

Communication strategies in nursery settings



This essay will be exploring the importance of effective communication strategies within nursery settings; also highlighting potential barriers which could be faced by practitioners and managers. It will also be discussing the benefits of staff appraisals, along with implementation strategies for appraisals, grievance and disciplinary procedures. Employment processes will also be discussed within this essay, with particular reference to policies which must be in place within nurseries; in compliance with national standards.

Effective management within a setting is important as “ the quality of management is one of the most important factors in the success of any organisation” (Mullins, 2010, P. 786). In order to become an effective manager background knowledge and understanding of certain areas is required. Communication takes place within the daily running of a nursery through many different forms, including; verbal and non-verbal communication. However communication may be misread by the receiver if the communicator’s facial expressions, body language or lack of eye contact is misleading; a good connection between the communicator and receiver is essential as it ensure the message is received correctly.

Effective communication ensures good working practice and a welcoming atmosphere within settings for practitioners, children and parents. “ Communication is therefore a central component of effective business operations” (Hargle, et al, 2004). Although managers must practice good communication skills with their staff team, it is a two-way process requiring all participants to effectively practice these skills; ensuring positive outcomes. However this is not always possible, as some participants are not

always willing to listen to or accept others ideas or opinions. By becoming active listeners' individuals are consciously practising effective listening skills and promoting good practice; however this may not always happen in daily practice, as the environment plays an important role in effective communication. If the setting is busy or not all members of staff are in the same area, communication would therefore be more difficult; resulting in some messages not being passed on or forgotten.

There are three general categories for communication; aggressive, assertive and passive. Good managers and leaders aim to be assertive communicators, to ensure the goal is reached but also ensuring all parties feel valued. Whereas passive and aggressive communication are not effective forms of communication for leaders and managers; as passive communicators do not like to put their ideas forward and go along with others to avoid conflict. Aggressive communicators are “ generally perceived as selfish and unwilling to compromise” (About. com, 2012). These will form barriers to effective communication as some recipients will not be willing to listen to aggressive communications, as they may feel they are being dictated to.

The ability to guide practitioners through situations which may arise ensures effective leadership and positive outcomes for children. Although managers are required to implement new requirements, such as the reformed EYFS, many members of staff may not be comfortable with the change. “ Effective leaders understand that any organisational change can have a major impact on the lives of those involved or affected by it” (Rood, 2006, P. 186). The leadership continuum, developed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt, shows “ a <https://assignbuster.com/communication-strategies-in-nursery-settings/>

range of action related to the degree of authority used by the manager and to the area of freedom available to non-managers in arriving at decisions” (Mullins, 2007, P. 372). Effective leadership empowers staff members to work towards a shared goal, achieving positive outcomes for children, practitioners and the setting. To achieve this, leaders must inspire others through positive role modelling, collaboration, open-ended conversation and encouragement.

Isabelle Albanese’s 4 Cs of communication are comprehension, credibility, connection and contagiousness. “ The 4Cs quickly provide a pocket tool to evaluate the effectiveness of every kind of communication” (PMP, 2014); ensuring communication is precise, understood, captivating and progressing in achieving goals. Therefore by using the 4 Cs managers and practitioners alike are able to focus on essential information within their communication, ensuring the effective running of the nursery.

Appraisals are usually carried out within nursery settings on an annual basis, in order to discuss evaluate and track individual practitioner’s performance, progress and future ambitions; with particular reference to training needs and future professional targets. The appraisal form provides a documented account of what has been discussed by management and staff members, with a signed copy of individual action targets agreed by all parties involved in the process. It must also comply with the UK Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, which states that “ It is unlawful to discriminate, harass or victimise job applicants, employees or trainees on the grounds of age” (Compact law, 1996-2014); all correspondence recorded in the appraisal

process should not discriminate against the individual due to their age, race, religion or disability.

Management training on how to deliver effective appraisal is beneficial as it ensures management are motivating their staff to reach their full potential; whereas ineffective appraisals will make practitioners feel demotivated in their job role. Effective appraisal systems must measure, debate and plan individual development and targets, generating useful feedback in both directions (Hay, 2008). Appraisals also offer practitioners the chance to voice their opinions and ideas on the running of the nursery; therefore managers must be open to ideas and opinions of their staff in order to maintain positive working relationships and improve their setting in the best interests of staff and children. Appraisals are a chance for both managers and practitioners to raise any concerns they may have over working practice, whilst also reflecting on their own performance within their role; both positive and negative. However some practitioners may see appraisals as a chance for management to be negative and list issues they may have; therefore it is essential for managers to take into account the views and opinions of practitioners, and offer constructive targets for improvements.

“ New staff should be given copies of policies and procedures as part of the induction process and given the opportunity to discuss them with their line manager” (Daly, et al, 2009, P. 287). This should include the nursery’s appraisal policy, and should be easily accessible for practitioners to access when they require. The policy should clearly state what is expected from both practitioners and management during the appraisal process. Employees are often required to fill out an appraisal form prior to meeting with

management, where they are able to reflect upon their own job performance. It is important for managers to provide practitioners with the last year's appraisal, to allow them to reflect on whether they have achieved their own personal development targets; also giving them the chance to complete targets they may feel they haven't achieved. However it could be argued that self-appraisal should be continuous practice throughout the year, in order to maintain high standards of care and learning for the children. " Self-appraisal should not only be seen as part of the appraisal process. It is also, in a more or less informal way, a regular feature of nursery work" (Sadek and Sadek, 2004, P. 140).

