COMMUNICATING IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

A handbook for people working with children with communication difficulties

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New York

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In the last section we looked at

- the importance of play in our work with children
- how to make low cost toys.

In this section we are going to look at how parents can use everyday situations to develop their child’s communication skills.

By the end of this section you should be able to

- appreciate why everyday situations are so important in building up a child’s communication skills
- recognise when it is appropriate to teach a child words
- give guidance to parents on how to teach their child words
- demonstrate and make practical suggestions as to how everyday situations can be used to improve communication between the parent and the child.
Parents' views:

At the rehabilitation department I was shown how to teach Peresi to wash, dress and feed himself and to be toilet-trained. My friends always encouraged me to keep on going to the department and to follow the advice I was given. Now Peresi can feed himself and try to dress himself and he is toilet-trained. He is also able to speak some words and he can communicate quite easily using gestures. I would never have thought that by using everyday situations like these I could teach Peresi so much!

I used to be too busy working to spend any extra time helping my disabled child. I was worried because I could see he wasn't improving, but I also needed to work to earn money for my family. After a while I visited the rehabilitation department. There they showed me how to combine teaching Kennedy with carrying out everyday activities. So I've started to use the times when I bath and dress Kennedy to talk to him and to teach him about communication. At last he is improving.

I started visiting the rehabilitation department and attending a parents' support group. It was there that I learnt how to care for Sharon, to keep her clean and well fed and how to talk to her so that she would learn to recognise my voice. I talked to myself and told myself that I must love and care for Sharon. I started to keep her clean and dressed her in good clothes so that people would notice how nice she looked rather than only noticing her disability. Now people admire her clothes and the way she looks and that makes me happy.

I was shown how I could help Vimbai when I was bathing her, dressing her and feeding her, and while I was working in the house. I was told that Vimbai was just slow to talk, and that she would learn to talk eventually. Since then Vimbai has steadily made progress and now she is almost like other children of her age. She is learning to wash and dress herself and she is talking so much. Now, when I hear her voice I think, "Ah! Vimbai, now you are happier."
What do we mean by “everyday situations”?
They are activities that happen in a home as part of a family’s daily routine. The everyday situations that we are going to talk about in this section are

- bathing
- mealtimes
- dressing
- household activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and dishes.

What can a child learn in these situations?
Everyday situations can be used to teach a child many different skills:

- increased independence
- gross motor skills
- fine motor skills
- cognitive skills
- social interaction
- communication skills.

What a child can learn from everyday situations will depend on her abilities and disabilities. Every child has her own individual needs and possibilities and these should be reflected in the way that everyday situations are used with her. For example, some children can be helped to develop basic communication; others may need practice at all the skills of the communication house; while others may be ready to understand and to use words.

Why are everyday situations so important for teaching?
Everyday situations are important for teaching because they

- take place several times each day
- are times when natural interaction can take place
- encourage a child to be active in helping herself
- increase a child’s self esteem
- prepare a child to be independent for school and for later life
- use the words we need for living daily life.

As we have said, children can learn many different skills in everyday situations, but in this section we are going to look in particular at how they can learn communication skills. Come with me ...
If parents are shown how to use everyday situations as opportunities to teach their child, these situations can become invaluable tools in building up the skills of the communication house.

And what's more they...

- can be fun!
- use no extra time!
- need no special equipment or toys!
- can involve all members of a family!
To illustrate more clearly what we are talking about we have shown two situations below.

**Look and think... What do you notice?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mai Tendai</td>
<td>I think I'll buy that dress I saw...</td>
<td>I wish those dogs would keep quiet</td>
<td>Oooh! I'm tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mmm... It's not today.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mai Farayi</th>
<th>Take soap... Wash your head.</th>
<th>Wash your foot.</th>
<th>Wash your head. Well done! Good girl!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Look! Farayi is washing herself!</em></td>
<td><em>a-ga</em></td>
<td><em>oo! - ga - ba - ba eee!</em></td>
<td><em>Washing!</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mai Tendai** is not interested in bathing her child, and does not interact with her. Over the period of time from May to August, there is no change in Mai Tendai’s behaviour or in the child’s behaviour.

**Mai Farayi** is interested in bathing her child, and makes an effort to interact with her. As a result of her efforts, Farayi becomes more responsive and interested in communication. Her understanding improves and she begins to join in.

