

# Criteria for Effective Communication – Communication Barriers (Disqualified Messages, Cognitive Dissonance and Incongruence)

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## ABSTRACT

The art of child-friendly communication is a complex, multi-factorial process in which the use of specific communication techniques by adults, adapted to the needs of the child and the situation, is of utmost importance. This is only effective if one is familiar with the theories and practical techniques of effective communication, if one knows oneself and is mentally sound, and if one recognises the barriers and obstacles to communication. The most difficult point in any human relationship and situation management is dealing with uncertainty and resistance. Disqualified messages, cognitive dissonance, and incongruent communication have in common that they create anxiety, make us feel insecure, and make it difficult to connect with the other person. The persistence of such a tension-inducing, subordinating pattern of communication may even leave residual and permanent traces in personality development. This chapter provides a theoretical and practical insight into this.

## KEYWORDS

effective communication, communication competences, communication barriers, cognitive dissonance, incongruence

## 1. Introduction

Words have a special power in human relationships. They can strengthen human bonds, alliances and the sense of security between people, but they can also inflict deep wounds. Communication patterns within the family also determine a child's mental and physical health, along with their susceptibility to psychosomatic symptoms. Childhood is a particularly important and privileged period of life, as the communication patterns acquired in childhood can establish life attitudes that will affect the child's later life. This chapter focuses primarily on psychological and communication science approaches, within the broader framework of international and

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comparative children's rights. Legal aspects are not covered by this chapter. The aim of the chapter is to present criteria for effective communication and to identify barriers to communication, with a particular focus on the age-specific characteristics of children. The focus is on parents' communication with children, in which one of the criteria for effective communication is vulnerability-sensitive communication. At its core, it is important for parents to be aware of the communication process in which they can maintain their children's integrity and self-esteem. The chapter draws attention to the communication mistakes that adults can make causing children to feel hurt and resentful. In addition to the parenting aspect, several chapters also address general adult-child communication. Another criterion for effective communication is the ability to build intense relationships, to develop a deep, playful and non-violent relationship pattern that provides a sense of security. Consciously or unconsciously, adults may use a myriad of communication barriers and obstacles, such as disqualifying messages, messages that create cognitive dissonance, and incongruent communication. The chapter also describes the impact of these messages on personality development. This chapter is psychoeducational, aimed primarily at adults and parents, and addresses the problems of communication breakdowns in everyday life and in legal proceedings, as well as ways of resolving them.

## 2. Criteria for Effective Communication with Children

Human relationships are becoming increasingly complex and fragile in our changing world. This can be attributable to role overload, role conflict, the multiple channels of communication in the digital space, and social changes. Most of the disruptions in human relationships arise from communication breakdowns, most of which could be remedied by improving communication alone<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore very important to be cognisant of the criteria for effective communication. The individual's previous experiences, especially the conscious or unconscious patterns acquired in childhood, determine the level of communication that a person is able to communicate. In their book Giles, Coupland and Wiemann talk about communicative competence, by which they mean the set of knowledge and skills needed to smoothly conduct social relationships<sup>2</sup>. The work of these authors is an anthology that brings together psychological, sociolinguistic, gerontological, sociological and medical approaches to communicating with older people. For the present chapter, the concept of communicative competence is inspiring precisely because it is always interdisciplinary and involves multifaceted approaches. However, people tend to communicate at a low level of awareness and instinct. Were the level of awareness increased, the effectiveness of communication would also increase. Therefore, in addition to developing communication skills, there is also a need to increase theoretical knowledge.

