



**CONSCIOUS PARENT
ACADEMY**



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN CHILD WELFARE

“Conscious Parent Academy — Replacement Parents Urgently Needed!”
(Program Erasmus+ 2020-1-PL01-KA204-082283)

2022, May 2nd



What Is Interpersonal Communication?

“Interpersonal communication [refers] to dyadic communication in which two individuals, sharing the roles of sender and receiver, become connected through the mutual activity of creating meaning”

(Trenholm & Jensen, 2008, p. 29).



We are profoundly predisposed to communicate with one another, as it is the foundation for social relationships throughout our lives.

The Beginning Of Interpersonal Communication (Koprowska, 2008)

Communication starts at birth, and it essential for the baby's survival.

The human brain needs communication to develop, and that development depends on clear and caring contact with others.

Dependency on someone older to understand and meet their physiological and emotional needs.

Beginning of learning how to communicate and read other people's signals.



The Principles of Communication

Interpersonal communication is...

(Koprowska, 2008)

Interactive and takes
place within a
relationship



Beyond verbal
communication



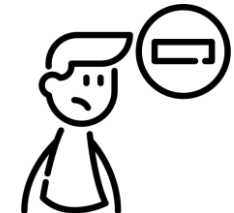
Context related



Dependent on goals
and roles



Susceptible to mistakes



The Principles of Communication

Interactive and takes
place within a
relationship



- Communication is interactive:
- Happens within a relationship, always:

Our **communication** has as an impact in other **people's** communication and vice-versa.
It is adapted within social interactions as we access the social situation in which we are in.

The effectiveness and quality of the communication is **connected to the quality of a relationship.**

The Principles of Communication

Interactive and takes
place within a
relationship



Exercise 1:

- Divide into pairs.
- We are going to each group and instruct which object one of you should draw, without the other one knowing what it is.
- Then, you are going to instruct your partner to draw it, by giving them hints about the object.
- **Time: 5 minutes**

The Principles of Communication

Interpersonal communication is...

Beyond verbal
communication



- Non-verbal communication:
- Emotions in communication:

Communication happens through **facial and body expressions**.

It **requires observational skills** to understand what other people are trying to communicate.

Through **facial and body expression** (e.g., gestures, non-verbal involuntary clues) **it is possible to identify emotions and determine the emotional state** of the person with whom we are communicating.

The Principles of Communication

Exercise 2: Consider the following interaction between a social worker and Matt, an elderly man.

Matt is in the hospital after a hip replacement, and the social worker is going to assess for home care services. The social worker walks in and stands at the door while talking to Matt, while always looking at her notebook and taking notes.

And asks him:

Beyond verbal
communication



- Non-verbal Cues?
- Emotions?
- What is being communicated?

SW: Do you live on your own?

M: I do now; ever since my wife died. The house . . .

SW: When did she die?

M: It's only six months ago. It feels like yester . . .

SW: Do you have any children?

SU: Yes, one daughter. She's very good to me but it's just not the same without her mother.

SW: So your daughter helps out with things, does she?

M: She does, she does her best, but . . .

SW: So you probably won't need much help at home when you get back. What do you think?

M: Well, I don't know really

Time: 10 minutes

The Principles of Communication

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Beyond verbal
communication



Non-Verbal Cues:

Lack of eye contact; Focusing on taking notes; Avoiding proximity; Fast pace; Interruptions in communication.

Emotions:

SW – Rush; Irritation...

M – Sadness; Loss; Disappointment; Withdrawal...

What is being communicated:

SW – “I don’t have time to hear your story; I’m only here to get information; I’m in a hurry, I just want to get this over with”

M – “I really want to talk to someone; I just want to be listened”

The Principles of Communication

Interpersonal communication is...

Context related



- Context:
- Expectations and behaviors:

The context is **the environment** in which the communication takes place.

It is usually a **physical place**, and a **social and psychological space**.

It **determines expectations and behaviors** that are adequate and appropriate to certain settings.

Different behaviors can be appropriate in multiple contexts.

The Principles of Communication

Context related



Exercise 3: Think about all these contexts:

- Hospitals
- Home Visits
- Schools
- Concerts

- What are the **appropriate** behaviors in these contexts?
- What would be some **inappropriate** behaviors you could have there?

