a five-year old about their parent's drug usage and addiction may not make sense if they really don't understand the concept or how drugs affect a person. But a 15-year-old absolutely knows as they have started to see it in the world around them, if not with their friends, then through movies, music, social media, etc.

As discussed in the Child Development theme, it is always important to consider the child's developmental level which may not be the same as their chronological age. So, if the child is chronologically age 10, but has the social experiences of a 15-year-old, then conversations about something like drug usage would happen earlier. Or, if a child is age 10, but more like 5-year-old in their emotional capacity, they may not be ready yet for the conversation or might need very simple ways to understand their feelings like saying "owies on your heart" to describe being sad, angry or scared in relation to a parent's drug addiction.



**CASE STUDY:
DISCUSSING
DARIUS'S MOTHER
WITH DARIUS**

Darius was born while his mom Lorena was a teen. At the time, Lorena was living on the streets and had substance use issues. Lorena left at age 17 and has not been heard from since.



26

SAY

Our next activity will give us an opportunity to practice conversations at different ages and developmental levels.

DO

- Ask participants to turn to Handout #2: Case Study for Effective Communication in their **Participant Resource Manual**.
- Read the case study. Then, move to questions on the next slide.
- **Note:** There are adapted slides in the addendum section for kinship caregivers for this activity. For kinship caregivers, use Handout #3. Case Study for Effective Communication for Kinship Caregivers.

CASE STUDY: Lorena grew up in a family with severe violence. Her father was addicted to alcohol. Her mother attempted to protect her children from his outbursts but was often not able to. Lorena watched her father physically and emotionally abuse her mother regularly. Lorena would run to her room and lock the door to get away from it. Lorena left home at age 14 and lived on the street with other teens, moving from place to place. She began using drugs and eventually did sex work to support her addiction. After giving birth to Darius, she had no place to go from the hospital. Social Services got involved and Lorena and Darius were placed in foster care together. Lorena remained in the home for 2 years, however she often broke the rules, left Darius at night to go out, ditched school, and eventually began using drugs and doing sex work again. When she left for the last time at

age 17, she asked her foster mother to take good care of Darius, and she has not been heard from since. Social Services has tried to find her, without success.



CASE STUDY DARIUS AT AGE 5



Darius is around age 5.
If you were parenting Darius and he asked where his mother is, what would you tell him?



27

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they might say to a child at this age. Assure them that there is not just one “right” answer.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR NOTES

D may be a “textbook answer”, but each child is unique so it’s helpful to think through options. Make this point as you draw out participants’ thinking about the range of choices.

Throughout the discussion on age five, reinforce the following points:

- Thinking about why a child is asking a question can be helpful to guide a parent’s response.
- At age 5, the child’s main need is to know they are loved, safe and secure. Any question is likely coming from that need.
- The parent’s role when a child is younger is to reinforce the child’s security, rather than giving a lot of information that they can’t yet understand. In this situation, he more likely wants to understand what’s right in front of him, like why he’s in this family and if he will be taken care of or need to move again.
- Labels like mom/mother and dad/father can be confusing to use at this age. Around age 5, those terms are usually understood as the people who take care of children. It may be



helpful to choose together what to call Lorena.

- If the child is in a permanent family, parents should add reassurance to the child that he will be remaining with them.
- Be sure everything you say is truthful, so you have a strong and honest foundation to work from later.
- Body language and tone of voice speak volumes. Keep an even, non-judgmental tone and comfortable body language so the child learns you're open to them coming to you in the future on this topic.



**CASE STUDY
DARIUS AT AGE 10**



Darius is around age 10.
If you were parenting Darius and he asked where his mother is, what would you tell him?



28

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they might say to a child at this age.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR NOTES

C may be a “textbook answer”, but each child is unique so it’s helpful to think through options. Make this point as you draw out participants’ thinking about the range of choices.

Throughout the discussion on age ten, reinforce the following points:

- We want to continue to make sure the child knows they’re safe and loved.
- Now the child is beginning to wonder more about his mother and what happened to her.
- We are continuing to build the child’s story at this age, layering in more information as the child can understand these facts. This is not likely to be one conversation, just examples of what may be discussed at any given time.
- Keep all information factual, with words the child can understand.
- You may choose to add an example from other families the child knows where members live in different places such as families who have parents who are divorced, or a movie



or story where this has been the case.

