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# Verbal Communication in Counselling and Therapy

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## Abstract

Globalisation has many facets which affect individuals and families alike. One of the areas affected by globalisation is communication, which is no longer regarded as something that happens between two or more individuals in a physical setting, but in the twenty-first century, can take on a different form. Hence, through the use of media and technology, verbal communication has taken a back seat. Social media platforms have become children's main mode of communication and in the process losing sight of the most important aspects that verbal communication entails, like how the message is communicated and received. It is sometimes forgotten that the message often carries thoughts and emotions proving that it is more than simply the translation of information. Communication is a symbolic process by which people create shared meanings. Thus, the absence of verbal communication in families has resulted in parents not really engaging with their children and being aware of what they are up to, thus leading to an unstable family environment which is not conducive to the positive development of children. This chapter will explore the importance of verbal communication for the creation of attentiveness in children and a stable family environment.

**Keywords:** verbal communication, globalisation

## 1. Introduction

Communication is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else (Merriam Webster). Communication also entails the use of verbal and non-verbal cues, and in the process often a big deal of information is passed, and sometimes misunderstandings can also occur. This is because you can share the words without really conveying the message because of poor communication. Alternatively you can share the wrong message because of poor communication. This is because communication can entail the use of verbal and non-verbal cues. There are many forms of communication, but for this chapter, we shall focus on interpersonal communication which is the most common form of communication between people. The most common of this type of communication is verbal interpersonal communication, which is also laden with its own subsections that go with it.

This chapter will explore verbal communication and why it so important as an effective method for the conveying of messages between two people. It is sometimes forgotten that the message often carries thoughts and emotions which proves that it is in fact more than simply the translation of information. Hence, Sadri-Flammia [1] sums up communication as a symbolic process by which people create shared

meanings. So what is verbal communication? Verbal communication is about language, both written and spoken. Verbal communication is about spoken and written language. In other words human beings interact through the use of words or messages in the form of language (Oxford reference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115457102).

Effective verbal communication skills include more than just talking. Verbal communication encompasses both how you deliver messages and how you receive them. Therefore, it goes without saying that for parent's effective communication will automatically engage the use of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Communication is a very important skill and it's one that is essential that every parent should have.

Parents who can convey information clearly and effectively are at a very big advantage as this means that children are in a position to interpret their messages and act appropriately on the information that they receive and have a better chance of executing their tasks and perhaps excelling at school as well.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research methodology**

#### *2.1.1 Population*

The population of the study is young people that are having issues with their self-esteem. This is informed by the fact that the youth of today is easily influenced by external factors such as (television, the Internet, clothes, etc.).

#### *2.1.2 Sample*

Young people were purposely sampled for the study.

#### *2.1.3 Research instrument*

Given that the study is of a descriptive nature, the researcher collected data desktop analysis.

## **3. The concept of communication**

A theoretical understanding of the concept of communication is important in order to understand the impact of globalisation on family communication. That is borne of the fact that the family is a unit of society and most importantly an agent of socialisation. Van Ruler [2] posits that even among scholars, there has never been an understanding of what "communication" or "to communicate" means. The study gravitates towards those scholars whose definitions of communication are similar with each other, purely for the purposes of the study.

Glare [3] argues that the word "communicate" comes from the Latin word "communicare" which means "to make generally accessible" or "to discuss together". Meanwhile, Ezezue [4] posits that communication comes from the Latin word "communis" which he describes to mean "to share". In this context and according to him, sharing can also be taken to mean "partake" and/or "cooperation" which therefore makes "communication" a social activity. If there is any synergy between the definitions from the two scholars, it is the fact that

communication is a tool for bringing people together and it involves reaching out between two or more people.

Rosenberg [5] on the other hand suggests that, among other things, communication involves the process of creating meaning psychologically, socially and culturally. The definition by Rosengren also recognises the fact that communication is a social activity and adds the element of interpretation, decoding or creating meaning out of the message. To Rosengren, communication is “how” messages are understood intellectually and how ambiguity arises and gets resolved. The notion of communication involving meaning is supported by Littlejohn (1992) in arguing that “communication” does not happen without the creation of meaning and people create and use meaning in interpreting events.