- **Time: 3 minutes**

The Principles of Communication

Context related



Exercise 3: Think about all these contexts:

- Hospitals – Being silent, waiting to get attended... / Make a scene, shouting...
- Home Visits – Talk to the family, helping ... / Ignoring the family or their requests...
- Schools – Talking to teachers / Disturb the classes...
- Concerts – Singing, dancing... / Disturb other people, smoking...
- What are the **appropriate** behaviors in these contexts?
- What would be some **inappropriate** behaviors you could have there?

The Principles of Communication

Interpersonal communication is...

Dependent on goals
and roles



- Inherent goals:

The **communications and behaviors** depend on the **goals** of the context in which they happen.

Although **these goals** may not be explicit, they **are unconsciously assumed**, and as such, you act accordingly.

- Assumed Roles:

The communications and behaviors are also **guided by the role** you occupy.

So the **context and the goals determine the role** you need to assume to accomplish it.

The Principles of Communication

Dependent on goals
and roles



Exercise 4: Think about these contexts:

- University libraries
- Hospitals
- What are the goals of your behavior here? In the **individual** perspective and towards **others**?

Now, think about when **you are visiting a foster family**:

- What is the role you are expected to assume?
- **Time: 3 minutes**

The Principles of Communication

Dependent on goals
and roles



Exercise 4: Think about these contexts:

Goals:

- **University libraries** – To study (**Individual**) /
Being silent so people can concentrate in their studies (**Others**) .
- **Hospitals** – To visit someone or do a check-up (**Individual**) /
Being silent so people can recuperate and rest (**Others**)

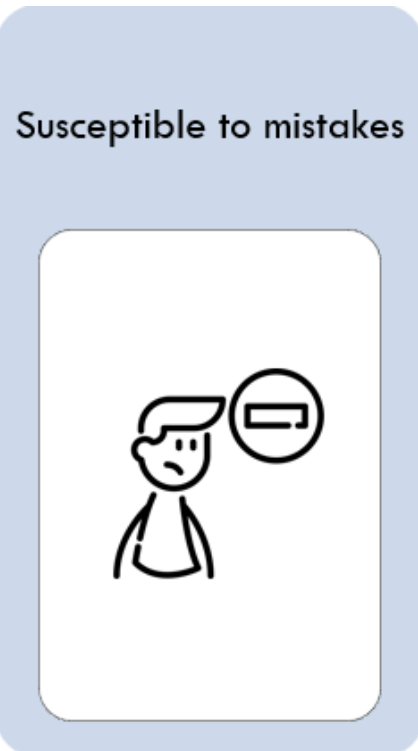
Now, think about when **you are visiting a foster family**:

Role:

- To assess the family, to help the family with the new child they are caring for.
- To do domestic chores, to judge/critize the family.

The Principles of Communication

Interpersonal communication is...



- Skills and behaviors which are inappropriate in certain contexts
- Limited knowledge and understanding of the goals in social situations
- Limited understanding or confusion regarding the role to assume

Context Errors

E.g.: Oversharing or venting at the workplace.

Goals Errors

E.g.: The goal is to help people with mental illness, but if a person doesn't meet the criteria, they aren't considered.

Role Errors

E.g.: Confusing personal feelings with role or not preform a task, because it isn't part of the role.

The Principles of Communication

Susceptible to mistakes



Exercise 5: Think about these examples, and what type of errors they apply.

- A coworker who sulks or uses personal insults when in the face of a conflict with other coworkers.
- A psychologist listens to a patient's story about losing their sibling, and since it resonates with their own loss, they share with the patient their story, turning the session towards them.
- A social worker who goes to assess a person with an assessment questionnaire, finds that the person is unable to answer the questions at the moment, and gives up.
- **Time: 5 minutes**

- Context errors?
- Goal errors?
- Role errors?

The Principles of Communication

Susceptible to mistakes



Exercise 5: Think about these examples, and what type of errors they apply.

- A coworker who sulks or uses personal insults when in the face of a conflict with other coworkers. ← Context errors?
- A psychologist listens to a patient's story about losing their sibling, and since it resonates with their own loss, they share with the patient their story, turning the session towards them. ← Goal errors?
- A social worker who goes to assess a person with an assessment questionnaire, finds that the person is unable to answer the questions at the moment, and gives up. ← Role errors?

