

12 Roadblocks to Communication

According to Thomas Gordon, author of Teacher Effectiveness Training (T.E.T.), there are thousands of messages that we can send to students by how we communicate with them. They can be grouped into twelve categories, each of which tends to slow or completely stop existing communication that students need to solve problems and continue in their learning.

Some typical responses that communicate unacceptance are:

1. Ordering, commanding, directing.
Example: "Stop whining and get back to work."
2. Warning, threatening.
Example: "You had better get your act together if you expect to pass my class."
3. Moralizing, preaching, giving "shoulds" and "oughts".
Example: "You should leave your personal problems out of the classroom."
4. Advising, offering solutions or suggestions.
Example: "I think you need to get a daily planner so you can organize your time better to get your homework finished."
5. Teaching, lecturing, giving logical arguments.
Example: "You better remember you only have four days to complete that project."

These next responses tend to communicate inadequacies and faults:

6. Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming.
Example: "You are such a lazy kid. You never do what you say you will."
7. Name-calling, stereotyping, labeling.
Example: "Act your age. You are not a kindergartner."
8. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing.
Example: "You are avoiding facing this assignment because you missed the directions due to talking."

Other messages try to make the student feel better or deny there is a problem:

9. Praising, agreeing, giving positive evaluations.
Example: "You are a smart kid. You can figure out a way to finish this assignment."
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling, supporting.
Example: "I know exactly how you are feeling. If you just begin, it won't seem so bad."

This response tends to try to solve the problem for the student:

11. Questioning, probing, interrogating, cross-examining.
"Why did you wait so long to ask for assistance? What was so hard about this worksheet?"

These messages tend to divert the student or avoid the student altogether:

12. Withdrawing, distracting, being sarcastic, humoring, diverting.
"Seems like you got up on the wrong side of the bed today."

Many people are unaware that they respond to students in one of these twelve ways. It is important that we know alternative ways of responding. Many of the above responses have hidden messages when the student hears them. They may hear you saying that they are to blame or that they can't do anything right, when your intention for the message was quite different.

Active Listening:

As an alternative to the roadblocks discussed above, Thomas Gordon uses the technique of active listening to promote communication. Communication has several avenues that can get crossed if the speaker is not clear with the message or the listener decodes it incorrectly. When we use our own words to repeat back what we think the student has just communicated, we are clarifying their message. This "feedback" is called **active listening**. For example:

Student: I don't like this school as much as my old one. People are not very nice."

Para: You are unhappy at this school?

Student: Yeah. I haven't made any good friends. No one includes me.

Para: You feel left out here?

Student: Yeah. I wish I knew more people.

The paraeducator is verbalizing what he/she thinks the student is saying. This lets the student affirm what the para said or explain their meaning in a different way.

Active listening is a powerful tool which helps the paraeducator communicate more productively with the student. Active listening helps the paraeducator more fully understand what the student is saying and also helps the student articulate their concerns. The time it takes to learn and use active listening provides a number of benefits.

- Active Listening:
- -Helps students deal with and "defuse" strong feelings.
- -Helps students understand their own emotions.
- -Facilitates problem solving.
- -Keeps the responsibility with the student.
- -Makes students more willing to listen to others.
- -Promotes a closer, more meaningful relationship between para and student.

Factors Affecting Listening

Being aware of the different factors involved in listening will aid in the process of communication. Listening is an important part of effective communication. We need to concentrate on encouraging not only students, but ourselves, to exhibit good listening behaviors and strategies.

Listening is a process that involves actively hearing what another person is communicating and attending to that communication. Listening is how we receive the verbal portion of a person's message. By listening, we can show concern and interest in understanding both the person and the situation. Listening can be affected by personal

bias, environmental factors, a short attention span, rehearsing a response, daydreaming, hot words, or through the use of filtering.

Bias can take on many forms. Personal prejudice can affect how well we listen and how we perceive what the speaker is saying. Anger can also cause distortion of the message. As good communicators, personal bias and anger must be put aside in order to interpret the message. Be willing to listen to new ideas. Make eye contact with the speaker, use nonverbal communication, such as nodding your head or smiling, to show that you are interested. Even if you do not agree with the speaker's message, showing acceptance will let the speaker know that you have received their message.

Environmental factors, such as noise, temperature and uncomfortable seating can cause us to focus our attention on other factors besides what the speaker is saying. Try to control environmental factors whenever possible. Try adjusting the thermostat, finding another seat, or moving to a quiet place to continue the conversation. It is hard to focus attention when we are constantly distracted by outside forces.

Short attention span. As we receive a message, we must attend to it or we will lose it. Some people have trouble remembering points to discuss when the speaker is talking. Try taking notes as the speaker talks, or use a cue to help you remember what you were going to say. If you find your attention wandering, concentrate on what the speaker is saying, and rehearse how you will answer, or what you are going to say to keep your mind on the task at hand. Ask questions to clarify and to become involved in the conversation. Concentration helps you receive accurate information and indicates that you are interested in what the speaker is saying.

Rehearsing a response: Many times we catch the drift of what the speaker is saying and we begin to rehearse a response, thereby missing parts of the message. Other times we may be anticipating our turn to speak and will spend time mentally or physically reviewing notes and will miss what the speaker has said.

Daydreaming: We are capable of receiving and processing information more rapidly than a speaker can deliver it. This causes us to have spare time to think or daydream, and if we don't concentrate on the message being delivered, we will find ourselves drifting or daydreaming.

Hot Words: We all have certain words that we react to such as, raise in pay, punishment, or compensatory days. Sometimes when a speaker uses a hot word in his/her message we will concentrate more on the meaning of the word, or its implications for us. Consequently, we tend to lose sight of what is being said by the speaker.

Filtering: Many times we will be asked to attend a seminar where we exhibit little or no interest in the topic. As listeners, we tend to listen to get an overview of what is going to be presented and then simply tune out the rest of the message.