1 Buda, 2002, pp. 40–46.

2 Giles, Coupland and Wiemann, 1990.

György Csepeli, Hungarian social psychologist and sociologist highlights three important features of human communication<sup>3</sup>: *Socialisation means that* through communication persons in one place become persons “together”. Otherwise, if they do not communicate, they do not come into contact with each other, their being in one place remains a mere physical fact. This communitising power of communication can be experienced by a child in both primary and secondary socialisation settings. In the family, at nursery school, at school, it is vital that everyone who belongs to a community has space to express herself/himself. Therefore, parents and teachers have a great responsibility to make use of this resource of communication in a good, appropriate way. The second characteristic of human communication is *transmission*: our communication tools are part of our cultural heritage, largely inherited from older generations. The third characteristic is the *personal history of communication*. This means that communication is always influenced by the life history of the parties involved, their previous experiences and the attempts they make to interpret the communicative situation. Personal and family histories play a great role in this. Furthermore, it is important who narrates the narrative to a child and how the story is formulated. Also crucial are the extent to which the story scripts contain constructive coping patterns and the solutions.

‘When modelling cognitive and memory processes, though by no means on the basis of some social constructivist position, Schank and Abelson (1995: 1) argue for the narrative nature of all human knowledge. They state that ‘Virtually all human knowledge is based on stories constructed around past experiences’, and ‘New experiences are interpreted in terms of old stories’<sup>4</sup>.

The power of these family and social narratives is enormous, since the child’s world view is constructed from these stories and from their own personal experience. The child will also interpret his/her own stories according to the patterns he/she learns in the narratives. Unfortunately, children who are surrounded by negative patterns and negative scenarios in family stories will adopt and pass these on. The same is true of communication patterns. Subordinate, destructive patterns within the family are the primary source of psychosomatic upheavals.<sup>5</sup>

Internationally, the most relevant sources on effective communication with children include the works of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky on cognitive and social development, as well as UNICEF’s guidelines on child-friendly communication and the Council of Europe’s recommendations on children’s rights in communication<sup>6</sup>. A number of studies have addressed the changing life situations during the COVID epidemic, with effective communication as a central element<sup>7</sup>. In this respect, the

3 Csepeli, 2006.

4 László, 2008, p. 22.

5 Bernáth and Solymos, 2003; Balogh and Jámборi, 2022, p. 235.

6 Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978; UNICEF, 2018; Council of Europe, 2017.

7 Dalton, Rapa and Stein, 2020; Weaver and Wiener, 2020.

importance of age-appropriate communication techniques is emphasized. Other recent sources point to social media communication usage trends.<sup>8</sup>

### ***1.1. Communication Competences***

In this chapter, based on recent research, we present communication competences that directly or indirectly determine effective communication. “The effects of psychological resilience and social and emotional competence on communication skills are of great importance at both the individual and societal levels. By developing these internal elements, individuals can progress towards communicating more effectively and strengthening their relationships. It can also be effective in developing important competencies such as strong communication skills, leadership, cooperation, and teamwork in business and social life”<sup>9</sup>. Recent research has shown a high correlation between resilience, social and emotional competence and communication competence. The results of a study with university students suggest that this has a significant impact on their success at work and in their personal and social life. “Resilience, as a protective factor, encompasses personality traits that facilitate successful adaptation despite life’s threats, mitigate the negative effects of stress and enable adaptive coping with change. Resilience also refers to the ability to return to normal functioning following excessive stress that tests individual coping styles”<sup>10</sup>.

Another interesting aspect is highlighted by the study on teachers’ communicative competence: beyond lexical knowledge, it draws attention to the development of continuous skills and effective action in the given interaction. “Teachers’ communication competence involves the knowledge of adequate and effective communication behaviours, development of the repertoire of skills comprising proper and efficient means of communication, and a possibility to act adequately and efficiently in an interaction”.<sup>11</sup> It can be seen that the definition of communication competence is a dynamically changing and evolving concept, which provides an exciting and inspiring framework for theorising effective communication. From the above quote, we need to highlight three important factors that are important in interactions with children – in the family and at school, and in any other setting: behaviour, skills, and self-expression. All this will be effective if the adult’s message becomes meaningful to the child.

