Communication and the Importance of Communication in Child Development

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the points that need to be considered when establishing healthy communication with children; the importance of children's communication with their environment, families and especially sick or technology-addicted children according to their developmental levels is emphasized. Communication is a basic human need and an inseparable part of social life. It is a process that continues as long as humans exist. In this context, parents and individuals who take care of children should support their development by communicating with children in a way that is appropriate for their developmental periods. One of the easiest and most efficient ways to effectively communicate with children is to know them and their developmental characteristics. Communication within the family is of great importance for the healthy development of the child. Individuals need to communicate in order to understand themselves and their environment. In this article prepared from this perspective, the definition of communication, its basic characteristics and the importance of effective communication are discussed; it is emphasized why communication with sick and technology-addicted children is critical; it is aimed to draw attention to the necessity of the child's participation in communication as an individual within the family.

Keywords: Child, Development, Communication, Interaction, Family.

Introduction

Communication, in its most general sense, is the process of transferring information, feelings, thoughts and meanings between individuals or groups through various means. In the academic literature, communication is a broad phenomenon that is studied in social, cultural, psychological and technological contexts. Shannon and Weaver define communication as a process in which a message from an information source reaches the receiver through a channel (Shannon & Weaver 1949). It is also stated that communication has functions such as obtaining information, persuading, managing, entertaining and creating an impact on the environment. Communication, which is a basic need for both the individual and society, is also one of the basic elements of social structure (Bütün Ayhan & Beyazıt, 2017). Communication skills are among the most important competencies that children should acquire from an early age. Because communication development includes the ability to express one's feelings, thoughts and information and to understand others (Gooden & Kearns, 2013). Communication is a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and thoughts are sent, received and understood through verbal or non-verbal messages (Berko, Aitken & Wolvin, 2010). Human beings have tried to transform their environment since the day they came into existence, and in this process, they have also undergone change. In this context, communication is a tool used to change the environment. A good understanding of the communication process provides the opportunity to have an impact on the environment by understanding the relationships between different elements and certain patterns. As people become more informed and aware of communication, they can transform themselves and their environment. For this reason, delivering and teaching communication education to all segments of the society will minimize the failures in communication and contribute to a healthier functioning of the social order (Yüksel, 2014).

Communication is a natural human need and an inevitable part of social life. It is a process that begins with human existence and continues with it (Güngör, 2016). From the moment an individual is born, he communicates with his environment by constantly interacting with it and continues his life this way. Communication is a basic tool that enables people to make sense of themselves, their environment, society, and the world. It plays an important role in recognizing oneself and others, establishing satisfying relationships, and adapting to the environment. In line with this framework, it is thought that this research, prepared considering the effects of communication on child development, will contribute to the field in terms of communication with the child.

Main Elements of Communiaction

Sender (Source): The person or organization that produces and transmits the message.

Message: Information or meaning created by the sender and conveyed to the receiver.

Channel: The medium through which the message is transmitted (verbal, written, visual, etc.).

Recipient: The person or group who receives and interprets the message.

Feedback: Feedback that shows how the receiver has understood or reacted to the message.

Noise: Internal or external factors that cause distortion of meaning in the communication process (Yüksel, 2014).

Communication with Child

Language, one of the most basic features that distinguishes humans from other living things, has a great importance in human life (Aksan, 2007). With language development, communication skills progress and this positively affects the individual's social development and life skills. Language and speech, which helps individuals to establish healthy and balanced relationships with themselves and their environment,

is one of the most fundamental elements of interpersonal communication (Işık, 2013; San Bayhan & Artan, 2007; Zolten & Long, 2006).

The child's interaction with his environment, socialization, empathy and interpretation of events are a reflection of family education. Children's behavior is based on the education they receive, cultural values and family communication. Therefore, healthy family communication plays a major role in the development of the individual's communication skills (Öztürk, 2023). Children shape their perspectives on themselves and the world based on their daily experiences. One of the most valuable experiences adults can offer them is to communicate effectively with them and understand them. Daily interactions help children explore themselves and their environment. In this process, adults bear the responsibility of establishing healthy and positive relationships (Gable, 2003)

The Importance of Effective Communication with Child

Communication plays a critical role in the cognitive, emotional and social development of the individual. Communication, especially in childhood, directly affects personality development, social skills and learning. Therefore, it is very important for parents and educators to use correct communication techniques by empathizing with children (Lichman, 2000).