- If the child asks a question where the information seems like too much for their developmental level, answer the best you can at the time, but also let them know you will write the question down to be sure to answer the question more fully when they're older.
- For children who are adopted, you can reference the Right Time theme- **Life Story-Birth Story and Adoption Story**.



CASE STUDY DARIUS AT 15



Darius is around age 15.
If you were parenting Darius and he asked where his mother is, what would you tell him?



29

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they may say to a child at this age.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR NOTES

'A' may be a "textbook answer", but each child is unique so it's helpful to think through options. Make this point as you draw out participants' thinking about the range of choices.

Throughout the discussion on age 15, reinforce the following points:

- This answer is a snapshot of what would actually be several open conversations during adolescence. The child will only digest this over time and as different events in their own life are unfolding.
- Now that Darius is a teenager, it is time for him to begin to understand his whole story.
- The child's story ultimately belongs to them. The parent's role is to share the information in developmentally and emotionally sensitive ways and to support their understanding of it.
- Once a child becomes a teenager, the parent's role shifts to supporting them in understanding and making sense of their own story, not to editing or judging it.



- In answer A, the parent adds the education about addiction. While all conversations should not keep emphasizing this, it is important for the child to understand this reality as a teenager.
- The information we have been given does not tell us about Darius' father. It could have been someone she was close to, or because his mother did sex work, it is possible that his father is not known. This is something the child will eventually ask or need to know, so it will be up to the parent to discuss this reality and support the teenager in any range of feelings about it. Do not take much time debating this bullet, simply state it during the group discussion. If any participants debate sharing sensitive information, you can remind the group of the reality that the child's story belongs to them. Eventually he probably will find out information on his own and if he finds out without you, you will not be there to provide needed support. Also, he may feel that you have not been truthful with him.
- Consider the option of speaking individually with a participant who seems to be struggling with talking about sensitive subjects to check in about what makes it so difficult.

REFLECTION / RELEVANCE



30

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

If time permits do this reflection in class. If time is short, ask participants to do on their own at home. This activity should take approximately 5 minutes.

SAY

Now, we'll take a few minutes to reflect on what we've learned in this theme.

For your reflection, please take out your **Participant Resource Manual** and turn to this theme. Now, think of a time when you had an interaction with a child or teen that did not go well. Recall the details of the situation for a moment. Then, consider how you might have handled it differently now that you have the new skills that you learned in this theme. Write your thoughts in your **Participant Resource Manual**.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This section will take approximately 5 minutes.

SAY

Now, it's time to wrap up. Let's highlight some key takeaways from this theme.

- Use authentic listening. This means staying present while the child is communicating.
- Both the parent and the child need to be regulated for effective communication to occur. This may take time, validation and listening on the part of the parent.
- It is important for parents to show empathy and acknowledge the child's feelings and ideas.
- Communication at the appropriate developmental level for the child is key.