From the agreements above, it can be deduced that communication is a social activity that involves decoding meaning to create a social, cultural and psychological meaning and context. The definitions above also acknowledge that communication is a complex activity or process that can lead to ambiguity or barriers to communication. A definition from Kelvin-Iloafu [6] encompasses all the above in stating that communication “is a crucial instrument of social interactions and a medium through which all relationships are established and maintained”. It follows therefore that for communication to be a success, there needs to be a common understanding from verbal and non-verbal symbols [7]. For communication to be understood well, the different types of communication should be discussed.

## **4. Types of communication**

### **4.1 Verbal communication**

Verbal communication is based on a face-to-face interaction. This may also involve the use of electronic devices like telephone and megaphone/loudhailer. The common thread in these communications methods is that a human voice is heard from the transmitter to the receiver. Verbal communication has been the main feature of family communication in their social role of socialising the young to the norms and values of the community. This form of communication happens from birth to death as the mother verbally communicates with the young even before they can be able to comprehend the message nor respond to it.

### **4.2 Written communication**

Written communication involves the translation of oral messages into visible alphabetic symbols, words and symbols, thus making reading and writing necessary competences in written communication. Ever since the early days of civilisation, communication in writing has developed and taken new forms different from a paper to a computer and more recently to mobile phones. With the world becoming a global village, families have also relied on written communication to link up with each other from different parts of the world.

### **4.3 Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication involves the transmission of messages without the use of words, letters or symbols. This communication involves reliance on our physical environment, body movement, drawings and pictures including sign language. Family members are able to use body language to communicate with each

other without losing meaning because they know each other well. This therefore means that there should be a common understanding between the transmitter and the receiver on what the movement and or the sign entails.

#### **4.4 Kinesics**

Kinesics involves the study of communication through body movement and facial expression. Posture and gestures are important features in this form of communication.

#### **4.5 Proxemics**

Proxemics involve the way people use physical space to convey messages between them. For instance people use the four distances in communication on a face-to-face basis. For very confidential communications, an intimate distance is used. In a conversation involving family and close friends, a personal distance can be adopted. For business transactions a social distance is used. Lastly a public distance is used when talking to a group in a room [6].

#### **4.6 Insights to verbal communication**

Language is what sets humans apart from another species in communication. Even though the use of symbols and body language may be useful in communication, language gifts human communication with three properties, semanticity, generativity and displacement, and these distinguish language from other forms of communication that other species have.

#### **4.7 Semanticity**

In human communication, signals and symbols have meaning. If a person consistently scratches one spot in their body, it indicates that they have an itch on their body. To an observer, the scratching might signal a skin irritation, but the scratching cannot express the word “itch” when expressed in words. Language is pivotal therefore in that even families rely on language to communicate even those things that cannot be adequately expressed through symbols.

#### **4.8 Generativity**

This can also be called productivity. Languages by their very nature can generate an endless number of meaningful messages. Languages enable symbols to be merged and recombined in ways that produce unique meanings, and as a result any competent language user is able to produce and make meaning of utterances that have never been uttered before but are immediately comprehensible to all competent language users.

#### **4.9 Displacement**

Language has an ability to explain or define things that are sometimes abstract or more remote in space and time or even things that exist only in imagination. Krauss [8] quotes Bertrand Russell in saying “No matter how eloquent a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his father is poor but honest.” Even in families, family members are able to communicate and even abstract things. Language is able to convey displaced messages that distinguish it from other communication modalities.



#### **4.10 Four communication paradigms**

Language functions as a medium of instruction in many ways. Krauss and Fussell [9] identify four models or paradigms of communication. The four paradigms are encoding-decoding paradigm, the internalist paradigm, the perspective-taking paradigm and the dialogue paradigm. For the purposes of the study, focus will only be given to encoding-decoding.