On the next page we are going to look in more detail at exactly what Mai Farayi does to help develop her child’s communication skills....
By using her communication skills Mai Farayi turns an everyday situation into one where her child can develop his communication skills. This is what all of us should try to aim for.

THE GOLDEN RULES FOR COMMUNICATING IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

Learn from Mai Farayi

- She gives her whole attention to the situation she is involved in with her child.
- She gets her child’s attention by calling his name and by touching him, before she talks to him.
- She positions herself at the same level as the child.
- She makes sure that she has good eye contact with her child.
- She talks to the child about what she is doing.
- She uses clear, simple language.
- She repeats important words often and in context.
- She uses an interesting facial expression and voice.
- She gets her child to join in the activity and encourages him to try things for himself.
- She praises him whenever he tries.

Remember! ~ it is how you talk that is important, not how much you talk.

We're off to try the "Golden Rules"!
The most difficult of all the communication skills is learning to understand and use spoken language. Because it is so important we are going to look at it now, in more detail.

Everyday situations are the best times for learning to understand and to use words because it is at these times that words are used in a natural and meaningful way. Also, these situations occur every day, and sometimes more than once in a day, so the words and situations are repeated often and become familiar to the child. This is how we all learn spoken language!

As we said in Section 1, spoken language is just one part of communication. Not all children with communication difficulties will develop spoken language, but some of them will. Everyday situations provide those children who are ready to understand and to use words with the ideal opportunity for learning.

How do we learn words?

Most people learn to use words easily and do not think twice about the process by which they learnt to use words at an early age. To help us understand a little better what it is like for a child who is learning to talk, we can think back to our own experiences of starting to learn a second language.

Try this activity

1. Take a friend.
2. Think of the name of an object in a language that your friend doesn’t understand.
3. Tell your friend the word but do not show her the object.
4. Your friend can repeat the word, but can she understand it and use it meaningfully?
5. Now do the same with your friend, but this time, show her the object that your are naming.
6. Your friend can now not only repeat the word but can also understand it and use it meaningfully.
What exactly is a word?

- Words are symbols which are used to represent objects.
- Words enable us to talk about objects which are not present.
- Any sound can be called a word as long as another person understands its meaning.
- Look at all the different words that can be used to refer to a cup, a dog, and bread. And these are just some of the many words used for cup, dog and bread throughout the world.

To truly learn and understand a word, it is not enough just to hear it being spoken. Listening alone will not help a child to learn the meaning of a word. **For words to become meaningful and useful they must be linked to an object or a situation.**

For a child to truly learn a word he must

- listen to the word
- see the object to which it is referring
- see the object being used
- hold the object
- use the object
- feel the object
- experience the situation/object regularly.
There are three steps involved in learning words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>The child...</th>
<th>The adult...</th>
<th>Remember!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | - hears the word being used in many different situations  
      - links the word she hears to its meaning  
      - starts to understand the word | - stresses the word and uses it in many different situations  
      - repeats the word and clearly links it to its meaning  
      - consistently uses the same word for a particular object | - the child does not need to speak.  
      - the child must be actively involved in the situation.  
      - be patient - this step takes time. |
| 2    | - tries to copy the word she hears in the situation  
      - is encouraged by the adult’s response  
      - keeps trying! | - gives the child time to try a word  
      - praises any attempt the child makes to say a word  
      - continues to use the word in context | - wait patiently for the child - she can’t be forced to speak.  
      - do not talk too much.  
      - give the child lots of time at this step - do not rush her on to step 3 too soon. |
| 3    | - thinks what meaning she wants to convey  
      - remembers the word for this meaning  
      - remembers how to say the word | - keeps the same activity going to give the child time to think and to use the word  
      - praises and accepts any attempt the child makes to use the word in the meaningful situation | - do not move on too soon to new activities and to new words - the child needs practice.  
      - always be a good example for the child to follow. |

To see just how important it is that a child is helped to progress through these three steps when learning a word, compare the two situations shown below...

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Say “daddy”</td>
<td>Say “daddy”!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(daddy)</td>
<td>(daddy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | There’s daddy  
   Hi! daddy! | Daddy’s eating  
   Dadda |
|   |   | Daddy |
Did you know that there are different types of words, and that a child learns them in a particular order? ...Well, it's true ...