Competencies in Communication

First Order Skills

Skills and competencies
required in direct
communication with
others.

Language,
Clarity,
Information...

Second Order Skills

Skills and competencies
indirectly associated with
communication.

Planning,
Observing,
Adjusting
Review...



Competencies in Communication

Exercise 6:

- Imagine you work in a community social work team. Lily, is one of the people you support, and you suspect she is depressed, and that marital problems could be part of the cause. You arrange a home visit to see the couple and after introductions, you say, 'I understand you have some difficulties in your marriage. Perhaps we could talk about them?' Lily and her husband exchange a look and then they say, 'What are you talking about? We don't have any problems in our marriage at all. Not at all'. The interview comes to an abrupt close.
- Let's assume that your initial intuition is correct.
- Use your second-order skills to review how the interaction went, and to devise some different approaches to this delicate subject.
- **Time: 10 minutes**

1. How could you approach the subject differently?
2. If you used a different approach, would it change the outcome of the conversation?
3. Is there non-verbal cues we should pay attention to?
4. Are there some errors you can identify?

Competencies in Communication

Exercise 6:

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1. **Approach:** "I would like to know more about your relationship, can you talk a little bit about it?" Ask about the couple, how is their relationship, is there issues they would like to share...
2. **Outcome:** If you asked about their relationship, you could have other information that would allow a better assessment.
3. **Non-Verbal Cues:** The look exchanged between the couple.
4. **All errors:** The goal is to help Lily, and not to make assumptions about the marriage. The professional context is different from the personal one. Our role is to provide help.

Competencies in Communication

There are **two main domains of interpersonal communication skills** that need to be considered, specially in social services:



Competencies in Communication

**For communication
itself**
Skills needed/implied:

1. Share information.
2. Active Listening.
3. Attention to congruence and coherence.
4. Respecting the silences.
5. Responding with empathy.
6. Unhurried pace.



Competencies in Communication

1. Share information.

When sharing information with families, children or other users of the social services it is important to:

- Keep the vocabulary simple, but clear and adequate to each person (e.g., children).
- Inform about confidentiality and other procedures inherent to the assistance.
- Inform about services and ways to access them.
- Respond to any questions that they may have or that arise during the conversation.



Competencies in Communication

2. Active Listening.

Listening **conveys interest and respect**, as we are aiming to understand a person's point of view, their story, their relationships, and to consider our responses in return.

This is **especially important in social services that deal with vulnerable people** (e.g., foster children)

This skill implies :

- **Actively paying attention** to a conversation (as to, also, not ask questions about information already shared);
- **Responding**, sometimes with only sounds or short words, such as “mhm”, “yes”, “right”.
- **Thinking carefully about the response**, so it is structure, attuned and congruent with the information that the other is giving.



Competencies in Communication

3. Attention to Congruence...

When talking to someone that you accompany, such as talking to a foster child about their biological family, you should pay attention to: are their words congruent with the non-verbal signs? Is he/she angry/sad when talking about leaving their biological family?

Often, the non-verbal communication has an underlying genuine emotion.



This skill implies :

- **Actively paying attention** to the words being said and the facial and body expression.
- You can draw attention to that incongruence, but in a gentle way, so that the person doesn't feel self-conscious.
- **Example:** "You say you are ok with not seeing your mother everyday. Do you feel how tense your jaw is? Or have you noticed your fist clenching? What do you think that tension tells you?"

Competencies in Communication

3. Attention to Congruence and Coherence.

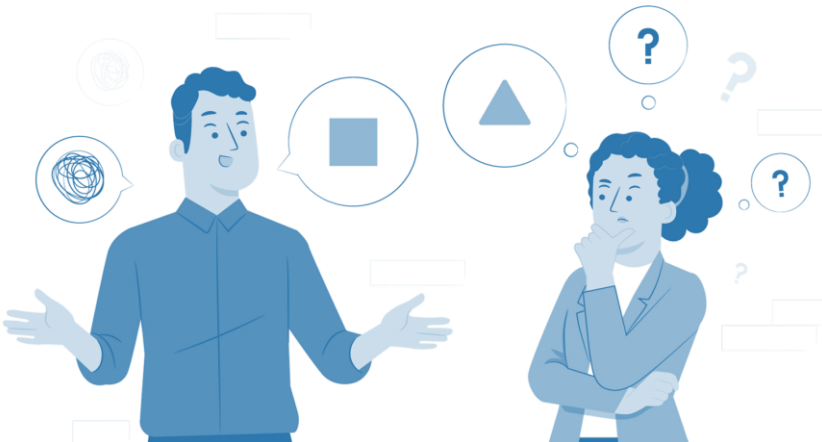
When talking to the same foster child as before, you should pay attention to:

is their communication coherent or hard to follow?