### ***1.2. Theories of Effective Communication***

Effective communication is part of building quality relationships. Several areas of applied psychology deal with the topic of effective communication, for which I would like to highlight a practical example from sport psychology. Anshel calls the following guidelines the ten commandments of effective communication<sup>12</sup>. The use of these

8 Zhang et al., 2021.

9 Ciftci, 2023, p. 331.

10 Járαι et al., 2015, p. 129.

11 Bjekić, Zlatić and Bojović, 2020, p. 24.

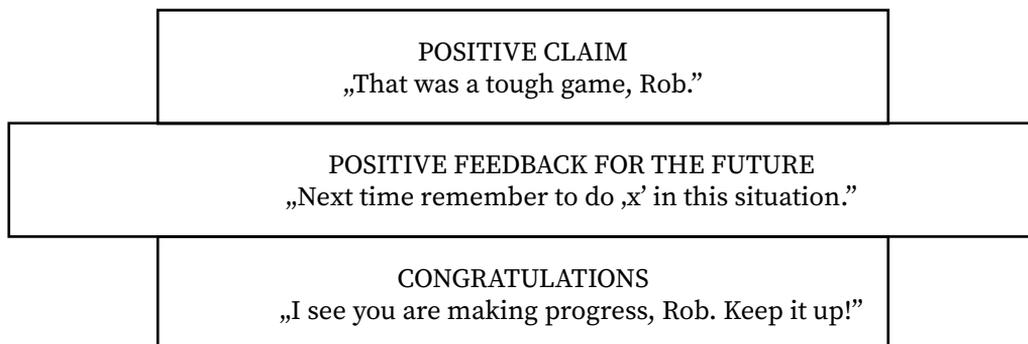
12 Anshel, 2011.

guidelines in the style and composition of communication with children is highly recommended for all professionals, coaches and educators.

Effective communication involves 10 basic principles. These guidelines are very important in influencing children’s behaviour, feelings and attitudes, for effective communication. They include: (1) Be honest, (2) Don’t be defensive, (3) Be consistent, (4) Practice empathy, (5) Don’t mock, (6) Don’t praise or criticise the person but his/her behaviour, (7) Respect the integrity of others, (8) Use positive, non-verbal instructions, (9) Teach skills, and (10) Be consistent with all team members, with non-beginners receiving equal attention<sup>13</sup>. At this point, it should be pointed out that the techniques and suggestions listed here work well primarily in performance-oriented situations, with a task focus. There are also general rules that apply to all adult-child interactions, such as honesty and consistency. The communication situation in sport becomes comparable to communication with school children outside sport, precisely because of the performance focus. However, it is also age-specific, as the rules listed above are less adapted to the experiences and activities of pre-school children.

The following technique is also useful in parent, teacher and coach communication with children, called constructive feedback or sandwich approach:

**Figure 1.** The Sandwich approach to constructive feedback<sup>14</sup>



*The positive statement.* Instead of negative messages, children need positive ones. Once a child comprehends overt (positive) statements, he/she will pay attention to the next instruction. Examples of appropriate positive affirmation are “Good try Gene.”, “You are to be commended for your effort Mary.”, “It is not your fault Barbi”. Pay attention to using children’s first names. This also shows sensitivity towards the individual.

*Positive feedback for the future.* The child now, after the initial, opening statement, no longer feels threatened. The reason for keeping the instructions future-oriented is to help children avoid thinking about and recalling the mistake. Thinking about bad luck actually increases the possibility of its recurrence, this is called the Pygmalion

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Author’s own work.

effect<sup>15</sup>, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The message must have a positive content. People who learn remember positive information better than negative information.

*Congratulations.* This phenomenon is what is known in cognitive psychology as *the recent effect*. It means that we remember the latest information better than the information we received earlier. An important element in the sandwich approach is that children react favourably to what has happened in their relationship with the adult, particularly when they receive constructive feedback on their performance. If the interactions have a positive outcome and outcome word, it will (1) increase retention and the retention of information – positive input is remembered more than negative input, (2) lead to greater trust and loyalty towards the community, (3) reinforce that the activity was performed correctly, and (4) help children to at least grasp and understand the learning skills in a less traumatic way than when the adult's emotions get out of control.