The words we use can mainly be divided into

- names of people, for example, Mum, Dad, Viola, John
- names of objects, for example, ball, car, chair, doll, book
- social words, for example, goodbye, hello, no, yes
- action words, for example, eat, sleep, walk, bath, cook, wash
- describing words, for example, hot, cold, big, small, fast, slow.

And there are other small words that a child also needs to learn later on...

**Step by step guide to teaching words**

- **First of all**, **decide if the child is ready to learn the meaning of words.** Is he already using gestures? Does he enjoy pretend play? Is he already using some sounds with meaning?

- **If so**, **decide which words would be useful for the child to learn.** What is he interested in? What situations can be used to teach the child? Start off with words that belong to the earlier groups shown above ie, names of people and objects, social words. Later on, teach action words and describing words.

- **Now**, think about **how you can teach the words** to the child. Choose between 5-10 words to teach the child. Think back to the steps involved in learning words (page 8). For each word you have chosen, think about which situations can be used to teach that word.

**REMEMBER!**

Teach no more than 10 words at a time.

Take your time - be sure that the child knows the first 10 words well, before moving on to the next 10 words.

To begin with your child's pronunciation will not be perfect, but praise him for any attempts he makes to speak.
From single words to sentences!

Once a child has learnt to understand and to use many single words, she needs to learn how to put those words together to make sentences. To begin with she will just put 2 words together, later 3 words, and eventually she will put many words together to make longer sentences.

Did you know that there are rules that we must follow when we put words together to make sentences? If I said “book this an interesting is” I wouldn’t be following the rules, would I? When a child is learning to put words together she may need help to follow the rules.

The rules that govern how a child puts single words together to make early sentences are

- **social word + name of person**
  for example, bye bye Daddy, yes Mummy
- **action word + name of person or object**
  for example, wash dolly, feed baby
- **name of person/object + action word**
  for example, Daddy go, dolly sleep
- **describing word + person/object/action**
  for example, big pot, more drink.

To help a child move on from single words to putting 2 words together, remember the rules above.

Also, think back to how we said a child learns to understand and to use single words. A child will learn to put words together in exactly the same way. She will learn to use words together

- by hearing an adult use 2 word sentences in a variety of everyday situations
- by linking the words used to the situation
- by starting to understand the meaning of the words used
- by trying to copy the adult’s 2 word sentence in the situation
- by remembering for herself how to say the 2 word sentence in a meaningful situation.

**Remember**
- Praise the child for any attempt she makes.
- Repeat phrases often in meaningful situations.
- Always use words that the child knows. Try to put the same words into new phrases.

Once a child starts to put 2 words together, she will progress rapidly to longer phrases and sentences.
Important points to remember about learning words

- Words are symbols for the objects they represent.
- Words used without understanding are not useful for communication.
- Choose no more than 10 words to concentrate on teaching at any one time.
- There are different types of words that a child needs to learn.
- Be sure that the words you choose are useful to the child.
- Think of as many situations as possible in which the words can be taught to the child.
- Remember there are 3 steps involved in learning a word.
- Involve the child actively in situations and clearly show him the meaning of the words.
- Give a child time to listen and think about what you say.

- Never force a child to copy your words.
- Praise the child whenever he tries to say a word even though his pronunciation might not be perfect to begin with.
- Once the child has started to use some of the new words, continue to use those words in everyday situations so that they become firmly established in his mind.
- When the child is ready, choose 5 more words for him to learn.

- Everyday situations are the best times for learning words.
Now we are going to look at some everyday situations in more detail and suggest activities that can help to build up the skills of the communication house. Look at each picture carefully—think which communication skills are being built up in each situation.

**BATHING**

- Look at the soap! Smell the soap!
- Let's pour water in the tub. Oooh! It's hot water!
- Oooh! Look at the water... Splash! Splash!
- I'm washing my arm. Mum's washing Peter's arm.
- Wash your arm!
- Where's Peter? Oooh! There he is!
- Pour the water!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas of words to teach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People:</strong> Daddy, Peter, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objects:</strong> dish, water, soap, towel, cloth, head, arms, legs, stomach, face, hair, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social:</strong> splash splash, look, ooh, give me, goodbye.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action:</strong> look, smell, pour, washing, rub, dry, get in, get out, sit down, stand up, play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describing:</strong> hot, cold, clear, dirty, quick, slow, soft, rough, smooth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I'm putting on my red shoes. You're putting on your green shoes.

