

Helpful Ways to Talk About Feelings

Size

When your child shares an upset feeling, ask them to show you with their body if the feeling is small, medium, or big. Use your arms and hands to communicate each size as you speak it. For example, “*Are you a little mad, medium-sized mad, or really, really big mad?*” When we talk about the size of feelings, we are helping our children learn that feelings:

- Come in different intensities
- Come and go
- Can be made smaller or more manageable when we learn what to say and do to make things better

Practice

Use the word “practice” frequently as you practice your own communication and guide your child to practice their communication. For example, you might talk about your own communication by saying something like, “*I am going to practice my patience so I can make sure to handle this situation with kindness.*” Or you might coach your child by saying, “*Practice using your Talking Voice so I can listen to what is upsetting you.*” When you use the word “practice,” your children will understand that we need to put effort in and try again when we have not yet formed a positive communication habit. Let your children know that practice does not make perfect, but it does make things better!

Tools

Talk with your child about how tools help us. Hammers help us build. Pencils help us draw and write. Communication tools help us make and keep friends and do our best in school. Using the word “tools” makes communication sound and feel more tangible and lets children know there are positive actions we use to help us express feelings. (The Kimochis Keys to Communication are the tools!)

Habit

Using the word “habit” instead of “skill” can also make a big difference. The word “skill” gives the impression that you either have the ability or don’t have the ability. The word “skill” can also make one think that there is a right and a wrong way to do something.

Now take the word “habit.” Habits are often acquired without being directly taught. We can develop not-so-good habits, but with teaching, repetition, practice, positive feedback, and gentle reminders, we can learn and change to new, positive habits. Using the word “habit” in relation to communication can help your child feel more hopeful that they can improve. It can also encourage children to be more open to redoing or trying again when they forget to use positive communication.

Story

Most people start a conversation with “wh” questions: “*What? When? Where? Why? How?*” Typically, these questions result in simple answers. Consider the response you get when you ask someone, “*How are you?*”

Most people will say, “Fine.” Instead, try using the word “story” as a way to encourage a fuller, richer response. “Tell me a story about recess today.” Everyone likes a story, and using the word “story” also can make a child feel less interrogated or on the spot.

Mistakes

Make your family a “Second Chance Family.” Tell your child that everyone will make mistakes when we express feelings. We may yell or accidentally say unkind words in the heat of the moment. Make an agreement that in your family, everyone gets the chance to stop and start again or redo a moment if they make a communication mistake.

TEACHING THE KEYS TO COMMUNICATION SEL in ACTION

Key 1: Call Someone’s Name, Wait for Eye Contact, and Give a Communication Tap, if Needed, Before You Speak

Why this key is important: Hearing our name gives us a sense of belonging and alerts us to look at the speaker. Eye contact engages the listener and speaker and helps to make a communication connection. Friendly eye contact will increase the odds that children and adults will listen to each other during challenging social moments. Sometimes calling someone’s name is not enough to get their attention. When children learn how to use a gentle tap on the shoulder to get the attention of peers, teachers, and parents in an appropriate way, they are developing positive, relationship-building communication strategies. A helpful way to encourage eye contact when a child speaks without it is to have the child tell the story to your eyes. For example, “Tell my eyes the story of what happened on the playground.”

Tool: Eye Contact

1. Tell and show children what eye contact is.
2. Ask students to put their feet out if they would like to get your eye contact.
3. Put your index and middle fingers in the shape of a V pointing towards your eyes and then moving in the direction of student’s eyes as you say, “Eye Contact.”
4. Have students imitate this gesture and say, “Eye Contact.”
5. Show and tell children that when we make eye contact we feel a “connection.” Explain that connection makes us feel good inside and close to people.
6. Putting one hand on your head talk about how your brain helps us think.
7. Putting your other hand on your heart explain that our heart helps us feel.
8. Now moving both hands together in front of you clasp them and say, “When people call our name and wait for our eye contact you can feel a ‘connection.’”
9. Ask students to imitate your gestures by putting one hand on their head and one on their heart.
10. Ask students who wish to feel a connection to put their legs out in front of them.
11. One by one call students names who wish to have a turn. Tell these students to connect their hands when they feel a connection.