Effective communication established during childhood develops the individual's social and emotional skills, supports self-confidence, problem-solving ability and academic success (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Healthy communication between parents and children is important for the child's happiness and social relations. People live together as social beings, and children gain their first social experiences in the family, which supports this development. Children are not just individuals preparing for adulthood, but individuals with their own voices and needs. Therefore, they should be approached with respect and empathy (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

Communication with children should be age-appropriate and child-friendly. This communication process should take a holistic view of children and consider their developmental needs. Effective communication in childhood is vital for a healthy psychosocial development of the individual. Parents, teachers and caregivers adopting communication strategies appropriate to children's developmental stages will help them develop a healthy identity and communication skills. Communication is a fundamental process that enables individuals to transfer their feelings, thoughts and information to each other. This process is particularly important for children. Communicating correctly and effectively with children supports their spiritual, emotional and social development (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011).

Communicating effectively with children requires patience, understanding and using the right techniques. Strategies such as empathy, active listening and encouraging language can be used to establish healthier communication with children. In this way, children can express themselves more freely and grow up in a safe communication environment. Communication plays a major role in a child's emotional, social and cognitive development and contributes to healthy relationships within the family. Strengthening emotional bonds, improving language and communication skills, expressing feelings and thoughts, increasing social competencies, developing problem solving skills and adapting to the environment are supported by effective communication (Öztürk, 2023).

Childhood Stages and the Role of Communication

In order to develop their communication skills, children need a communication environment that is open, engaging and focused on their needs. Each child is at different stages of development and at these stages, different interests and needs emerge. As a child grows, they need supportive environments where they can express themselves clearly and safely. This requires providing children with rich experiences through different environments and materials, especially to develop language and communication skills (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011; Lichman, 2000).

In order to communicate effectively with children, communication styles and behaviors appropriate to their age and developmental level should be adopted. Interacting effectively with children requires understanding how children of different age groups communicate and what topics they are interested in (Gable, 2003). Therefore, adults should know and practice communication methods appropriate to children's age, developmental level, interests and needs. Such interactions take place in the preschool period within a framework of shared meaning and understanding between children and adults (Nurania & Utamia, 2017).

a) Infancy (0-2 Years)

During this period, communication is evaluated from the perspective of attachment theory, and babies often use crying as a signal for communication (San Bayhan & Artan, 2007). In this process, the love and trust relationship between the mother and the baby plays a decisive role in the relationships the baby will experience in the future. The mother's ability to accurately understand and interpret the baby's reactions and respond to these reactions as quickly as possible has positive effects on the baby's development (Ulutaş, Aksoy & Çalışkan, 2016). The baby, who makes eye contact from the first months of life, tries to communicate by giving emotional reactions through body movements and facial expressions. As the language developer, he begins to express his wishes more clearly (Anisfeld, 2014; Çağdaş, 2012).

b) Early Childhood (2-6 Years)

Although individuals need to communicate throughout their lives, the foundation of these skills is laid especially in the preschool period. This is a critical period that shapes the future life of the individual and during which the personality develops. In line with the progress in cognitive, language, motor, social-emotional development and self-care skills, communication skills are also acquired at an early age. Communication skills developed during this period positively affect all other areas of development (İlgar & Örs, 2021).

In preschool, families and teachers play a critical role in supporting the development of children's communication skills. Adequate and appropriate communicative stimulation positively affects all areas of children's development (Gooden & Kearns, 2013). In contrast, insufficient stimulation can seriously hinder a child's development (Hart & Risley, 1995). Learning to communicate in preschool is one of the most fundamental developmental tasks for children. It is crucial for children to develop communication skills so that they can interact with the people around them and express their needs. Communication skills acquired in the preschool period include understanding and expressing thoughts, feelings and information. Communication begins before birth and continues to develop as the child hears, sees and interprets information from the individuals around them. This process forms a lifelong dynamic cycle (Gooden & Kearns, 2013).

c) Middle Childhood (6-12 Years)

In this age range, children develop more complex communication skills in academic and social life. In this age range, children develop more complex communication skills in academic and social life. Effective listening, clear and understandable speaking skills, emotion management and the ability to cooperate are shaped during this period (Gooden & Kearns, 2013).

d) Adolescence (12-18 years)

Adolescence is a period when identity development is at the forefront and communication with one's social environment gains more importance. According to Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, the process of identity acquisition is experienced during this period and the individual's communication with peer groups affects his/her self-esteem and future decisions. Clear and healthy communication with the family is an important factor for the emotional balance of the adolescent (Gooden & Kearns, 2013).

Effective Communication Techniques with Children

Active Listening: Active listening is one of the most important ways to communicate effectively with children. Children should be allowed to express themselves by making eye contact, supporting with body language and giving feedback when necessary.

Empathizing: Understanding children's feelings and thoughts makes them feel safe. By empathizing, it is possible to show that the child's feelings are respected and understood.

Speaking Simply and Clearly: In communication with children, simple and clear expressions appropriate to their age level should be used instead of complex and abstract expressions. In this way, children can understand messages more easily.

Using Positive and Encouraging Language: Using positive expressions in communication with children builds their self-confidence and helps them express themselves better. Phrases such as "Your success was very nice" or "You put a lot of effort into that" can motivate children.