### 1.2.1. *Effective Communication in Groups*

So far, we have reviewed the principles and success criteria for communicating with children. Next, in line with the socialisation spaces and institutional characteristics of children being in groups, playing and learning in groups, it is worth reviewing the group specificities. Learning to communicate effectively is the first step towards building satisfying interpersonal team relationships. Recognising that it is difficult to be receptive to someone else's feelings, thoughts, ideas and needs when you don't even know them. We summarise some suggestions from Orlick's work<sup>16</sup> that can help improve these communication processes within groups and communities:

1. Let us make sure that “everyone is in the same boat” (the team is the priority). We need to recognise that the more open we are with others, the better our chances of thriving and achieving our goals.
2. Discuss ways to improve harmony within the team, including how to support and help each other on and off the field. In addition, do whatever is necessary to make team members feel valued and accepted.
3. Listen to others, they will listen to us! Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand their point of view.
4. Learn to give and receive feedback or criticism in a constructive way. Pay attention to the intention, don't take everything personally.
5. Let us learn to tolerate each other better. Accept team members for who they are, with their flaws, their abrupt turns, their characteristics and their funny habits that make them unique.
6. Do not talk about them behind their backs and do not gossip. Cliquishness and jealousy will quickly destroy team morale.
7. We handle our conflicts privately. Deal only with the person directly (e.g. “This is how you behave”, “This is how your behaviour makes others feel”,

15 Rosenthal, 2010.

16 Orlick, 2015.

“This is how you influence others with your behaviour and how others perceive it”).

8. Recognise that not all conflicts can be resolved, but they can be managed more effectively if both parties are willing to communicate.

### *1.2.2. Assertiveness: The Need for Expression*

‘You and I have a relationship that I value and want to keep. But we are two people with our own needs, which we have the right to meet. If you have a problem, I will listen with understanding attention to help you find your own solution. I respect your right to your own beliefs and values, even if they differ from mine. If your actions conflict with my needs, I will tell you openly and honestly, trusting that you will try to change behaviour that I find unacceptable. However, if I am behaving in a way that is unacceptable, please tell me openly and honestly so that I have a chance to change it. If we get into a conflict, make a commitment to resolve it without either of us trying to get the upper hand at the expense of the other. I will respect your right to have your needs met, but I must also respect my own. So let’s always find solutions that work for both of us. Your needs will be met as well as mine. Neither of us will lose. We both win. In this way, we can develop a healthy relationship in which we can both grow, fulfil ourselves... and continue in mutual respect, love and peace.’<sup>17</sup>

Children must learn to stand up for their rights and for things that are important to them. The term assertiveness refers to the honest and straightforward expression of a person’s thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a socially acceptable way that does not infringe or trespass on the rights of others.<sup>18</sup> The assertive response patterns include 4 main components: the ability to ask for favours, the ability to express positive and negative feelings, the ability to say no, and the ability to initiate, continue, and end certain conversations.<sup>19</sup>

People may have difficulties with assertiveness for a number of reason. These may include social inferences (e.g. not daring to speak up for fear of what others will think or of offending others); lack of awareness (e.g. no one has ever taught him/her how to be assertive); lack of confidence (e.g. the influence of socialisation patterns and cultural differences) and vulnerability (e.g. self-awareness may have negative consequences).<sup>20</sup> Assertiveness is a learned behaviour that takes a lot of practice to perfect. Effective interpersonal skills, such as assertiveness, cannot be acquired in a few months, but rather requires a broader approach that includes, in addition to assertiveness, other cognitive-behavioural mental training skills such as goal setting,<sup>21</sup> coping

17 Burch and Gordon, 2021, pp. 5–6.

18 Lazarus, 1973.

19 Author’s own work.

20 Connelly and Rotella, 1991.

21 Locke and Latham, 2002.

techniques,<sup>22</sup> internal dialogue,<sup>23</sup> (self-talk) and self-efficacy beliefs.<sup>24</sup> The problem window in the table below will help you find effective communication techniques.