#### **4.11 Encoding and decoding**

“Language often is derived as a code that uses words, phrases and sentences to convey meanings” [9]. Coding is a system that outlines a set of signals onto a set of important meanings. “The Encoding-Coding approach to language conceives of communication as a process in which speakers encode their ideas in words, phrases and sentences, and listeners decode these signals in order to recover the underlying ideas” [9].

#### **4.12 Positive aspects of verbal communication**

Verbal communication assists in getting the message across more effectively and quickly. In addition, tactful verbal communication skills are capable of dealing with disputes.

##### *4.12.1 Verbal communication increases motivation*

Through verbal communication, leaders and family heads are able to give words of appreciation. Emails can be impersonal, but words sound more personal and reassuring. Having regular in-person meetings with family or colleagues goes a long way to boost confidence. It also serves as a team-building session.

##### *4.12.2 Verbal communication provides clarity*

Some people are more prone to remember or retain information directly and verbally presented to them. For training, verbal communication comes handy as questions can be asked and answers provided immediately. Even within families, the value is that young people are able to learn quicker as they can ask information-seeking questions as they observe in growing up.

#### **4.13 How to improve your verbal communication skills**

For those who lack in communication skills, they can read books or go for professional and professional and personal development. A key component of communication is listening. This requires key issues like eye contact, facial expression and body language.

### **5. Barriers to communication**

#### **5.1 Noise**

This serious barrier negatively affects communication. This is rife in families particularly when there are different generations living together. The younger generations are more likely to enjoy loud music and/or headphones that impede effective communication.

## **5.2 Perception**

This happens when the receiver of the message interprets the message in a manner that suits them far from the intended meaning. The perception of the receiver might be far from the intended meaning and thus distort the real meaning and interpretation of the meaning.

## **5.3 Emotions**

When the transmitter of the message appears to be emotional when conveying a message, objective and effective listening gets affected; thus, the assimilation of information is hampered. Emotional states that lead to this involve anger, fear, sorrow, happiness, etc.

## **5.4 Source credibility**

The extent to which a source of information is trusted and credible affects the receivers' perception of the message. Lack of credibility can lead to distortion or doubt on the side of the receiver.

## **5.5 Information overload**

Given the spread at which the modern world moves and the amount of data produced in the global village, information becomes overloaded, and interpretation gets difficult.

## **5.6 Dangers of lack of communication**

Mokeyane [10] posits that healthy communication between a parent and a child strengthens the relation between them. It is therefore critical for parents to cultivate a culture of healthy, open and mutually respectful communication between the two.

### **5.6.1 Weak emotional bond**

Healthy communication strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child and the rest of the family. The child feels free and secure. While lack of communication creates distance, trust issues and emotional problems that later lead to mental illness. The bond between the child and a parent lays the foundation for future relationships and behaviour. Healthy communication reassures the child that the parent or the family is there for them and it shows interest in them as individuals [10].

## **6. Behavioural problems**

Children who lack the necessary verbal communication skills to express difficult emotional issues are more prone to face behavioural issues. A child who cannot verbally express their emotions may tend to use force or aggression to express emotions.

## **7. Conflict resolution**

Teaching a child to verbally express their emotions helps the child to develop effective ways of dealing with conflict. Role modelling ways of verbally resolving

conflict (by parents) through open and respectful communication creatively equips the child to act out that behaviour in dealing with conflict.

## **8. Basic verbal communication skills used in counselling**

Basic verbal communication skills in counselling include using counselling microskills which are specific skills a counsellor can use to enhance their communication with clients. Counselling microskills enable a counsellor to effectively build a working alliance and engage clients in discussion that is both helpful and meaningful. We shall explore a few of these skills:

## **9. Encouragers, paraphrasing and summarising**

These microskills mean that the counsellor is attentive to what he/she has been saying. In this way the client feels understood and acknowledged.

Encourager is a strategy in which a counsellor uses to encourage a client to talk and open up more freely. In this way both counsellor and client are able to explore issues in greater depth. This skill also informs the client that the counsellor is attentive to what he/she has been saying. In this way the client feels understood, acknowledged and valued. On the other hand, paraphrasing and summarising are more active ways of saying to the client that they have been listened to. Summarising also assists the client to organise their thinking. The following paragraph will take a closer look at each of the three ways of communicating.

Encouragers are a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways of urging clients to continue talking. The different types of encouragers include non-verbal minimal responses such as a nod of the head or positive facial expressions and verbal minimal responses such as "I hear what you're saying". There can also be brief invitations to continue such as "Tell me more". What this means is that encouragers are simply a way of encouraging the client to keep on talking. In order for a counsellor to have more influence on the direction in which he wants to steer the conversation, he would need to make use of other techniques as well.

Paraphrases: In order to be able for the counsellor to paraphrase, he needs to choose the most important details of the conversation and reflects them back to the client. How does this happen? These paraphrases can be in the form of a few words or one or two brief sentences. Important to remember is that paraphrasing is not a matter of simply repeating what the client has stated but rather capturing the essence of what the client has said. If the counsellor has captured what the client is saying, then the client will give out a signal as some form of a confirmation. In a way it is reaffirming what was said earlier on that; it is a way to acknowledge that the client is heard.

Summaries can be brief statements of longer excerpts. It entails attending to verbal and non-verbal comments from the client over a period of time and then pulls together key parts of the extended communication and restating them for the client as accurately as possible. Summaries are similar to paraphrasing, with the exception that they are used less frequently and encompass more information.

## **10. Questioning**

Questioning is another skill which can yield good results if used properly. The purpose of using questions during the counselling session is that they can help to open up new areas for discussion. They can also assist to pinpoint an issue, and they



can assist to clarify information that at first may seem ambiguous to the counsellor. The type of questions to use for instance may encourage clients to reflect on some information and the client's own actions. Thus counsellors need to familiarise themselves about the different types of questioning techniques they can use while also knowing the direction in which the questioning is taking. However, caution should be exercised in overusing this technique as it may send out the wrong idea that the counsellor is the one in charge of the situation.

The counsellor can use two main types of questions: (1) open and (2) closed questions.

Open questions give the client the opportunity to speak as much as possible, while on the other hand, the counsellor gets the opportunity to collect as much information as possible. Questions such as what, why, how or could can be used.

"How" questions encourage the client to talk about their feelings and/or process. "What" questions more often lead to the collection of facts and information. "When" questions bring about information regarding timing of the problem, and this can include events and information preceding or following the event. "Where" questions may reveal the environment, situation or place where that the event took place, and "why" questions usually give the counsellor information regarding the reasons of the event or information leading up to the event.

It is important to note that care must be taken by the counsellor when asking "why" questions as these type of questions may provoke feelings of defensiveness in clients and may encourage clients to feel as though they need to justify themselves in some way.

Closed questions normally begin with is, are or do and may be answered by a simple yes or no. It is important to note that while questioning techniques can be used positively to draw out and clarify issues relevant to the counselling session, there is also the very real danger of overusing questions or using questioning techniques that can have a negative impact on the session. For instance, the use of the wrong types of questioning techniques, at the wrong time, in the hands of an unskilled interviewer or counsellor, can cause unnecessary discomfort and confusion to the client.

## **11. Reflection of meaning**

This type of strategy helps clients to reflect and find meaning into their life experiences. Hence, the skill of reflection of meaning is to assist clients to explore their values and goals in life, by understanding the deeper aspects of their experiences.

## **12. Reflecting and clarifying**

Reflecting is the process of retelling the other person your understanding of what has been said. In other words it may involve paraphrasing the message communicated to you by the speaker in your own words. This means that the counsellor needs to try and capture the essence of the facts and feelings expressed and communicate your own understanding back to the speaker. It is a useful skill to the counsellor because it tells whether the counsellor has in fact clearly understood the message conveyed to him ([skillsyouneed.com/ips/verbal-communication.html](http://skillsyouneed.com/ips/verbal-communication.html)).

## **13. Importance of verbal communication in counselling**

This chapter has demonstrated that communication can impact counselling in a variety of ways; such effective communication skills have been highlighted through

the different modes of communication as well as the effective communication skills counsellors can utilise. On the part of the counsellor, reflecting and clarifying are a particularly important listening skill, and in this process, empathy is communicated to the patient. According to Carl Rogers, empathy is considered a basic condition in counselling and can be seen as communicating a sense of caring and understanding. According to this definition, empathy involves not just caring but being perceived as caring. This again is validation that the patient is heard and his/her feelings are acknowledged and seen as valid. The patient needs validation of experience, which is crucial for emotionally sensitive people. The patient needs to get recognition and acceptance that the experience the person has just gone through was a valid one [11, 12]. When it comes to achieving psychological well-being, validation plays an important role. Validation from others is one of the best tools to help emotionally sensitive people manage their feelings effectively. Validation primarily consists of two aspects: that one's inner experiences, i.e. thoughts, emotions, feelings and behaviours, will be acknowledged, understood and accepted by other people. On the other side, one's identity is accepted by others as well. To validate someone's feelings means first to accept someone's feelings. Following this is to understand and eventually to nurture them.

Validation entails listening. Therefore, painful experiences that are expressed, acknowledged and validated by a trusted listener will diminish [11, 12]. On the other hand, painful feelings that are ignored will gain strength. Communicating when one is overwhelmed with emotion is most often very difficult, and being able to trust someone enough to share one's feelings with is a great achievement. Thus, the absence of verbal communication in families has the potential to result in problems such as parents not really engaging with their children and being aware of how they are responding to them.

#### **14. Therapeutic strategies for effective verbal communication**

The concept of therapeutic communication has been defined by scholars to with the purpose of decoding its complexity. They do this by defining each word separately. "Therapeutic refers to the science and the art of healing, of or pertaining to the treatment or beneficial act (Miller and Keane, 1972; Potter and Perry, 1989). Similarly, Rogers (1961) refers to the helping relationship "which is one that promotes growth and development and improved coping with life for other person". Furthermore, some scholars have defined "communication" as having definitions that emphasise either the message or the meaning. Mohan et al. (1992) posit that communication is "the ordered transfer of meaning: social interaction through messages: reciprocal creation of meaning: sharing of information, ideas or attitudes between or among people". Similarly, De Vito (1991) posits that communication is whereby one or more people send or receive messages that have a potential of being disturbed by noise and occur within a "context, have some effect and provide some opportunity."

Sibiya [13] sums up the purposes of communication as to inquire, inform, persuade, entertain, request and investigate. Sibiya posits that a single message is capable of having more than one of the following purposes:

- To convey information/opinion, for example, "this is the doctors rooms".
- To request information/opinion/behaviour, for example, "is the doctor available at this present time?"
- To give social acknowledgement, for example, "doctor is available from Monday to Saturday".

Sibiya argues that it is possible that these three major types of messages can be combined into different ways to form an interaction or conversation. In the case of nurses, their communication with their patients is consciously and purposely meant to be therapeutic. Families can also adopt this approach and focus of conversation (verbal communication) as a therapeutic strategy for effective communication. Families that adopt this type of therapeutic communication stand a chance of cementing relations among family members. In addition, young members of the family learn to trust. Trust is critical for families who sometimes find themselves spatially located in the global village. Trust makes them open up when they are overwhelmed by the challenges of globalisation. Therapeutic communication tends to mend rifts in terms of conflict and play a proactive role in averting conflict.

## 15. Conclusion

This chapter has explained in detail what verbal communication is, its many facets and forms and how the message often carries thoughts and emotions which proves that it is in fact more than simply the translation of information. Verbal communication is important to clarify misunderstandings between any two parties as well as creating trust, validation and empathy, therefore highlighting the advantages and importance of verbal communication for the creation of attentiveness in children and thereby building a safe environment where children can openly discuss and share their thoughts and emotions.

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