Performance appraisals are a good tool in identifying particular individuals who are progressing well in their job role, and who may be eligible to progress to the next pay and job level; within some bigger nurseries. They also prove worthwhile in motivating individuals within their role, through personalised discussion and development targets. " Managers of effective settings provide intellectual stimulation for their staff, along with respectful individualised support" (Miller, et al, 2012, P. 288).

Although the appraisal process provides a private personalised time where individuals are able to discuss their concerns with managers, it is important for managers to address any pertinent issues with staff as they arise. This therefore ensures that issues are resolved quickly and effectively, rather than being left to escalate. However this is not always possible within larger nurseries whether staff members do not always come into contact with management.

Like the appraisal policy the disciplinary and grievances procedures must be clearly set out within a policy, and kept in an easily accessible place for employees to refer to as required. These procedures ensure the safety and protection of all staff in the setting; in accordance with the ACAS code of practice and current legislation, including the Employment Act 2008. They provide “ clear and transparent structures for dealing with difficulties which may arise as part of the working relationships from either the employers or employees perspective” (CIPD, 2014). The policies should also set out what is expected from staff members, in relation to their conduct; therefore trying to avoid such issues; however this is not always possible.

Issues which may arise include lateness, capability, bullying and performance of individual practitioners. Disciplinary and grievance procedures aim to deal with these issues in house, without the involvement of a tribunal. The three stages of the disciplinary procedure are as follows; issuing a letter to the employee, a meeting between management and the employee and then finally a chance for an appeal. The ACAS code of practice states that “ employers would be well advised to keep a written record of and disciplinary or grievances cases they deal with” (ACAS, 2009, P. 2). This is an important aspect of the procedure, as the records provide evidence in case the issue goes to an employment tribunal. Training is essential in order for management to conduct an effective disciplinary interview; “ Having the appropriate training and knowledge enables you to be in control and manage any situations that arise” (Nicked, 2012).

Employees should be given advanced notice of the meeting in the form of a letter, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. All facts surrounding the case

should be examined and investigated prior to the meeting, ensuring management are aware of all the facts. It is essential that another member of management records notes during the meeting, to guarantee that evidence is collected in case a tribunal is called. All parties involved must be able to put their side across, with plenty of time; this may include relevant witnesses to the case. In order for the manager to make an informed decision they must remain impartial during the meeting, then deliver the verdict to the employee in writing; along with information in case they wish to appeal the verdict.

In conclusion to the interview the outcome may involve no action being taken, a warning being issued or the dismissal of the employee. The manager will decide which of these outcomes is appropriate due to the nature of the case; however they must be able to prove their decision is appropriate and reasonable. Instead of filing a formal procedure employees should be able to approach their managers on a daily basis to discuss any issues; however they may not always feel comfortable doing this.

The employment of new staff within nursery settings follows three stages; advertisement, selection and recruitment and induction. Nurseries are required to have policies in place to reflect these stages, stating how they aim to employ high quality staff whilst maintaining equal opportunities for all applicants. The wide deployment of advertisements at the same time allows a wider range of applicants to apply for the job, with equal time to apply. The vacancy should be advertised to all areas of the community, which is essential to maintain equal opportunities.

To select potential candidates from all the applications managers must review their curriculum vitae against the job description. This is an effective way to avoid discrimination, as they are not being deterred by race, gender or age; it is focussing on their individual skills and attributes, which are appropriate to the role. Having two members of management involved in selecting new members of staff promotes equal opportunities and avoids discrimination; all decisions should be recorded and delivered in writing.

Settings must have an induction policy which clearly sets out how new staff will be introduced to the setting; effectively informing them of the daily running of the nursery and settling them into the environment. This should also include the new member of staff being given the nursery policies to look at, making them aware of the policies and procedures; also identifying children with particular needs or allergies. This is an effective tool during the induction as it avoids mistakes being made, for example a child with a dairy intolerance being given milk to drink by accident.

In an ideal world the shadowing of a current member of staff would provide the new employee with a mentor and a chance to familiarise themselves with the daily running of the setting. However this is not always the case or possible within settings, as due to the busy nature of the environment existing staff members may not have the time to show them certain things; resulting in the new employee not gaining the relevant knowledge needed.

The staff development policy must take into account the ever changing needs of the children in the setting, as well as the changes in legal requirements; such as the reformed Early Years Foundation stage. The key

elements of effective practice (KEEP) states that effective practitioners must have, “ knowledge and understanding in order to actively support and extend children’s learning in and across all areas and aspects of learning” (Surestart, 2005, P. 3). Individual staff personal development plans identify the training needs of individuals, ensuring they receive this training is essential as high quality care and education is important in ensuring positive outcomes for all children. “ Effective practice in the early years requires committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners with a breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and understanding” (Wilcock, 2012, P. 50). The settings promotion policy should clearly set out how promotions will be identified and given at appropriate times, in accordance with the recruitment policy and equal opportunities; staff appraisals also help to identify potential candidates for promotion.

In conclusion effective communication is essential within nursery settings to ensure the smooth daily running of the setting, whilst also achieving the highest outcomes for children. There are many potential barriers to effective communication, which must be overcome by all practitioners to maintain effective practice, and positive working environments. Appraisals are an important factor within staff development as they identify positive aspects of practice, whilst also identifying improvement targets; improving the environment and care of the children. Disciplinary and grievance procedures must be carried out effectively in order to resolve issues quickly and appropriately, within the best interests of all involved. The employment of new staff should reflect equal opportunities, whilst retaining high quality staff appropriate to the role.