12. The teacher also makes a connection with your hands when you feel the connection between yourself and each student.

Tool: Communication Tap

1. Sit in a circle all facing the center.
2. Begin the communication tap game by gently tapping the shoulder of the student on your right. This student then makes eye contact with you, smiles, and passes the tap on to her right.
3. When the tap makes it all the way around the circle, send it in the opposite direction. See how fast you can get the tap to go around the circle.
4. Practice the tap in predictable situations (lines, floor time [I can't see], asking questions)

Key 2: Use a Talking Voice Instead of a Fighting Voice

Why this key is important: Some students may be unaware of their tone of voice. Others may be unable regulate the use of a talking tone and volume vs. a fighting one. This lesson will activate student awareness of the importance of their tone and volume in communication and give them a communication tool called Serious Voice to communicate upset emotions in a way people will be more inclined to listen.

Tool: Talking Voice, Fighting Voice, Serious Voice

1. Before you begin with the children, ask an adult in the room to stand up when they hear a fighting voice (loud, fast, abrupt) and stay seated when they hear a talking voice (calm, slightly slowed down, appropriate volume). Say in fighting voice, "Move." Adult stands. Then say it in a talking voice and the adult sits down.
2. Now play this game with the children. They stand when they hear a fighting voice and sit when they hear a talking voice. Use common language typically spoken by your children, such as "That's mine." "It's my turn." "I want that."
3. Ask, "How do you feel when I used a fighting voice?" Tell children that it is kind to use our talking voice even when we are upset.
4. Choose children to have a turn using a talking voice or a fighting voice. Others stand or sit depending on which voice the child uses.
5. Now tell your students there is a voice called Serious Voice. This voice is helpful to use when you are upset and someone is not respecting your Talking Voice. Model a slow stretched speech message such as "I was here."
6. Give students a turn using both a Talking and Serious Voice in role-plays or shows.
7. Think together about when a Serious Voice may be needed.

Key 3: Use a Talking Face/Body Language Instead of Fighting Face/Body Language

Why this key is important: The number one reason for miscommunication is the way we "come across" due to body language and tone of voice. Additionally, people often read body language from fear thoughts. We easily misread the message and take things personally. This activity and concept will help students begin to consider that what we see is not always what a person is feeling. This can help students to consider the shadows/insecure places that fuel communication that is hard to listen to.

Tool: Recognizing Different Faces

1. Invite 5 students to come to the front of the room and make their face look mad.
2. Select 1/3 of class to observe and notice how their facial expressions are similar (all have a frown).
3. Select another 1/3 to observe how they are different (some have pursed lips and some don't).
4. Select a final group to say what else they can be communicating other than mad. (bored, frustrated, etc).

Tools: Talking, Fighting and Serious Eyes

1. Review the concept of eye contact and explain that how we use our eyes when we have upset feelings can make things better or worse.
2. Show students Talking and Fighting Eyes and have them determine which pair of eyes would help.
3. Explain that when you feel upset your body will want to use fighting eyes. Give students fighting eyes and ask them what it makes them want to do when they are given fighting eyes.
4. Reassure students that there is a communication tool called, Serious Eyes.
5. Show students Serious Eyes and have them imitate. (Widen eyes slightly with no tension)
6. Brainstorm when and where Serious Eyes can help us communicate.

