Notes to facilitator

Introduction
This is one of nine Take and Teach lessons designed to encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Each lesson is based on University of Minnesota Extension’s Parenting for School Success booklet, which should be used as a companion resource.

It’s recommended that you offer this lesson only after you have taught “Lesson 1: Parents Make a Difference,” which provides an overview of factors and parental roles in aiding children’s success in school, as well as learning in the wider world.

Lesson goal
“Lesson 5: Relationships” seeks to help participants understand the importance of maintaining positive and healthy relationships that contribute to their children’s school success. The lesson also addresses development of communication skills for parents to maintain healthy relationships with their children. Remember a key objective of all lessons – to persuade parents to be more intentional about helping their children learn in school, at home, and in the community.

Lesson objectives
Participants will:
- Describe some ways to develop positive and healthy relationships with their children in order to support their school success.
- Identify elements of effective communication and practice communication skills that foster healthy relationships.

Suggested scripts
Suggested scripts for facilitators are indented and printed in the “Lesson Plan” in sans serif typeface. Here’s an example:

Children learn better when they feel safe and accepted at home and at school. A warm, caring and encouraging environment at home and at school also helps children in all areas of their lives.

Time
Allow 60 minutes for the lesson.

Handouts
Each participant should receive one copy of the following:
- "How Well Do I Communicate?" worksheet – Master form provided; make copies
- Parenting for School Success booklet (already received)
Materials

- "Survey Topic Map" (for facilitator use only) – Document included
- Flipchart and markers
- Writing paper – Provide at least two sheets for each participant
- Pencils or pens – Provide one for each participant
- Timer (or simply check a clock)
Lesson Plan

Note: Suggested scripts are indented and in sans serif type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning activities</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Welcome and introduction                                 | • "Survey Topic Map" (for facilitator use only)  
|                                                          | • Parenting for School Success booklet  
|                                                          | • Flipchart  
|                                                          | • Markers                                  | 10 min |

Briefly review the last session you conducted for participants and ask how they fared completing any tasks they were assigned. For example, if participants most recently attended Lesson 1, ask them how things are going on the action steps they set to support their children's learning in school and at home. Discuss briefly.

Respond to any questions participants might have about what they have learned to date.

Begin the content portion of the lesson. Say:

Remember filling out a survey in Lesson 1? In that survey, many of you asked to learn more about promoting good relationships with your children to support their school success – including at least one of the following topics: "Improving parent-child communication and relationships," "Using positive phrases with my children," "Communicating and listening more effectively to my children," or "Showing respect for my children."

Children learn better when they feel safe and accepted at home and at school. A warm, caring and encouraging environment at home and at school also helps children in all areas of their lives.

Positive, healthy relationships are central to creating this warm, caring environment. Can you think of some ways to develop good relationships with your children – and help them feel safe, respected and loved?

List responses on the flipchart, and then review pages 10-11 of the Parenting for School Success booklet for ways to help children feel safe, respected and loved. Note: It’s important to go over some of the booklet material (on relationships) to meet Objective 1 because the bulk of this lesson addresses Objective 2 (on communication skills).

Transition to the first activity by saying:
Communication is central to maintaining positive, healthy relationships. Let’s look at some communication basics and differences in communication styles and methods.

**Learning activity #1: Communication basics**

Ask participants:
How is communication different today than it was when you were growing up?

Record participants’ responses on a flipchart, and then state these points:

- Communication practices and methods vary between generations and between cultures. For example, older generations may prefer to communicate by phone call or letter. Younger generations may prefer to communicate by texting or social media.
- Just because something is different doesn’t mean it’s “bad.”
- Parents and children who came to the United States from another country will know two communication styles – one from the old country and one from the new. Different situations will dictate which style to follow.
- It’s important for parents to communicate effectively with their own children, as well as help them communicate effectively at home, at school, and in the community.

Although communication styles differ, there are some elements, or aspects, that make all styles of communication more effective. Although these elements apply to all or nearly all communication methods, we will focus on face-to-face communication and effective conversations.

One important aspect of effective conversations is using clear language that everyone understands to express your thoughts, ideas, and feelings. That means using simple words and phrasing instead of “big” words or complicated phrasing. Using clear,

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Time</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning activity #1: Communication basics</td>
<td>Flipchart, Markers</td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
simple language is especially important when communicating with children.

Transition to the next activity by saying:

We’ll talk more about choosing the best words to keep a conversation going soon. Now let’s look at the role of body language in effective communication.

**Learning activity #2: Body language and listening**

Continue speaking:

“Body language” is another important element of good communication. Body language means “the process of communicating nonverbally through conscious or unconscious gestures and movements.” Other forms of nonverbal communication include facial expression, posture, touch, physical space, and silence.

In other words, you may say one thing, while your action, or lack of action, says another. A simple example would be saying “I hear you” to someone but not making eye contact – looking away or doing something else, such as checking your cell phone for messages or watching TV.

It’s important to make sure what you’re saying matches how you’re saying it. For example, if you’re trying to show your children that you care about how they’re doing in school, your body language should also show them that you care.

What types of body language would show your children that you support their efforts in school?