Thomas Gordon<sup>25</sup> one of the best known exponents of humanistic psychology, suggests that we should talk about ourselves, about our own feelings, when we have a problem.

**Figure 1.** Thomas Gordon's model: Identifying who has the problem<sup>26</sup>

<p><b>The other is the problem</b> The feelings and needs of the other must be voiced Attention to value</p>
<p><b>No problem</b> Messages of appreciation</p>
<p><b>I have the problem</b> My feelings and needs need to be voiced</p>

And when the other person has a perceived problem, instead of giving our own opinions and advice, we signal back that we understand what they are saying. What he/she feels, what his/her needs are. A basic principle: whoever has the problem, let it be about their feelings and needs.

If I have the problem:

1. I initiate the contact
2. I want to help myself, to make my own voice heard
3. I have to find my own solution
4. I have to be satisfied with the solution

5. If the other person has the problem:

6. Contact is initiated by the other person
7. I can help him/her find his/her own solution
7. I understand and accept the needs of the other
9. We use the technique of mindful attention

22 Gallwey, 1997.

23 Bandura, 1977.

24 Ibid.

25 Burch and Gordon, 2021.

26 Author's own work.

It is essential to clarify who owns the problem in the relationship. If it is our problem, we feel tension, anger, annoyance, anxiety; some legitimate need is being violated. It is not our partner who needs help, but us.

It is important to understand that we can never know exactly what the other person is experiencing, because it is impossible to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. We can only guess what is going on inside the other person. Human communication is a much more subtle and complex “art” than we might think. We understand our partner best when our impression is close to the one they feel. This kind of emotional and content reflection is the art of understanding attention. Unfortunately, however, true understanding relationships are rare because: we do not always feel free to say what we think, we are not always aware of our own feelings, and the same words mean different things to different people. Listening is the constant and frequent reflection and feedback of our feelings and impressions of the other person. It is a way of checking the accuracy of our listening: whether we really understand the other person well. In this way we can minimise the possibility of misunderstandings and distortions. Listening with understanding is a means of providing evidence that the message has been understood. It is this evidence that makes the messenger talk further and go deeper in telling the problem.

In our relationships, two factors, empathy and acceptance, are necessary for one person to be able to promote the emotional – physical – spiritual development and health of the other. This applies to work relationships as much as to our intimate relationships. Empathy is the ability or activity of understanding the other person's inner world, thoughts, feelings and needs. Such an atmosphere facilitates problem solving, which leads to better satisfaction of needs. Components of empathy: An empathic person senses and understands the other person's personal feelings, while being able to maintain a certain detachment from the other person. The empathic person communicates in such a way that the other person feels understood and accepted. Acceptance means that I feel good about what the other person is doing, his/her behaviour is acceptable to me, I do not wish to change it, I accept the other person as he/she is at that moment<sup>27</sup>.

The surprising effectiveness of sympathetic attention is that the responsibility can be left entirely with the one who has the problem. There are three important ingredients:

Indicating presence, participation in the relationship. Followership, the other person's careful, non-intrusive escorting of the other person through his/her own problems. Feedback: reflecting reports and feelings, summative feedback.

Some examples:

1. I hear what you feel
2. I understand how you see things now
3. I see you just as you are
4. I am interested and concerned

27 Roberts, 2021.

5. I understand where you are now
6. I do not want to change you
7. You do not have to fear me

Listening attention should be used when you are arguing or criticising the other person, when the other person is showing strong emotions, or when the other person is looking for a solution. There are also situations when it is not necessary and is inappropriate to use mindfulness: when you are not confident in the situation, when you feel strong emotions, or when you just need information.