Using Body Language Correctly: Not only verbal communication but also body language plays a big role in effective communication with children. A calm and smiling body language helps the child to feel comfortable (Nurania & Utamia, 2017).

Mistakes Made in Communicating with Children

People should avoid attitudes and words that negatively affect communication such as commanding, threatening, judgmental, argumentative, critical, sarcastic, self-righteous or sexist expressions against each other in order to improve their relationships by establishing healthy communication. It can be said that especially parents should stay away from such inhibiting factors in order to maintain a healthy relationship with their children and set a good example for them in interpersonal communication. (Altunok, 2019).

Giving orders and talking harshly: Phrases such as "Do this now!" can frighten the child and damage communication.

Using Critical and Accusatory Language: Generalizing statements such as "You always do this!" may cause the child to become defensive.

Not Listening or Ignoring: Ignoring what the child says can make him/her feel ignored (Altunok, 2019).

Communication in the Family

The family, which is recognized as the smallest structural unit of society, plays an important role in the development of children. These roles can be considered in various dimensions: psychological, physiological, economic and social. Physiological roles fulfill the child's basic needs such as shelter and nutrition, while psychological roles are based on emotional needs such as love and attention. It is of great importance that families fulfill these responsibilities consciously and correctly in order to have a positive impact on the development of the child (Öztürk, 2023). Family communication is generally defined as the interaction between spouses, between parents and children, and between other members of the family (Aydın, 2005). Whether parents' attitudes towards each other, their children and other family members are positive or negative is a factor that directly affects children's development (Genç, 2004).

Individuals need to communicate in order to understand themselves, their environment and the events they experience. Family communication includes the interaction of parents with each other, parents with their children and children with their siblings. Communication has a significant impact on a child's

development and education. Cüceloğlu (2002) states that a child who feels valued by establishing a healthy communication with his/her family perceives himself/herself as valuable. This also contributes to the development of the child's self-esteem (Cüceloğlu 2010). The health of family structures, one of the subsystems of society, contributes to the stability of the global order (Canatan et al., 2020). In family communication, which is one of the factors that can have positive or negative consequences globally, maintaining healthy communication between individuals is a critical issue. The family is the first social structure that individuals join when they are born. The most important factors that keep the family together are healthy communication between individuals, love, respect, common goals and the efforts made to achieve these goals. The bond of love between family members is the most distinctive feature that distinguishes the family from other relationships. When a family is established, the most basic expectation of men and women is to find mutual love and to maintain the emotional bond that existed before marriage in a safe family environment (Önder, 2003).

Parents play an important role in helping children acquire communication skills. Parents should support their children to gain self-confidence by giving them the opportunity to express themselves. For a healthy communication environment, parents need to improve their communication skills, adopt an accepting attitude and listen carefully to their children. Unconditional acceptance, empathy, effective listening and the use of I language are key elements of effective communication (MEB, 2013).

Children first learn to communicate from their families and develop these skills in their social environment. However, the emotional development of children growing up in a negative communication environment can suffer. Children who cannot express themselves properly may face problems such as stress, anxiety and depression. Lack of communication can lead to speech and comprehension difficulties, making it difficult for the child to adapt socially. This can result in introversion, feelings of loneliness and difficulties in social relationships. Children who are unable to express their feelings in words may show tantrums and physical reactions. It is important to show special attention to such children, explore their interests and encourage them to express their feelings (Öztürk, 2023).

In order to establish healthy communication with their children, parents need to understand their needs, get to know their developmental processes, interests, abilities and relationships with their social environment. Parents who ignore these elements may find it difficult to guide their children's behavior and communicate effectively. The child first learns all these feelings and behaviors in the family. When communicating with their children, parents can have a positive impact by understanding their emotional needs, accepting their feelings and thoughts, making them feel valued and showing an accepting attitude. They build healthy communication by showing interest in the child's interests, spending time with the child and following up on what the child shares. They take a supportive approach to their children, recognizing their achievements and encouraging them to cope with the challenges they face and revealing their strengths. In this way, parents are in active communication with their children (Öztürk, 2023).

Children of parents with strong communication skills in the family environment are more successful in social life and adapt to school more easily. Children learn basic communication skills in the family, their first social environment, and adopt the communication style of their families. Developing communication skills with the manners and knowledge gained in the family, the child starts the school process with these foundations. School is the child's next social environment and the education they receive there helps them to further develop their communication skills. Effective communication between people is of great importance for education to be carried out efficiently (İlgar & Örs, 2021). Communication styles may differ in each family, culture and generation. Parents have a great influence on children's acquisition of positive or negative communication habits. Therefore, it is of great importance for parents to be the appropriate role model (Özel & Zelyurt, 2016). Although children begin to acquire speaking skills in the family environment, as the social environment expands, these skills also develop in the environment of friends and school. In this process, various educational programs are prepared and implemented by trainers, experts and researchers to improve children's speaking abilities and thus support their speaking skills.