Record responses on the flipchart, and then say:

We’ve just discussed the importance of using clear language and watching our body language when we speak. But talking isn’t the only part of effective communication – we also must listen to others.
Following are some rules for good listening. These are good rules to follow whether you’re talking to adults or children. But now let’s think about them in the context of talking to your children about school-related issues:

- Let your children finish talking without interrupting.
- Use “active” listening – ask your children to repeat or explain if you don’t understand something they said.
- Accept what your children are saying without showing judgment – in words or in body language.
- Don’t be too quick to go into “problem-solving mode.” Children often just want you to listen, to hear them out. Save advice or solutions for later.
- Above all, find time to talk – and listen – to each other regularly!

Ask if there are any questions, and then go on to Activity 3.

Learning activity #3: Building awareness of listening and body language

Conduct learning activity #3 by saying:

Let’s do an activity to help us become better listeners by using good body language. We will conduct this activity in two parts.

In a moment, I’ll ask you to pair off with someone else in class. One person will be the speaker and one the listener. The speaker will have two minutes to share something great that happened recently. The listener will pay attention for a few seconds, but then look away or do things to show that he or she is no longer paying attention to the speaker. OK, choose a partner and I’ll tell you when the two minutes begin.

Using a timer or looking at a clock, start the first segment of

15 min
the activity. After the two minutes are up, continue with the second part.

Let’s try this again, and switch roles. This time, the speaker will share something bad that happened recently, and the listener will maintain eye contact and pay attention throughout.

Time the second segment, and let them know when two minutes are up. Lead a follow-up discussion by saying:

- For the first-time speakers, what made you realize that the listener was no longer listening to you?
- How did it make you feel when you realized that you were being ignored?
- For the second-time speakers, what made you realize that the listener was listening to you?
- How did it make you feel when you realized that you were being listened to?

Now think about your children. How do you think they feel when your body language tells them you’re not listening to them?

Allow time for responses before moving on to the next activity.

**Learning activity #4: Choosing positive, respectful words**

Conduct learning activity #4 by saying:

Poor body language can hinder communication. But so can a poor choice of words. Negative or disrespectful words and phrases are conversation stoppers. It’s especially important to choose positive, respectful words when communicating with children.

Some words are obviously disrespectful. For example, calling someone “stupid” or “lazy” is clearly insults them. But some words show disrespect in less obvious ways.
Words or phrases expressing judgment, impatience, or plain old “bossiness” also stop conversations—especially when delivered in an angry tone. Can you think of some words and phrases that can cut a conversation short?

Listen to participants’ responses and record on the flipchart. Possible answers might be:
- “You always say that!”
- “Don’t you know better?”
- “You shouldn’t feel that way.”

Next, ask participants to think about words and phrases that keep conversations going. Say:

What words or phrases do you think would aid communication because they make people feel respected, listened to, and cared for? (And not judged.)

Possible answers might be:
- “How did that make you feel?”
- “Please help me understand.”
- “Tell me what happened next.”

Closing

If participants are returning for another lesson, say they will be asked to report how they did on their homework to improve a communication skill in the coming week. If participants are not returning, urge them to report their progress to someone in their life (spouse, friend, relative) as a way to hold themselves accountable.

Thank participants for coming and wish them luck in supporting their children’s learning and success in school.

5 min
As parents, it's important for you to develop effective communication skills so you can develop healthy relationships with your children. It's also important for you to model good communication skills, especially good listening skills, to your children so they will become effective communicators. Complete this worksheet to identify specific communication skills you would like to improve.

1. Which one of the following communication skills would you most like to improve? Check only one.
   - Presenting my thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a clear and effective way
   - Being a better listener
   - Thinking more about my body language—does it match what I'm trying to say?

2. Think about relationships you have had throughout your life – relationships with family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others. Consider your relationships with people of all ages. In the space below, write the names of people you think were the best listeners.

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

3. Below is a list of practices and behaviors that may block communication between people. Look over this list of barriers to effective communication and check those that apply to you. In other words, check practices or behaviors that you may show too much. Note that some behaviors are acceptable in moderation, but cause problems when carried to extremes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordering, commanding</th>
<th>Rushing to advise or offer solutions without being asked – instead of just listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moralizing, preaching</td>
<td>Lecturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making assumptions</td>
<td>Teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making negative facial expressions</td>
<td>Using sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning that comes across as cross-examination</td>
<td>Issuing warnings that come across as threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathizing to excess, rushing to excuse another's &quot;bad&quot; behavior</td>
<td>Offering unconstructive criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding and shifting blame</td>
<td>Ridiculing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at your watch or phone (showing impatience)</td>
<td>Judging negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not taking enough time to talk (showing impatience)</td>
<td>Using &quot;you&quot; (blaming) messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Taking over&quot; the conversation – dominating the conversation</td>
<td>Rushing to persuade (instead of just listening)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Think about the communication barriers you selected in the preceding list. What practices or behaviors do you want to change the most? Write down two or three here, and choose one to work on in the next week.

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

5. Finally, think about the people you named as good listeners on the first page of this worksheet. What aspects of their behavior will you practice as you work to become a better listener?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

This worksheet was adapted from: