

Interpreting Communication

Consider a child you know who has emotional and behavioural difficulties and where there is little open communication.

Step 1: Understanding the Context

Consider the context in which the child is communicating.

	Key area	Purpose of question	Questions to answer	Responses
Q1	When is the child most engaged?	To understand how to help the child to be engaged and alert so that they are emotionally settled and able to communicate.	<p>What levels of engagement does the child exhibit across the day?</p> <p>When is the child most alert?</p> <p>How long can s/he maintain attention?</p> <p>What problems does the child have in shifting and maintaining their attention?</p> <p>What variables appear to affect the level of alertness in the child?</p>	
Q2	How does the child take in information?	To ascertain which are the preferred sensory modalities of the child.	<p>What sensory channels are most effective for gaining the child's attention?</p> <p>What sensory channels are important for conveying reliable information to the child?</p> <p>What degree of sensory information or pacing of presentation of information helps</p>	

			<p>the child shift his/her attention?</p> <p>Is the child's orienting reflex a response to visual or auditory stimulus?</p>	
Q3	What are the most important things in this child's life?	To ascertain what the child likes to do.	<p>How does the child communicate what s/he likes and dislikes?</p> <p>What opportunities are there throughout the day for the child to choose what to do?</p> <p>How consistently are you able to respond to the child's choice?</p> <p>How does your role and responsibilities interfere with providing the child with opportunities to choose?</p>	

Step 2: Understanding the Communication

Identify the most significant people in the child's life. This will include you, other members of staff and the child's parents and siblings. It may also include other children in the class and people in the wider community.

Discuss with these people the following areas:

	Key area	Purpose of question	Questions to answer	Responses
Q4	How do you communicate with the child?		Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Body position• Touch• Verbal, sign or symbol	
Q5	What do you communicate about?		Do you communicate about the same or different things? Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management• Learning• Choice• Emotion	

Step 3: Similarities and Differences

Using the above information you can now begin to make more sense of the child's communication. Focus on the exceptions as this will allow you to find levers for change.

Exceptions may happen in any of the above areas. For example, consider the following:

	Key area	Purpose of question	Questions to answer	Responses
Q6	Context	Understanding the context Taking in information Favourite activities	When during the day is the child the most settled? When are they most agitated? What sort of sensory stimulus helps them settle? What makes them agitated? What activities will the child spend an exceptional amount of time focused on?	
Q7	People	Needs Choice Emotion	Who understands best what the child wants? Who gives the child choice? Who contains the child's anxieties?	

The greater the exceptions and differences, the easier it is to develop the communication with the child. This is not a value judgement about one adult being better than another, it is simply a recognition that all children and all adults are different. If a particular adult has found a way of communicating both practically and emotionally with the child then other adults can learn from this.