

Observing Communication Activity

You probably spend much of your time observing adults or observing children that adults have concerns about. It can be a good exercise to spend some time watching children and staff members engaging and communicating with each other. Watch the *Observing Communication: Peer Communication* video located in the Explore section of Lesson 3 T&C Communication & Language Development. This video features a school-age boy with communication challenges. As you watch, use your knowledge of child development to think about what you would talk with the teacher about. Answer the questions below.

1. What evidence of communication did you see? What are the boy's communication strengths? How did the boy express interest or disinterest to staff members?

The boy seems to have relatively strong verbal language. He talked about his mother, he completed a spelling assignment, he requested a piece of gum, etc. He can communicate his wants and needs clearly. However, it seems that he might have trouble noticing or paying attention to others when they talk to him; he might have trouble processing what he hears.

2. What strategies did staff members use to communicate with the boy? Were the strategies successful? Why or why not?

In the school-age program area, the boy seemed to wander around. The staff member called to him without getting his attention first. The strategy was not successful. Once the staff member touched his arm and said his name, he began paying attention again and he followed directions quickly.

3. What might you say to the staff member about their communication strategies?

Responses will vary but might include:

- **Reflective Questions** such as “What have you noticed about getting Chad’s attention?” or “I wonder what Chad feels when he enters the busy room. What do you think?”
- **Supportive Feedback** such as “When you touched Chad’s arm, he listened right away. It seems like he is really responsive to you.”
- **Constructive Feedback** such as “I noticed that you had to repeat Chad’s name several times. Next time, it might work to get into his line of vision and gently tapping his arm before saying his name or giving a direction.”

4. How did the environment, materials, and/or opportunities for peer interactions promote or limit communication for the boy? What might you discuss with staff members about the space, materials, experiences, etc?

The environment might have been distracting for the boy. He seemed most interested in watching peers play video games. This did not provide many natural opportunities for communication.

Towards the end of the clip, a girl begins talking with the boy while he is laying on the couch. She maintains strong eye contact with him and seems interested in what he does and thinks.

As a Training and Curriculum Specialist, you might want to discuss opportunities for helping this boy get involved in program activities more quickly. You might say, "I noticed Chad walking around a lot when he first arrived. Is that pretty typical? What kinds of activities do you think he would like to jump into when he arrives?" You might also talk with the staff member about opportunities for communication between peers. For example, "I noticed that Yelena and Chad seem really close. She seemed to be a great communication partner. How do you think we could capitalize on that when Chad arrives in the afternoon?"