

# Communication and professional relationships with children



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The educational environment is a place that gives us opportunity to make a deep and a vital link with children and young people. This also enables us to communicate and build positive relationships with them. Support staff should bear in mind that there are specific principles, skills, and regulations that are compulsory to provide a productive learning environment for children and young people. So, what are the main principles that the supporting assistant should be knowledgeable of when working in a school setting?

The principles of relationship building:

Effective communication with its both sides verbal and non-verbal is very important to develop positive relationships with everyone, from inside the school setting and from outside it like parents and careers. It has a good impact on children emotionally, intellectually, and socially as it provides them a harmonious and a happy learning environment. It is hard to build relationships with everyone in the school setting especially when we come across different people with different ideas, morals, and working practices. Therefore using good communication principles helps us easily to build positive relationships.

We value children and young people when we respect them and when we communicate with them effectively by listening and making time to them. We should consider their feelings as well by avoiding making assumptions and prejudgements, and try to know what the reasons that push them to behave differently. When we show interest in children as human beings and

when we behave with them with a sense of humour makes relationship building with them easy task.

There are some social, professional, and cultural factors that affect our communication and relationships with people. Due to that the communication can be either formal or informal depending on the context and situation we are in. A formal communication can occur between a parent and any working staff in the school when discussing the child's behaviour; it should take place as well when the teacher is discussing any learning information with children. On the other hand the informal one is considered to be an efficient manner to build relationships between teachers themselves and support assistants and also between teachers and their pupils. Informal communication gives more space and freedom for everyone in the school setting to get to know each other deeply. The other factor to be considered is culture. We already mentioned that working in a school setting we may come across different people from different backgrounds and cultures. For that reason, it is mandatory that we modify our communication to be adequate for everyone in order to avoid any misunderstandings, because what might be considered as respect in one culture might be considered as disrespect in another one.

In addition to these principles, the supporting assistant should adopt some skills and adapt them when communicating and when dealing with disagreements, either with children and young people or with adults.

Communication skills:

There are different skills that are important when we communicating with children. For example keeping eye contact and adopting the art of silence shows them that their talk is valued by the listener, and it gives them freedom to express themselves and talk freely, especially children who have a low self-esteem.

Once the child starts speaking we should pay attention to what they are saying and react appropriately by correcting their language mistakes implicitly. The use of questioning is another skill that proves to children that we are interested in what they are saying. It is an effective skill that enables us to converse with them. In addition to that, we value children more when we use body language; bending down to talk to a child gives him or her feeling of security and equality.

Some other aspects like the age of children, the context and communication differences are strong reasons for us to adapt our communication with children and young people.

When supporting 3-7 years age group, non-verbal communication is more used such as eye contact, tone of voice, gestures and motivation. Whereas, communication with the age range of 7-12 years is more verbal. Children at this age tend to converse freely with adults as they have more needs and problems to confess . This verbal and non-verbal communication is likely to change though , according to the context of the situation we are in. For instance, the tone of voice may either be soft or loud depending on the activity being supported.

When we adapt communication with children and young people it strongly means that there are differences that must be put into consideration.

With children:

The tone of voice should be projected appropriately to assure that the instructions are heard and being acted upon. The purpose of communication with children aims more to teach them or ask them to do something and we should show interest, and then listen to them when they are responding to questions being asked.

With young people:

The tone of voice here should not be projected when it is not required in order to avoid causing any offence. The purpose of communication with young people is different, in terms of passing a lot of information besides what is being taught to them by adopting verbal communication. In general communication with young people takes another sense depending on their level of maturity , on their interest in the subject being taught and depending on their personality.

Besides children and young people, adults as careers and parents also have some communication needs that support staff should be knowledgeable of, precisely when they pass information from school about their children or to explain them things that need to be done.

These are some adult's needs that communication should be adapted to meet them:

Literacy: Information should be simplified and clarified as much as possible.

Vision impaired: We should show the parents their children's work closely.

Hearing impaired: We should speak slowly and loudly with a clear voice.

Speaking English as a second language: The supporting assistant should simplify their English language level and a translator should be provided if required.

Communication skills are not only important to build positive relationships but also to deal with disagreements that may lead to break these relationships, and produce us negative relationships instead. Differences in personalities and culture backgrounds are factors that may lead children to disagree easily if they are not brought to accept and respect others.

When children disagree, it is preferable to follow these skills:

- Keep calm, as low voice makes it easy to discuss the situation.
- Encourage both sides to reconcile and communicate.
- Ensure no issue is dismissed regardless of how big or small they are.
- Encourage both sides to apologise and remind them that they should treat others as they would wish to be treated themselves.

Mostly disagreements happen with adults because of lack of communication, dishonesty, and inability to compromise, but if these negative elements are avoided adult's disagreements might be decreased. When it is inevitable,

adults should sort out their conflicts far from children's earshot and sight especially if any aggressive disagreement is taking place. The support assistant should discuss other's opinions calmly far from raised voices and assumption making. We should remain polite and professional as we are representing the school policies and principles. Then, consult with other member of staff or the teacher if the disagreement is beyond our position. We should also exercise confidentiality in all disagreements and discussions. When the support assistants comes across complicated disagreements , they should refer them to teacher or head teacher of the school and it is also advised that they refer to the school grievance and policy.

The purpose of practicing these skills wisely and peacefully in disagreements, guaranties a safe and a secure schooling environment for children, and it helps them to develop their positive attitudes towards others.

Regulations:

Exercising confidentiality in the school setting is a crucial condition that ensures safety for children and young people. All the school staff has access to confidential matters of pupils their families and even the school information. To safeguard this data and information, we should be aware of the main legislations covering and governing this confidentiality. The Data Protection Act 1998 explains us how to exercise confidentiality lawfully, fairly, appropriately, and professionally.

The teaching assistant has a duty towards children and young people to reassure them that any information related to them is safe and will not be shared with someone else, as long as this information is not harming the

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child or anyone else around him. In every rule there is an exception no matter how strict this rule is. Therefore, confidentiality must be breached in cases like these:

- Situations disclosed by pupils that would indicate they could come to harm.
- Where a child is involved, or could become involved, in criminal activity.
- Evidence of an adult being at risk or suffering harm.

The teaching assistant should notify the child protection officer as soon as possible. There is another case that necessitates sharing data. For instance, having a child suffering from any dangerous illness. In cases like that the other members of staff should be privy to the whole situation so that attention is paid to the child to ensure his safety at any time.

When the teaching assistants raise their knowledge about these principles, skills, and regulations it makes their work with children and young people productive and easier. Effective communication and positive relationships are vital contribution to children's progress in the school setting.