### *1.2.3. Reflective Listening*

Reflective listening is one of the most powerful ways to show the person you are working with that you are actively listening and trying hard to understand. The basic listening process consists of asking, encouraging, circumscribing, reflecting and summarising. The following reflective listening techniques<sup>28</sup> can facilitate communication with children:

1. questioning: ask open-ended questions to encourage the child to keep talking (“How do you feel about the injury?”, “Tell me more about how it happened”). As a general rule, avoid “why” questions, as this may provoke a response from the person you are talking to. Wait until you have reached a comfortable level.
2. clarification: make what you have heard clear to the other person. Clarification does not mean “I agree with your point of view”, but rather that the speaker feels that someone is listening. Some good introductions are, for example, are: “What I heard you say...”, “I am not sure I understood you right, but it sounded like you were angry at your coach for benching you. Is that right?”
3. encouragement: use various verbal statements or artificial signals to encourage the athlete to continue. These include head nods, gestures, coughs or repetition of key words.
4. using different words: ensure that the respondent understands the message. This encourages you to continue exploring your thoughts and ideas. Similar to reflective listening, this method is based on feedback in your own words, as the interviewer summarises and feeds back what the other person has said.
5. Reflection: show that you can “hear” the satisfaction and feelings from what he said (“You are sad because...” “You’re sure you can play at that level, but you are afraid to get there.”)
6. Understanding: use empathy to keep the conversation on the important topics (“It must have been hard to watch your teammates in training when you were recovering from arthroscopic knee surgery.”)
7. summary: gather all the main thoughts and feelings you have about what you have talked about (“It sounds like you have very mixed feelings about

28 Egan, 1994.

the situation. On the one hand, you want more time for yourself, on the other hand, you want to get back to your original role.”) Summaries can be used at the beginning or the end of a conversation, to introduce a new topic, or to clarify what was said at the end of a long and complex statement or topic.

8. Skills such as listening and influencing are not always enough to build quality relationships with people. Empathy has a primary role. Empathy is a special form of understanding. In essence, it means putting yourself in the other person's shoes and trying to understand their experience from their point of view.

### ***1.3. Mental Well-Being and Communication Effectiveness***

This is why it is important to keep positive psychological models in mind when educating children. A person who is not mentally well is most certainly also impulse-driven and incongruent on a communication level. In the next chapter we will review possible communication barriers. Another new direction that has been continuously inspiring psychological discourse in recent years is positive psychology. Positive psychology has shown a number of achievements in the last decade<sup>29</sup>, including the creation of a taxonomy of character strengths and virtues<sup>30</sup>, which are developable personality traits and markers of positive mental health. Positive character traits encompass six domains that can be used not only as benchmarks of mental health, but also as alphas for healthy and effective human communication. These six character traits are wisdom and knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spirituality and transcendence.<sup>31</sup> These strengths, according to positive psychology, are trait-like, manifest in a variety of situations, are stable over time, and result in a positive state of self, and are represented by famous role models in each culture. This research has brought about a paradigm shift in our approach to stress and coping with stressful life events, as it has highlighted the existence of positive unconscious self-protective mechanisms that can support coping with stress and effective communication in stressful situations. Examples of such self-protective mechanisms are humour and altruism.<sup>32</sup> An important message of positive psychology is that people can anticipate, think, plan and verbalise effectively. The various global models of well-being have highlighted that there are many aspects of well-being. They are also called flourishing models in positive psychology. The components of the global well-being model are: positive emotions, competence, emotional stability, engagement, grasping meaning, optimism, positive relationships, resilience, positive self-esteem and vitality.<sup>33</sup> One of the most accepted conceptualisations of well-being models is the PERMA Well-being Profile.<sup>34</sup> “The components of the model that emphasises the five pillars (competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive

29 Nagy, 2019; Oláh, 2013.

30 Zabó, Oláh and Vargha, 2023.

31 Peterson and Seligman, 2006.

32 Oláh, 2013.

33 Big, 2019.

34 Varga, Oláh and Vargha, 2022.

emotions, positive relationships, resilience, self-worth and vitality) contribute to the state of well-being in a mutually reinforcing way”.<sup>35</sup>

These new psychological constructs, along with several other positive psychological models, are certainly worth bearing in mind as important factors of effective communication. What is the relationship between mental well-being and effective communication? This area is still underrepresented in the literature and has been studied mainly in the context of communication within workplace organisations.<sup>36</sup> We find that adults with a balanced, mature personality can develop stable and congruent communication structures. Effective communication is certainly a pillar of well-being.