Tool: Use a Talking Hand to Request Objects

1. Hold an object and ask someone to grab it from you. Show how you want to grab it back.
2. Say, *"When someone grabs from you, you want to grab back. But that is a fighting hand and is not kind. Watch what I can do when a friend grabs that is kind."* Use another adult to model the talking hand. The adult grabs a block or toy from you and you demonstrate the talking hand gesture. (Put your hand out with the palm up and patiently wait). Adult places toy in your hand.
3. Now say, *"You watch and tell me if I use a fighting hand or a talking hand."* Do several different demonstrations. Help children to say *"Fighting hand or talking hand"* depending on what you do.
4. Give a toy to a child and tell them that you will grab it from them. Prompt the child to use a Talking Hand. When the child uses a talking hand, the others can give a silent cheer, a hooray or a thumbs-up. Let several children practice using the Talking Hand.
5. Introduce how to send an *"I mean it"* message without being mean. Demonstrate how to turn up the seriousness if the Talking Hand doesn't work the first time.
 - First try: Use the Talking Hand (student doesn't give it back)
 - Second try: Say with a Talking Voice and Face, *"(name), please give it back."* (Doesn't work).
 - Third try: Say with a Talking Voice and Face, *"I asked you to give it back nicely."* (Doesn't work).
 - Fourth try: Say with a Talking Voice and Face, *"Do I have to get a teacher?"*

Tool: Use Stop Hands

1. Invite everyone to imitate your Stop hands (both hands come up near your shoulders palms facing outward, fingers spread wide).
2. Say the message, *"Stop, I mean it,"* using slow, stretched speech as you bring your hands up near your shoulders to indicate STOP.
3. Take a step backwards while you are making Stop Hands and say, *"Stop, I mean it."*
4. Practice Stop Hands. Approach students who volunteer to practice sending a strong, clear message to stop by teasing or annoying them in a way you observe happens in real life.
5. Coach students who need help. Some children may need help adjusting hands, tone, and volume as this is challenging and foreign for many.

Key 4: Choose Words That Help Instead of Hurt

Why this key is important: Many people speak out of habit or without considering how a word or simple phrase can make an emotional moment even more upsetting. “*Use your words*” is a popular mantra parents and teachers use to remind kids to communicate peacefully. Unfortunately, many of our children do not have the words or cannot retrieve them in the heat of emotion. Practice helpful communication scripts away from the emotion as it raises the odds your students will be able to express themselves in more caring ways.

Tool: Helping or Hurting Words.

1. Open this activity by saying, “Words can hurt feelings.”
2. Ask student to nod if they ever have hurt feelings because of something that was said to them.
3. Ask students to clap their hands if they remember when they used words that hurt feelings.
4. Brainstorm words that are off limits. (baby, sissy, wimp, etc.)
5. Tell the children when someone makes a mistake and says hurting words, they can say “*Ouch*” and cover their ears. Say both kind and hurting words (try to use words you have heard your children use). Show students how they can say, “*Ouch, that hurts.*” when a friend forgets to think before they speak and uses hurtful words. Say, “*Let’s all practice covering our ears, and say, ‘Ouch’ with me.*”
6. Give students practice responding to you saying something hurtful to them so they can practice using the tool, “*Ouch.*”

Key 5: Be Brave and Redo Hurtful Moments

Why this key is important: Everyone makes communication mistakes that can cause regret and shame. Students can learn to get in the habit of listening and observing what they do and say to recover from saying/doing something they are not proud of. Help students get in the habit of redoing a hurtful moment. We edit our writing so why not edit our speaking?

Tool: Re-do

1. Draw a picture of a house on your whiteboard and accidentally draw the door on the roof.
2. Use an exaggerated face and voice and say, “*Oops, I made a mistake. I am going to erase and re-do the door.*”
3. Call FREEZE and ask the children what you did when you made a mistake. Remind students that everybody makes mistakes and so we need to practice re-doing the moments.
4. Ask an adult or child to join you and role-play. Say, “*Move, stupid!*” at the person using a fighting voice, face and body. Ask children how they think this made the person feel.
5. Now, redo the moment by saying, “*Sorry, I yelled.*” Redo by saying, “*Could you please move? I can’t see.*” Ask children how they think the person feels now. Ask the person how s/he feels.
6. Do additional role-plays with children. Show the children how we can hurt feelings by our actions and words. Make it clear how we can all redo a hurt moment. Tell children that in your classroom we are brave and kind and re-do moments when we accidentally hurt feelings.