Coherence can be influenced by many conditions such as confusing states, impairments, emotional dysregulation, distress, excitement...

This skill implies :

- Being aware of the situation and emotional/physical state of the person.
- If you notice incoherence in a single conversation, it might indicate that the topic is sensitive, and that the person needs more time and encouragement to talk about it.
- **Example for when having trouble understanding the person:** “I’m having trouble keeping up with what you are trying to tell me. Do you mind slowing down a bit, so I can understand it?”



Competencies in Communication

4. Respecting the silences.

Silence in a conversation allows the person to reflect on what's being said, and it keeps the attention on them, conveying your interest.

If you have difficulties in silent periods of conversations, reflect on it and review why: “I feel awkward, but does the other person feel too?”

Or are they just reflecting on what was said?”



This skill implies :

- Being able to review, internally, the conversation and interaction.
- If you find that both of you feel awkward, review what happened before “Have I made a difficult question? Did the person just revealed something important and needs a response from me?” – This should help inform you how to respond next.
- **Example for when you are having trouble and need to restructure the interaction:** Break the silence by saying and restructure what the person said before “You were just saying that...”

Competencies in Communication

5. Responding with empathy.

Empathy is a core skill in communication, particularly in social services.

It is essential to create less resistance, promote greater disclosure of information and to provide clarity about what should happen next in the support process.

This skill implies :

- Providing “emotional information” for people that do not recognize their own emotional state and matching their responses emotionally and emphatically.
- Observational skills to be able to attune empathically with others.
- Some statements might seem empathic but don’t translate real emotions – **“That must be very difficult for you”**.
- Instead try to translate emotions **“I can see that this makes you sad or has affected you”**.



Competencies in Communication

6. Unhurried Pace.

Feeling unhurried during a conversation is important to the quality of the communication with other people.

The pace is a non-verbal communication that informs the person with whom you are communicating, if they have your attention in the present moment.



This skill implies :

- Organization and management of real time, so that you don't come off as rushing the other people to get to the next appointment.
- **Explaining that you don't have a lot of time or setting a time limit in the beginning of the communication** can help you to keep organized and calm when communicating.
- Also, people communicate more clearly when they feel they have your full attention and that you are available to listen to them.

Competencies in Communication

**For the relationships
where
communication
happens.**

Skills needed/implied:

1. Understanding of how the relationship works.
2. Promoting choice and control.
3. Responsiveness.
4. Reliability.
5. Honesty.
6. Respect.

★ Although these interpersonal skills are not necessarily associated with communication itself, they should be considered, as they promote good relationships, and consequently good communication.



Competencies in Communication

1. Understanding of how the relationship works.

Developing a shared understanding of what the working relationship is about is essential for communication with people that you support.

It is important that the people you are supporting understand the goal of the relationship in the same way as you do, to avoid misinterpretations.



These can be done through:

- Defining goals and the purpose of the relationship, which can be adjusted if needed.
- Being understanding of other people's feelings and perspectives.

Competencies in Communication

2. Promoting choice and control.

A lot of people that attend social services have been deprived of choice and control in their decisions, so it is important for you to provide opportunities for them to make choices and retake control over their circumstances.



- It can be time consuming and imply some patience, from your part, as a professional, but it is essential to promote your user's self-esteem and the feeling of control and responsibility for the choices in their lives.

Competencies in Communication

3. Responsiveness.

Responsiveness is associated with two aspects of responding to the people you support:



- **Practical:** Which translates into responding in a practical way, such as returning calls, answering e-mails or providing information needed at the moment.
- **Emotionally:** Like responding with empathy, this refers to being sensitive to a person's feelings and emotional needs in certain situations and responding to those needs accordingly.

Competencies in Communication

4. Reliability

Being **reliable**, particularly in social and child welfare services, means being responsible and doing tasks that you'd said you do, when you said you'd do it.