Communicating with Technology Addicted Children

Technology addiction has become a major problem today (Mohamed İbrahim et al., 2018). Rapid changes in the field of technology since the early 2000s have led to the widespread use of easily portable devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, dragging people into the "Digital Age". These devices, which are easily accessible to all age groups, have become a daily necessity as they serve as a platform where children can do their lessons, have fun and interact socially. Although they are thought to contribute to children's daily lives, these devices pave the way for technology addiction as they provide unlimited access to children regardless of time and place (Ding et al., 2023).

Technology addiction, which is considered within the scope of behavioral addiction, can be defined as a clinical disorder that causes a number of negative emotional and behavioral problems as a result of frequent or pathological use of technological devices (Pourakbarianniaz, 2023). It is seen that some parental behaviors trigger technology addiction as much as the time spent with digital devices. Technology addiction may occur in children due to reasons such as parents sometimes using technological devices to relax or distract their children (Günüç & Atli, 2018), neglect of the child, parents not being the right role model in terms of technology use (Şentürk Yasin, 2024).

Due to technology addiction, children spend more time on online platforms and face various risks. UNICEF (2017) classifies these risks as content, contact and behavior risks and emphasizes that no child is completely safe. In addition to these risks, technology addiction can cause developmental and social problems in children (Coşkuntürk et al., 2023; Karadağ & Kılıç, 2019).

In this context, some issues that parents should pay attention to in their communication with their children come to the fore. Firstly, parents should be sensitive about children's use of digital devices. Considering that one-third of internet users worldwide are children, content monitoring and determining age-appropriate usage limits are important (Ateş & Saltalı, 2019). In addition, parents need to be a good digital role model for their children; otherwise, children will not take the limits seriously (Karabulut & Gökler, 2023). Increasing family communication and supporting activities related to children's interests will contribute to preventing technology addiction. Additionally, it is important to encourage children to engage in face-to-face social interactions rather than virtual environments. Finally, it is necessary for parents not to use digital device use as a method of punishment or reward in order to prevent children from becoming addicted to technology (Yeşilay, 2024).

Communication with Sick Children

In addition to facing many diseases during their development period, children may sometimes need to be treated in the hospital due to these diseases. The necessity of staying in the hospital during the treatment process is a traumatic situation for the child (Gültekin & Baran, 2005). Diseases and hospital treatment processes can negatively affect the independence of children, which is very important for them, and cause negative emotions such as desperation, fear and anxiety (Beyazıt & Bütün Ayhan, 2019). At this point, it is necessary to be careful in the behavior and attitudes towards the child in order to minimize the negativities that sick children may experience.

Considering that children may experience stress due to reasons such as physical harm, surgery and separation from the family, children should first be informed about their illness and become familiar with the hospital environment in order to reduce the anxiety and fears that occur (İnal & Akgün, 2003). Along with the training given on disease and hospital preparation, the child's current developmental period should also be taken into consideration during the process of informing the child. As a matter of fact, the child's current developmental characteristics have an important place in determining the level of influence of the disease and hospitalization process. Considering that each developmental period has different characteristics, knowing the characteristics of the developmental period the child has will contribute to the treatment process to progress in a more positive way (Karaaslan et al., 2019). In this

context, information about the disease and treatment process should be conveyed to the child in a clear and understandable manner, in accordance with the developmental period, without ignoring the fact that children are individuals during the treatment process. At the same time, children should be allowed to express themselves and supported in order to relieve the anxiety that sometimes arises as a result of the situation they are in (Alkan & Özyıldız, 2021). Using other applications other than verbal communication to carry out the transfer in question will reduce the child's anxiety and fears. Therapeutic play, which is defined as activities planned in the hospital environment depending on the developmental characteristics and health status of the child, is one of the practices that will help the child better perceive this process and be better psychologically (Li & Lopez, 2008; Yayan & Zengin, 2018). Similarly, informing the child using metaphors about the disease and treatment process will reduce the child's anxiety and fears and will allow the process to progress in a healthier way (Alkan & Özyıldız, 2021).

Conclusion

Communication is an indispensable element for maintaining a harmonious and orderly life among people (Yüksel, 2014). Communication is not only a simple and linear process that enables the sharing of emotions, information and common understanding between individuals, but also a complex structure consisting of multi-layered, multifaceted, serving different purposes and mutual interactions (Lunenburg, 2010). Communication plays a critical role in an individual's social life, as it is an important component of a broad set of social skills. For these reasons, it is thought that knowing the components that need to be taken into consideration during the communication process with the child will have positive effects on the child's development.

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