#### ***1.4. The Role of Age Specificities in Communication***

Personal development starts at birth and is a lifelong challenge. Each stage of life is important for the development of communication competences, and each stage of development has its own sensitive periods in relation to communication. In this chapter, we highlight a developmental stage that is a milestone on the path to adulthood and that has the most conflicting developmental tasks in terms of communication. Some of the literature based on practical experience with adolescents and young adults can be traced back to the work of the Young People’s Counselling Service (YPCS) at the Tavistock Clinic in London, such as Paul Upson and Isca Wittenberg. Upson<sup>37</sup>, following Erikson, emphasises that adolescence is a transition from play to the adult world of work, during which the young person can try on a variety of transitional identities. This rich space of possibilities is intensely demanding: the young person must constantly work on the inner balance between positive, creative, life-enhancing forces and negative, destructive, death-wish forces. Many young people choose to procrastinate, to put off their studies, as a kind of psychosocial moratorium. Psychodynamics cannot be spared, it is not possible to skip and not fight certain life tasks. Maturity is only possible through a process of development. It is during this period that young people acquire the ability to integrate “good” and “bad”. Which way does the balance tip? The socialisation spaces – family, school, peer group, coaches – play an important role in supporting this integration process.

Post-adolescence is the intermediate period between the full development of psychosexual maturity and the period of social adulthood<sup>38</sup>. The task of this period is to complete the developmental processes begun in adolescence: the complete separation from parents; career choice, fitting into an occupational role; building a stable partnership, starting a family.

Detachment is a central concept in growing up. Detachment from parents is only one aspect of the detachment process: the young person has to redefine his/her

35 Ibid., p. 35.

36 Cheney et al., 2008.

37 Upson, 1998.

38 Hajduska, 2008. p. 70.

relationship with himself/ herself and his/her environment, to detach from the role of child. According to Laufer, the developmental tasks of this period are to change one's relationship to parents, peers and one's own body<sup>39</sup>.

Effective communication is of paramount importance during these sensitive developmental stages, as the potential for vulnerability, sensitivity, resistance and temper tantrums is particularly high. Incongruent communication closes the interaction and hinders relationship management. When we know what is going on in the mind of a child or adolescent, it is much easier to connect with them, to use understanding attention, empathy and reflective listening to communicate effectively.

## 2. Communication Barriers

So far, we have covered the characteristics of effective communication. However, there are countless instances where communication barriers arise in adult-child interactions, and in all human relationships in general. Communication barriers are partly conscious and partly unconscious processes, and are caused by factors such as: impulse-driven situation management, emotionally unstable, unclear relational relationships, subordinate-superior situations, conflicts of interest, emotional blockages and unconscious patterns. In this chapter, the most common communication barriers are thematically highlighted.

### 2.1. *Disqualified Messages, Roadblocks*

Very indirect messages are usually less informative, where we say something without actually expressing an opinion. Bavelas et al. called such communications “disqualified messages”, i.e. we bypass the classification<sup>40</sup>. Studies have shown that people make such statements when they have to choose between two “dislike” communication situations, i.e., an avoidance-avoidance conflict<sup>41</sup>. For example, either they hurt someone else's feelings or they lie. In our everyday lives, such messages are quite common. However, if one uses this communication technique frequently, there is a risk that one will learn to avoid conflict, to avoid obfuscation, to avoid forming opinions. This is why it is important, for psychoeducational purposes, to make children aware of these hidden pitfalls of communication at an early age. Communication slur is a similar communication bias.

Relationship and communication problems, barriers and misunderstandings often arise from the other person imposing a ready-made solution. When the other person does not wait until we find our own solution. We then run into so-called communication barriers; a language of non-acceptance in which the other person communicates their solution to us as a fact. Communication barriers slow down problem

39 Laufer, 1989.

40 Bavelas et al., 1986.

41 Forgács, 2019, p. 151.

solving and hinder communication. Thus, subconsciously or consciously, the other party who uses them seeks to change or control the behaviour of the other party. The following reactions can be triggered when using communication barriers: resistance, defence; a feeling of lack of trust in the other party; loss of self-esteem and damage to self-image.