- This means, for example, returning calls, attending meetings on schedule, gather information that was requested, when it was requested..
- It is **an essential skill** to **promote trust and confidence in relationships**, especially in these contexts.

Competencies in Communication

5. Honesty

Honesty relates to **being open and true**, especially with the population that you work with, and **even in circumstance where you need to provide difficult information** to the people you support.



- **For example:**
- If you are working with a biological family whose child is in foster care, **you can't guarantee that that their child is going to be returned to them**, if you're not sure whether that would be possible or in the best interest of the child.
- If you do so, and it doesn't happen, you'll **risk breaking their trust** and **compromise your working relationship**.

Competencies in Communication

6. Respect.

Every other competency listed before refers, by implication, to a respectful approach.

These is inherently related to overall values, such as **respecting every person** just by virtue of their presence in the world.



Also:

- Respecting everyone you work with and for is of paramount importance for communication, since without respect it is impossible to communicate with others.

Thank you for your attention!

Dėkojame už jūsy dėmesį

Dziękuję za uwagę





**CONSCIOUS PARENT
ACADEMY**



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: Children, Youth And Families

“Conscious Parent Academy — Replacement Parents Urgently Needed!”
(Program Erasmus+ 2020-1-PL01-KA204-082283)

2022, May 3rd



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

1. Maintain a clarity of focus.
2. Recall the experience of being a child and relate that to the work at hand.
3. Encourage children to talk or express themselves.
4. Feel comfortable in the presence of children and to have them feel comfortable with them.
5. Facilitate children's play.
6. Decenter from an adult perspective to engage the child.
7. Continue working uninterrupted despite the emergence of painful and disturbing material.
8. Respond to the different vocabulary, idioms, and expressions of children.
9. Provide difficult information.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

1. Maintain a clarity of focus.

Being aware of the purpose of contact with the child and always keep that in mind.

Whether it is a meeting to gather information or to advocate for the child/teen, this should largely determine how you adapt your interaction and communication towards them.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

2. Recall the experience of being a child and relate that to the work at hand.

It is important to be aware of our own past experiences as a child, when working with children.

Recalling these experiences helps to:

- Prevent 'transference' from past experiences.
- Recall how time and concepts can be misunderstood from a child's perspective.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

3. Encourage children to talk or express themselves.

By exercising **active listening**, so that you convey interest in what the child is expressing.

Plus...

If a child feels that we are genuinely interested in their story, they are more likely to express their views and thoughts.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

4. Feel comfortable in the presence of children and to have them feel comfortable with you.

Have a **good sense of self** and not take any forthright comments made by a child as a personal attack.

And...

Not being distressed and **being sensitive and responsive**, if the child wants unceasing attention or is excessively shy and refuses to talk.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

5. Facilitate children's play.

Play is an **essential tool of communication** to engage and work, particularly, with children.

- Feeling comfortable with play often **conveys** to a child **that we value what he/she** does.

Often children **use play as a projective tool**, so we can **learn a lot about what the child** **thinks** by engaging with their play.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

6. Decenter from an adult perspective to engage with the child.

Be flexible, respectful and appreciative of a child's willingness to share information and when he/she wants to share it.

Unfortunately, because of time constraints, we might have to consult other adults to obtain information about a child's wishes.

While this may be necessary on some occasions...

It isn't the best practice to ensure the child's voice is heard, as it is one of their rights:

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

"(...)the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union:

"Children(...) may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity."



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

7. Continue exploring difficult topics, despite the emergence of painful or disturbing material.

“Foster carers describe the process... in which the child seems to test you out to see how much you can cope with. If you seem able to cope with what you have been told without being shocked or thrown off course, then later the child may tell you more”

(Colton et al., 2001, pp. 63).

Often children/youth reveal information that might be graphic, painful or hard to cope with.

If a child detects that we are unable to cope with the information being shared, they are likely to stop sharing that information with us.

It is important that we can manage those situations, to provide support to the child, without conveying that we are distressed by the shared information.

However, if the child seems upset, you should try and provide comfort and support, rather than keep exploring that topic.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

8. Respond to the different vocabulary, idioms, and expressions of children.

Being familiar with *slang* words that may be used by children/youth can help to build proximity to them.

- However, this doesn't mean that we should use them, as children and youth can feel patronized if an adult 'gets it wrong'.

Being able to engage with the child's language and be aware that abused children, (particularly sexually abused children), might use words that shock most adults.

- It is important to maintain a calm and understanding posture, while at the same time exploring the meaning that the words may have for the child or teen.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

9. Provide difficult information.

In the area of child protection, there are often **occasions when we are required to convey difficult information, “bad news”, or answer children’s questions** that we may find very difficult to answer.

Although we are **advised to be objective and aware as to not condemn parents**, in the information we share with children, it is also **important not to create any false expectations** (e.g., going back to the biological family).

- This can be a difficult task and **requires reflection and sensitivity** on our part.

It is also **important to be aware and responsive of the emotional state of the child or teen**, when we convey these type of information.



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

Factors that facilitate communication with professionals, according to children and adolescents:



Time

Being prepared to spend the necessary time with them



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

Factors that facilitate communication with professionals, according to children and adolescents:



Time

Being prepared to spend the necessary time with them



Relationship, trust and honesty

Having a warm and trusting relationship with them



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

Factors that facilitate communication with professionals, according to children and adolescents:



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Relationship, trust and honesty

Having a warm and trusting relationship with them



Active listening

Listen and respond with empathy and warmth



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

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Listen and respond with empathy and warmth



Choice and information

Give choice to participate in a decision-making process



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Choice and information

Promote the participation in a decision-making process



Support and encouragement

Give support and encouragement to state their views



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Activities

Use them to encourage children to share



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

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The child/youth's agenda

Provide space to discuss issues of their own



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

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The child/youth's agenda

Provide space to discuss issues of their own



Serious fun

Make the process less boring and more fun



Competencies in Communication: Children & Youth

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The child/youth's agenda

Provide space to discuss issues of their own



Serious fun

Make the process less boring and more fun

Children and Youth are more likely to communicate when the professional has these competencies and characteristics.



(Hall & Slembrouck, 2009)

Competencies in Communication: Families

○ Considerations and suggestions for communicating with families in child/youth support services:

Asymmetric Interactions

Professionals tend to dominate interactions in these contexts.

There should open to debate, not just asking questions and getting answers. Avoid a posture of superiority.

Providing advice

It tends to be a point of tension in the relationship.

The problem and the solutions must be discussed together. Avoid blaming and ignoring the family.

Shared perspectives

Reaching agreement with the family can create conflicts.

Question and consider the family's perspective before discussing the problem.

Discouraging undesired options

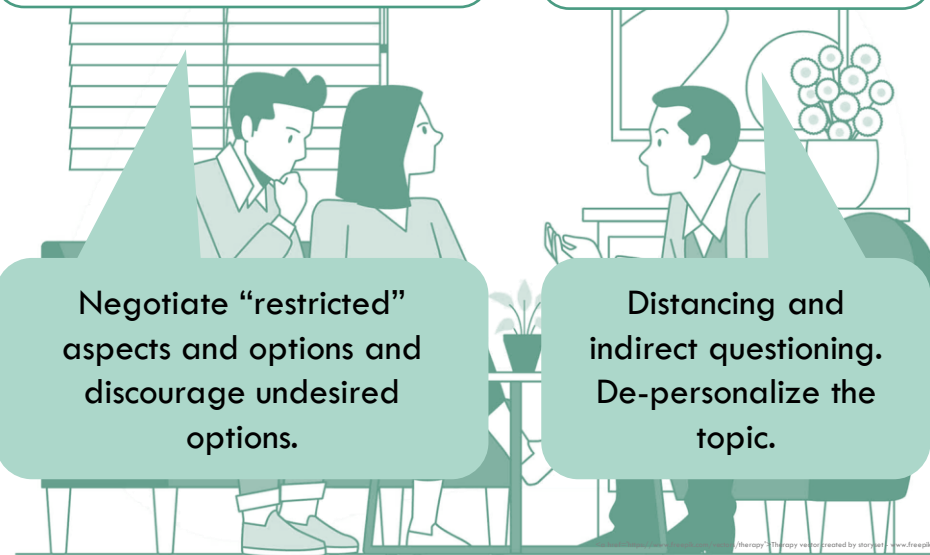
It may be necessary to reformulate the family's perspective.

