Teaching Assistant

Communication & Professional Relationships with Children, Young Individuals & Adults.
Explain how to adapt communication with children and young people for:
   a) the age of the child or young person
   b) the context of the communication
   c) communication differences

Building positive relationships with children and young people is an aim that requires a variety of adaptations on your part, depending on how old the child is, what the context is, and whether or not there are any barriers to effective communication.

The age of the child or young person

Different ages of child or young person denote different needs from communication and attention. Very young children may need a lot of reassurance, and can sometimes need physical contact to help with this. Older children may be quite confident most of the time, but certain situations may need sorting out and discussing, and sometimes they may need help to reflect on situations or problems.

Adapting to the age of the person means changing the language that you use so that they understand you easily. It can also mean that you might be expected to respond differently to them, so for example, when looking at a 5-year-old's painting of his house, you might just tell him it's great and that the colours are lovely. When feeding back to a 14-year-old about a drawing of his house, you might tell him that it looks really accurate, but then point out that some of the shadows are not quite right, and signpost a book on the subject that will make it easier for him to learn the technique.

Much of the way we communicate with a child or young person is dependent on their expectations and needs as much as it is on clarity. The 5-year-old doesn't need feedback to make their technique better; they may need encouragement and approval so that they will be confident enough to do another painting soon. The 14-year-old may not think he needs feedback to improve his technique, but if it is given in a way that does not make him feel criticised, he may find it useful anyway.
Factors to take into account when communicating with children and young people.

**Communication context**

School and nursery contexts produce a huge variety of situations, from quiet classrooms to one-to-one situations; from busy, chaotic playgrounds to structured games lessons. Although in every context, you are expected to maintain a professional relationship of carer-to-child, you can be more or less formal, depending on the social set up of the situation.

For example, when involved in a learning activity, children need you to be clear in your instructions, interested in what they are doing, ready with solutions for any problems that occur, and to be open and approachable. They don't necessarily know it, but they also need you to ensure that distractions do not disrupt their learning. In this kind of context, your communication may be more planned and even more formal, as you ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them.
Alternatively, if you are involved in playground duty, you will be able to work on positive relationships with the children under your care. They may ask you personal questions – which should be navigated carefully and with humour – and they may bring you personal problems, such as playground fall-outs and similar. Your communication in these kinds of situations will be unplanned, but still needs a certain amount of thought and attention and reflection afterwards, so that if you didn't quite respond in the best way, you are at least aware of what went wrong and how you might do it differently next time.

**Communication differences**

Communication differences’ are generally personal barriers to communication that some children have. Some examples of these are:

- Sensory impairments
- A different primary language
- Speech and language impairments
- Differing cognitive abilities
- Hyped-up emotional states
- Cultural differences

It really is important to present sensitivity and care when communicating with children who have one or more communication differences. Most of the time this means giving them enough time to form the thought and get the words out, and they may need quite a bit more time than other children, so using patience and understanding is helpful.

Children with a communication disorder, such as ASD, or even with a physical impairment, such as a stammer, may get quite stressed if others try to fill in the correct word that they are looking for, so rather than guessing what they are trying to say, it is best to listen to them as if they are not taking a very long time to say their piece.

Anxiety and nervousness can have bad enough effects on children who do not have communication differences, so clearly, these things can aggravate the situation for those who do.

Adapting the way you communicate is the best way to ensure more effective communication with children who have in-built barriers to communication. After all, you are the expert communicator; they are the ones learning. Your behaviour and your attitude shows them both how they are expected to behave, but also what they should expect from others.