

STOP IN THE NAME OF LOVE: Modeling authentic communication for children  
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Children learn to communicate by listening to, watching, and imitating adults. Pre-schoolers, who whisper about and exclude their peers, are practicing what they have observed. This session is an invitation to adults: how might we let go of outdated, manipulative communication patterns to model respectful, authentic communication?

1. Ninety percent of human emotion is communicated non-verbally. With a peer, please demonstrate 10 non-verbal behaviors that might communicate emotion.
2. Children learn more by watching their teacher interact with another child, than by following a lesson plan. What might children have observed in your recent interactions with their individual classmates?
3. Four-year-old Lin, placing her arm over the shoulders of her classmate, Miranda, whispers: "I'm not going to play with Madison for 100 years, are you?" What adult behavior might Lin have observed that gave her permission to do this?
4. Our research (Bruno & Copeland, "If the director isn't direct, can the team have direction?") reveals 80% of early childhood leaders avoid conflict. We hope that issues will "just go away" or that staff will "get the message" by watching how we do things. What does adult "conflict avoidant" behavior teach children?
5. Unwritten rules of behavior constrain us most. Dr. Phyllis Chesler's Woman's inhumanity to woman, (2003) contains this anecdote. What unwritten rules is Betty following? "If Alice has offended Betty, Betty will tell Carolyn & Diane about it- but in such a way as to enlist Carolyn & Diane against Alice by persuading them that Alice has not only unfairly offended Betty, but offended Carolyn & Diane as well. Of course, Alice may have done no such thing. Betty will carefully manage how she presents 'past events'. She will do so in order to gain the support of a clique imbued with righteous indignation, which will then assist Betty in any future confrontation with Alice, or in a decision to shun Alice. Betty must accomplish this without appearing to intent to."
6. Dr. Chesler's research tells us women are competitive and like to excel. Women, historically, were discouraged from being overtly competitive. Instead, women learned to pretend to agree. What behaviors emerge when competitive women don't agree, and don't have the skills/intention to confront their problems with one another?
7. Take a look at the contract colleagues can sign to agree they will not gossip (see overhead or refer to the article mentioned in #8 below). Would the members of your organization sign the agreement? Would the contract be effective?

8. Gossip is “Communicating about a person who is not present, with the intention to harm that person’s reputation. Listening to gossip is gossiping.” (Bruno, “Gossip-free zones” (*Young Children*, 2007). Early childhood professionals are often privy to personal information about others. What motivates adults to gossip, rather than to keep confidences or deal directly with others?
9. Moods are catching. Gossipers deflate a program’s morale. What steps can we take together and/or individually to stop gossip in our organizations?
10. Statements we can make to stop gossip from spreading (please add your own):
  - I am not comfortable talking about someone who is not present.
  - I need to focus on the children right now.
  - Would you be willing to talk w/ X about your concern with her?
  - I’ll go with you so you can share your concern w/ X.
  - Since I can’t help you with that problem, please don’t bring it to me again.
  - I promised myself not to gossip.
  - Let’s not go there (“Stop in the name of love”)
11. NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct (III, P-3A.2) says: “When we have concerns about the ethical behavior of a co-worker, we shall 1<sup>st</sup> let that person know of our concern in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and for the diversity to be found among staff members, and then attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.” If Kioko’s cultural heritage encourages her not to challenge anyone directly, how can Kioko effectively let Maura know Kioko is uncomfortable with Maura’s “preaching religion” to children? How could Maura let Kioko know that Kioko’s “messiness” in the classroom troubles her?
12. According to the Institute for Heart Math in Boulder, CO, our heart’s vibration can be felt up to 5 feet away by another person. The recipient feels that vibration as either a “yes” or a “no”. Assume you don’t like another person that you “have to” work with. How might you manage your emotion so that children nearby aren’t subjected to the emotional minefield between you?
13. Coach these team teachers on how to communicate: Organized Maude cannot bear things to be out of place. Gabriella “goes with the flow” and doesn’t notice messes. Gabriella, at the last minute, decides to finger paint with the children. In a rush to leave for her next job, she tells the children to leave their paintings on the floor to dry. Maude, fearing someone will slip and get hurt, throws away the wet papers. Children watch Gabriella and Maude’s behavior the next morning.
14. Mimi & Bessie do not like your team teacher, LaVonda. They make up stories about her, and shun her. What would you do if Mimi and Bessie invite you for coffee, and say nothing to LaVonda, who is standing beside you?
15. Name 3 actual steps you can take in your own program to ensure that children are exposed to authentic (rather than manipulative/damaging) communication styles?

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