Negotiate "restricted" aspects and options and discourage undesired options.

Dealing with sensitive topics

Sensitive topics are always difficult to address.

Distancing and indirect questioning. De-personalize the topic.



Competencies in Communication: Foster Care Study

887 English foster carers were questioned about their views of their foster case social workers.

According to the foster carers, they value social workers that...

- Show an interest in how carers are managing;
- Are easy to contact and responsive when contacted;
- Do what they say they are going to do;
- Are prepared to listen and offer encouragement;
- Take account of the family's needs and circumstances;
- Keep them informed and included in planning;
- Ensure that payments, complaints, etc. are processed as soon as possible;
- Attend to the child's interests and needs and involve foster carers in these when appropriate.

Also: Foster carers that attributed these skills to their social workers felt more satisfied in the foster care process and were less likely to consider leaving foster care.



Communication Beyond Professional Context: Our Families

The first relational and communicational setting is the family. It's where early childhood socialization experiences occur.

Through observation and interaction with the family members, children learn to communicate and to develop their own identity.

Communication is a **facilitating dimension** that helps families maintain stability and balanced levels of:



Cohesion

(the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another)

Flexibility

(the quality and expression of leadership and organization, role relationship, and relationship rules and negotiations)

Communication Models:

Developed through individual (each member) **and group** (family) **experiences**, and are replicated in other settings.

Adjusted to each stage of family life cycle, keeping up with the changes and the needs of its members.

Fulfil several purposes:

Build family narratives and rituals; establish, inform, and negotiate roles, rules and boundaries (inside and outside the family); communicate beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Family Communication: Exercise 7

Communication Scale of FACES-IV	Strongly Disagree (1)	Generally Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Generally Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Family members are satisfied with how they communicate with each other.					
Family members are very good listeners.					
Family members express affection to each other.					
Family members are able to ask each other for what they want.					
Family members can calmly discuss problems with each other.					
Family members discuss their ideas and beliefs with each other.					
When family members ask questions of each other, they get honest answers.					
Family members try to understand each other's feelings.					
When angry, family members seldom say negative things about each other.					
Family members express their true feelings to each other.					

Family Communication: Exercise 7

Communication Scale

of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale – FACES-IV

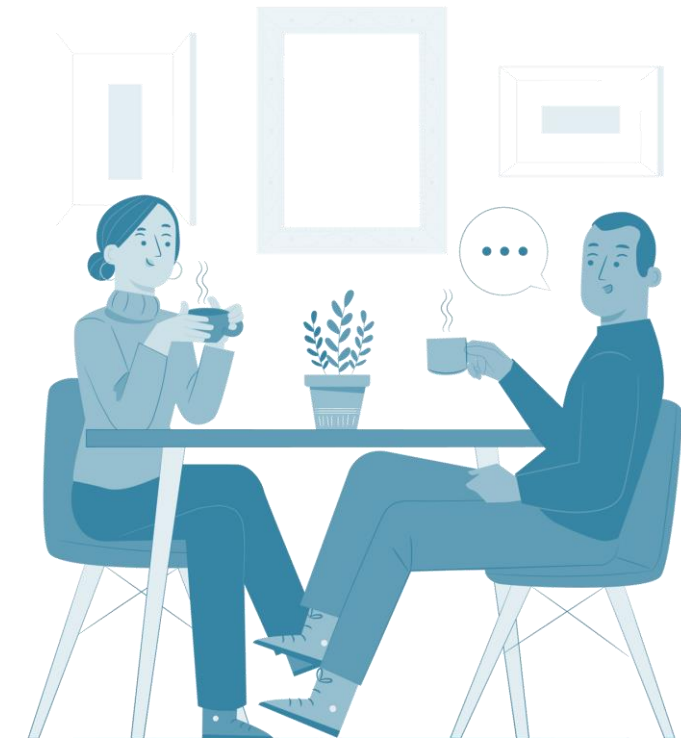
(Olson, 2011)

Scoring:

Add all items of the scale.

Communication Levels:

- Very low – 10 to 29
- Low – 30 to 35
- Moderate – 36 to 39
- High – 40 to 44
- Very High – 45 to 50



Thank you for your attention!

Dėkojame už jūsy dėmesį

Dziękuję za uwagę



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