LIFELONG LEARNING



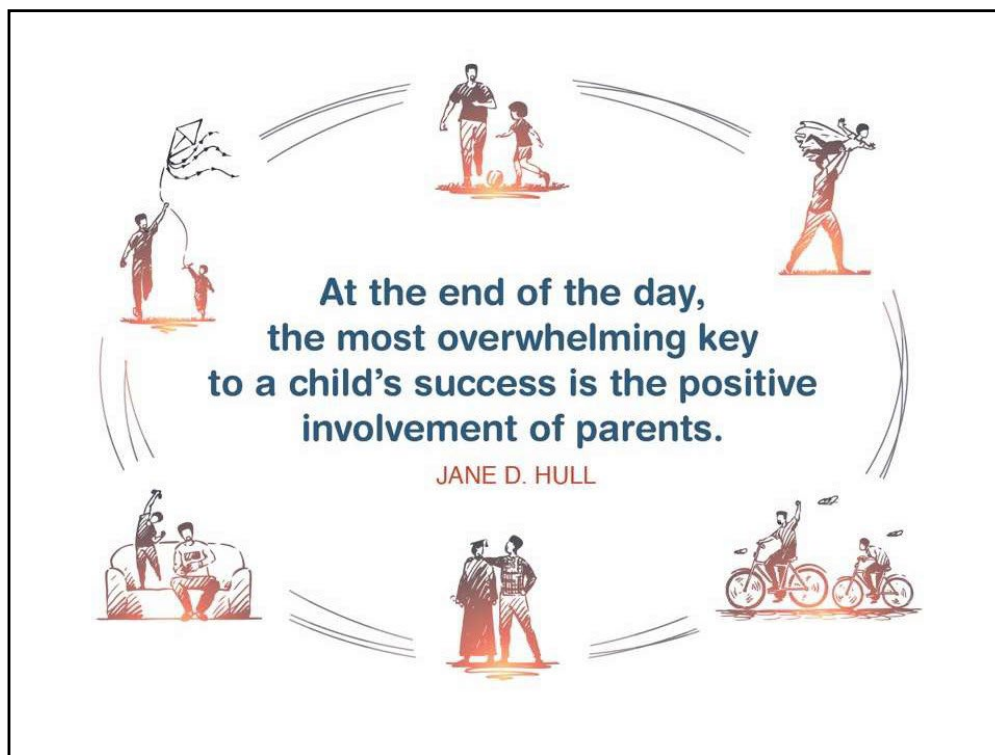
32

SAY

It is critical that as you go through this journey, you continue to enhance your knowledge and skills. It is important that you continue your own learning by taking advantage of resources that are available to you. This theme has lots of resources that will help you continue to learn more about this critical topic. For example, as we discussed today, children communicate differently at different ages, so for those of you who will be parenting younger children, be sure to watch the video ***Communicating With Your Child***. You might also want to check out the podcast on Effective Communication featuring Lynn White Dixon, a clinical social worker and therapist specializing in foster care and adoption for over 40 years.

Additional resources and this video can be found in the Resources on the NTDC website or in CapLEARN.





FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The closing quote above and the paraphrase section below will be done only once per day, after the last theme presented for the day. If you are moving on to another theme invite them to take a break, stretch, or breathe, before moving on to the next theme.

If closing for the day:

- Thank everyone for attending and for their thoughtful participation and attention. Remind the participants that although this training may seem long, it is critical for them to gather the knowledge, attitude, and skills that are needed as they embark on this journey because they ultimately will play a huge role in the lives of children and families.
- If in person, collect the name tents or have them tuck them into their **Participant Resource Manual** to bring back to the next class.

PARAPHRASE

Close out the day by covering the below topics:

- Remind participants of the date/time for the next class and let participants know if there are any changes to the location.
- Encourage participants to contact you (or other facilitators) if they have any questions or concerns.
- Review the themes that will be covered during the next class.
- If in person, remind participants to take their **Participant Resource Manual** with them and to bring them to the next session. If using a remote platform, remind participants to have the **Participant Resource Manual** available for the next class.



For more information, visit:
ntdcportal.org



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ADDENDUM: INCLUSION MATERIALS FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

36


Section 3: Age-Appropriate Communication

- Instead of using the case study on slides 26-29, use the case study that is specific to kinship caregivers which follows this slide.
- Please note that there is a handout for this case scenario that is specific for kinship caregivers. Use Handout #3. Case Study for Effective Communication for Kinship Caregivers



**CASE STUDY:
DISCUSSING
DARIUS'S MOTHER
WITH DARIUS**

Darius was born while his mom Lorena was a teen. At the time, Lorena was living on the streets and was struggling with substance use. Lorena moved back in with her mother but left at age 17 and has not been heard from since.

37

SAY

Let's start with a case study to illustrate how communication changes at different ages.

DO

Distribute the case study handout to all participants.

Read the case study or ask for a volunteer to do so. Then, transition to the first question on the next slide.