Where's Chipo gone? Oh! There she is! Mama!

We're putting on our hats and our jerseys.

Do you want to wear your long trousers or your shorts?

Where are your shoes? Where's your hat? Where's your jersey?

Tickle... tickle... eee!

Put the hat on dolly's head. Put the shoes on dolly's feet.

Where's Chipo?

Oh! There she is!

Ideas of words to teach

People: Mum, Chipo, etc

Objects: shirt, shorts, pants, shoes, socks, hat, buttons, laces, zips, head, arms, legs, feet, aah, good boy, look

Action: put on, take off, do up, lace up, get dressed, undress,

Describing: smart, new, old, long, short, red, brown, green, warm, cool, etc.
MEALTIMES.

First we wash hands, and then we will eat.

What do you want? More?

Mama’s cooking vegetables.

Mmm!
It tastes nice!

Do you want sadza?
Clap hands. Good boy!

Do you want an orange or a banana?

Sadza for John. Sadza for Blessing.
Sadza for Chipo.

Sadza! sadza!

Mama’s feeding Chipo.
Blessing’s feeding dolly.

More?

Ideas of words to teach

People: Blessing, John, Mum, Chipo, Dad,

Objects: sadza, meat, vegetables, soup, plate, cup, pot, orange, banana, baby, dolly, dish, spoon, fire,

Social: clap, please, more, give me, good boy, thank you, no more,

Action: eat, cook, take, give, drying, clap, clean, put, stir, feed, fetch,

Describing: hot, cold, hungry, full, sweet, thirsty, nice, tasty.
Ideas of words to teach

People: Mum, Dad, Tendai, Vimbai,

Objects: tomatoes, dish, onions, shirt, shorts, dog, chicken, cows, polish, bush, surf,

Social: hello, goodbye, good boy, well done, thank you, be careful!

Action: wash, give, feed, polish, scrub, collect, buy, choose, sweep, find, help,

Describing: clean, dirty, hungry, full, shiny, nice.
Remember!

Everyday situations can be valuable times when a whole family can communicate together in a natural and relaxed way.

Helping a child to do as much as possible for himself can make him a valued and accepted member of a community.

By using our skills well, we can help a child develop his communication skills.

It is up to us to make what could be an ordinary situation into an exciting and valuable opportunity for learning.

Everyday situations can be fun.
Important points to remember about communicating in everyday situations

- Everyday situations are those situations that happen regularly as part of a family's daily routine.

- A child can learn many different skills during everyday situations. Communication is just one area in which he can develop.

- Everyday situations are the best situations for learning communication skills, including words.

- They are natural situations where communication can take place in a functional setting.

- We can use everyday situations in different ways according to the needs of each individual child and our aims of working with him.

- Everyday situations can be used for teaching all levels of communication skills, right from basic communication to the understanding and using of words.

- By using everyday situations a family can include teaching their disabled child in their daily household activities.

- A family who has little extra time to play with their child should be strongly encouraged to use everyday situations to help their child to learn.

- For all children, everyday situations are the most valuable times for learning.
TEACHING IDEAS

Here are three teaching activities that can be used with groups of parents. All the activities are concerned with learning communication skills, including words, in everyday situations.

• Learning words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>CHILD</th>
<th>ADULT</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Pictures of everyday activities

• Practical everyday situations
Learning words

This is a set of posters which explains all the steps that a child goes through when she learns words. It can be used for teaching parents and health workers and anyone interested in finding out more about how children learn words. The aim is to show the steps involved in learning words and to describe how an adult can help a child to do this (see page 8 of this section).

You will need: scissors, card, pens.

To make the poster:

1 Cut out strip of card 10 cm x 120 cm.

2 Cut out three strips of card, each 30 cm x 120 cm.

3 Take the first strip and divide it into 4 pieces. Label each piece as shown.

4 Take the next 3 strips of cards. Divide each into 4 and label each one as shown.

Step 1
Understanding the meaning

- Hears the word in many situations.
- Begins to understand it.

