

Teacher's Guide

Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

Communication strategies



Develop communication strategies to better understand a student's needs and have the student better understand your requirements.

Communication strategies may include

- Initiate conversation when the student arrives, or seems to need help, if the student does not initiate contact. Use the student's name to establish connection.
- Monitor your voice volume, firmness, tone and pace. Calm verbal strategies can defuse a situation and improve compliance with the teachers' instructions.
- Use short phrases and repeat important instructions where possible using clear and specific language, do not criticise or blame, be realistic with your suggestions and what you offer.
- Use open ended questions that cannot be answered with a single word answer, to encourage the student to provide more information. Use prompters such as "Tell me more" or "Is there anything else?" to ask about feelings, ideas, concerns and plans, instead of suggesting them.
- Use reflective listening, to show that you understand the student and that you care about their feelings. Repeat back, in your own words, what you think the student is telling you. For instance, if the student says something like "I am just so sick and tired of people always telling me what to do" you might respond with "You don't like people ordering you around."
- Be solution focused. Help the student find out where they are, what they are feeling and where they went. Ask the student how you may help, tell them that it is ok to come back and ask later.
- Affirm, reinforce and compliment, acknowledge the positive to build responsibility and self-esteem.
- Be patient, try to avoid interrupting the student, give the student sufficient time to process what has been said and respond.
- Use a combination of visual cues and verbal instructions, use movement, gestures and signs, for example, moving hands apart when talking of something increasing, enhances the student's understanding and capacity to internalise content and vocabulary. Simple gestures are most effective. A teacher may use other gestures such as raising their own hand up to signal they want the attention of the class or cupping their hand behind their ear to remind students to listen.
- A student may use certain visual cues to communicate with the teacher that do not draw undue attention from other students, for example; a hand signal indicating that the student wants to move to a designated calm down space within the classroom.
- Summarise, especially toward the end of the conversation, to make sure you and the student are working on the same things. Remember to include the positive along with the negative.
- Keep in mind sometimes just listening is enough, students do not always want a solution.

Communication board

A board with symbols or pictures that can be used to facilitate communication for children with limited expressive language ability or for children who find it difficult to verbalise. The student can also choose what to do, or express their feelings by pointing to the pictures or symbols allowing the student to communicate their needs.

If the behaviour persists despite trying a number of interventions, discuss the student's situation with a supervisor or member of the learning and wellbeing support staff at your school.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>