CASE STUDY

Darius is a 5-year-old boy. His mother Lorena grew up in a family with severe violence. Her father was addicted to alcohol and her mother attempted to protect her children from his outbursts but often failed. She would run to her room and lock the door to get away from the violence. Lorena left home at age 14 and lived on the street with other teens, moving from place to place and staying wherever they could. She began using drugs and doing sex work to support her habit. During that time, her mother tried, without success, to find Lorena. She also sought help for women escaping violent relationships and left Lorena's father to keep her remaining two children safe. When Lorena was still living on the street, she gave birth to Darius. She had no place to go from the hospital, and Social Services intervened. She and Darius went back to live with Lorena's mother. For two years Lorena lived at home, breaking all the rules. She ditched school, would leave Darius at night to go out, and eventually began using drugs and doing sex work again. Her mother was Darius' primary caregiver. When Lorena finally left for the last time, at age 17, she asked her mom to take good care of Darius, and she has not been heard from since then. Social Services has tried to find her, without success so far.

CASE STUDY QUESTION 1



Darius is around age 5.
If you are the kinship caregiver and Darius asked where his
mother is, what would you tell him?



38

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they might say to a child at this age.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

'D' may be a "textbook answer" but each child is unique so it's helpful to think through options.

Reinforce the following points for communication at age 5:

- Thinking about why a child is asking a question can be helpful to guide a parent's response.
- At age 5, the child's main need is to know they are loved, safe and secure. Any question is likely coming from that need.
- The parent's role when a child is younger is to reinforce the child's security, rather than giving a lot of information that they can't yet understand. In this situation, he likely wants to understand what's right in front of him, like why he's growing up with relatives and if he's going to be taken care of or need to move again.
- Labels like mom/mother and dad/father can be confusing to use at this age. Around age 5, those terms are usually understood as the people who take care of children. It may be helpful to choose together what to call Lorena.
- Be sure everything you say is truthful so you have a strong and honest foundation to



work from later.

- Body language and tone of voice speak volumes. Try to keep an even, non-judgmental tone and relaxed body language so the child learns you're open to them coming to you in the future on this topic.



CASE STUDY QUESTION 2



Darius is around age 10.
If you are the kinship caregiver and Darius asked about his
mother, what would you tell him?



39

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they might say to a child at this age.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

'C' may be a "textbook answer", but each child is unique so it's helpful to think through options.

Reinforce the following points for age 10:

- We want to continue to make sure the child knows they're safe and loved.
- Now the child is beginning to wonder about his mother and what happened to her.
- We are continuing to build the child's story at this age, layering in more information as the child can understand these facts. This is not likely to be one conversation, just examples of what may happen at any given time.
- Keep all information factual. Remember that children may be hearing things from other family members, so clarify anything for them and stay truthful.
- Use words the child can understand.
- You may choose to add an example from other families the child knows where children live with their relatives or where members live in different places such as step-families, or a movie or story where this has been the case.
- If the child asks a question where the information seems like too much for their developmental level, answer the question as best you can, but also share that you will write the question down to be sure to answer more fully as they get older.



CASE STUDY QUESTION 3



Darius is around age 15.
If you were the kinship caregiver and Darius asked about
his mother, what would you tell him?



40

DO

- Give participants a moment to circle the response on their handout that best represents what they might say to a child at this age.
- Facilitate a brief discussion of the chosen responses.
- Engage all participants in a group discussion by asking them to think aloud about the various responses.

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

'A' may be a "textbook answer" but each child is unique so it's helpful to think through options.

Reinforce the following points for age 15:

- This answer is a snapshot of what would actually be several open conversations over adolescence. The child will only digest all of this over time and as different events in their own life are unfolding.
- Now that Darius is a teenager, it is time for him to begin to understand his whole story.
- The child's story ultimately belongs to them. The parent's role is to share the information in developmentally and emotionally sensitive ways and to support their understanding of it.
- Once a child becomes a teenager, the parent's role shifts to supporting them in understanding and making sense of their own story, not to editing or judging it.
- In answer 'A', the parent adds the education about addiction. While all conversations do not need to keep emphasizing this, it is important for the child to understand this reality



as a teenager.

- The information we have been given does not tell us about Darius' father. It could have been someone his mother was close to, or because she did sex work, it is possible that his father is not known. This is something the child will eventually ask or need to know, so it will be up to the parent to discuss this reality and support the teenager in any range of feelings about it. Do not take much time debating this bullet, simply state it during the group discussion. If any participants debate sharing sensitive information, you can remind the group of the reality that the child's story belongs to them. Eventually he can and probably will find out information on his own and if he finds out without you, your trust will be broken.