Step 2
Copying the adult

- Tries to copy the word.
- Gives child time and praises all attempts.

Step 3
Using the word meaningfully

- Thinks of word and remembers how to say it.
- Reinforce what the child said.
- Praise him.

Don't force child.
Be patient.

Give child practice.
Don't rush him.

Give the child a good example to follow.
Before you use this teaching aid, be sure that you understand clearly all the steps involved when a child learns a word.

To use this teaching aid:

- Explain to the group that there are 3 steps that a child goes through when he learns a new word.

- Emphasise that both the adult and the child have important things to do at each step and that there are valuable points to remember. Stick up the labels "Step", "Child", "Adult", and "Remember".

- Go through Step 1. Stress what the child does, how the adult can help, and the important points to remember. Stick up the relevant labels. Ask the group to give practical examples of how to help a child in this step.

- Go through Step 2, stressing the relevant points and sticking up the labels. Once again, ask the group for practical examples.

- Go through Step 3, in a similar way to Steps 1 and 2.

When the display is complete, revise each of the steps again and discuss it. Answer any questions. Emphasise again how you cannot force children to repeat words, but should ensure that the child is able to link the word to an object or situation; also emphasise the importance of praising the child for all attempts he makes to say a word.
Pictures of everyday activities

This is a set of posters which encourages people to think about how everyday situations can be used to help children learn communication skills. It can be used for teaching parents, health workers and anyone interested in helping children learn. The aim is to show people how valuable everyday situations can be in helping children learn the different skills needed for communication.

You will need: scissors, card, pens and plastic props: pot, doll etc.

To make the posters:

1 Cut out 12 pieces of card 20 x 30 cm.

2 Take 3 cards and draw on each a picture concerning bathing.

3 Do the same for dressing.

4 Do the same for mealtimes.

5 Do the same for household activities.

Before you do this teaching activity be sure that you yourself understand how everyday situations can be used to help a child learn communication skills.
TEACHING IDEAS

To use this teaching aid:

- Remind the group of all the skills that are needed for communication and for learning words.
- Explain that this activity is to show how these skills can be taught during everyday situations.
- Give each person in the group a card showing one of the everyday situations.
- Each person must take their turn to role play the situation shown on the card, using either a doll as the child, or another member of the group.
- The other members of the group must watch the role play and then comment on what they have seen. What has the "child" been taught? Was the situation used well? Was the adult using his communication skills well?
- Encourage the group to make suggestions about how the situation could have been improved or used more effectively.
- Continue with this activity until every member of the group has taken their turn.
- Answer any questions the group may have and stress again the importance of using everyday situations for teaching a child communication skills.

Note!

You can also use this activity to show how a particular communication skill can be taught in an everyday situation. Carry out the activity as outlined above but this time ask each member of the group to teach one particular communication skill in their role play. For example, "Mai Chipo, show us how you can teach *turntaking* while you are bathing your child", "Mai Fortunate, show us how you can teach *attention* while you are dressing your child".

In these situations emphasis should be placed on teaching the particular skill, although of course other skills will be used at the same time.

This activity may be used in preparation for the following activity which looks at putting the skills learnt here into practice.
**Practical everyday situations**

This is an activity which uses real-life everyday situations as opportunities for teaching and learning. The aim is to show practically how everyday situations can be used to teach a child the skills needed for communication.

**What will be needed:** Each parent in the group will need to have with them all that is needed for bathing and dressing their child, e.g., dishes, soap, towel, flannel, lotion, clothes, etc.

**To carry out the activity:**

1. Revise with the group the important points about using everyday situations to teach a child communication skills.

2. Provide 4 parents with dishes and warm water, in which to bath their children.

3. Ask the other parents in the group to sit round and watch the parents bathing their children.

4. Encourage them to comment on what they are seeing and to make suggestions to help the parents use the situation more effectively. They should notice for example how the parents are talking to their children, how they respond to them, how well they are teaching them.

5. Once the children have been bathed, the parents should go on to dressing, and the rest of the group should watch and comment as before.

6. When the first 4 parents have finished bathing and dressing their children another group of parents can take their turn.

7. Continue the activity until all the children have been bathed and dressed and you are satisfied that every parent knows how to use these situations to teach their child communication skills.