Communication barriers also send the message that our needs are more important than those of our partner. Such messages do not provide a solution to the problem in the relationship. Thomas Gordon has called his list the “dirty twelve” spoilers of communication<sup>42</sup>.

*Commanding, instructing, directing:* this kind of communication barrier tells the other person that his/her feelings are not important, only the other person matters. It creates resistance and can also trigger anger and resentment: *You must do this!; You cannot do that!; Stop it!; Apologise!; Get to work right now!*

*Threats and warnings:* like the previous one, this communication provokes anger and resistance: *Better not to try!; If you do not do this, you...; I am warning you, if you dare do this to me...; If I ever see you do that again...*

*He or she lectures, he or she preaches:* Any kind of teaching can provoke anger in the recipient, as it can make them feel inferior, stupid. Most people do not like to be proved wrong. Instead of statements, well-directed, thought-provoking questions can help: *This is what you should do.; You should try.; It is your responsibility to do so. ; You should tell him that...*

*He or she criticises:* This is the communication barrier that perhaps most often makes you look inferior, stupid, unworthy. Many people’s self-image is heavily influenced by the opinions of others, i.e. they judge themselves as they hear others say. If one hears a lot of this type of communication, one will feel that there is nothing good in him/her, that he/she is not to be liked. It is worth focusing on the solution rather than the scapegoat: *You are being silly.; You are out of touch.; You did not do it right.; You are wrong.; That is a silly thing to say.*

*Giving advice, solutions:* this type of communication is a way of telling one person to another that they cannot solve their problems, that they cannot find solutions to their problems. Frequent advice often hinders the generation of ideas of one’s own: *I think what you should do is...; Allow me to suggest that...; You’d better...; If I were you...*

*He or she asks questions:* from these statements you can conclude that the other person does not trust us, does not believe us. This type of questioning can be threatening, especially if we do not know the other person’s intentions: *Why did you do this?; How long have you felt this way?; What have you done to solve it?; Are you sorry you did it?*

*Diagnosing, analysing:* such a communication gives you the feeling that the other person is above you, that they know better, that they can see through you. This creates a feeling of incompetence in the other party: *You say that because you are angry.; You are jealous.; What you really need is...; You always have problems with superiors.; You have a persecution complex.; You want to be seen as good.*

42 Burch and Gordon, 2021; Forgács, 2019.

*It reassures him/her, it agrees:* It is as if this communication trivialises, does not give due weight to the other party's communication: *This is not so bad.; You did everything you could.; Why do you get so excited about things like that?*

*Praise:* if you praise someone all the time, the praise loses its value, it is not a real acknowledgement and the other person will doubt its authenticity: *You are an intelligent man.; You have very good judgement, but...; You have a lot of talent.; You have the profession up your sleeve.*

*Humour, evasion, changing the subject:* joking can give the impression that the other person is not interested in what we are doing. When someone brings up a potentially sensitive topic, the other person often tries to avoid answering by using humour. Changing the subject or joking about serious issues can be bad for the other person: *Think of the good!; Forget the whole thing!; Which reminds me of when...; Do not worry about it so much!*

*Regrets, consoles:* Such a communication conveys to the other person that his/her feelings are not welcome. Often, if one does not know how to respond to a negative situation, one tries to use soothing words to distract oneself and the other person from the situation. This can also trigger resistance: *You will feel different tomorrow; Everything will work out for the best in the end.; Borurura serenity.; Do not worry about it.*

*Mocking, labelling, ironising:* such messages can seriously damage the self-esteem. They make the person think that he/she is unloved, unlovable: *You think cleverly.; Now you have really messed up.; You are a sloppy worker.; You are just another insensitive man.*

We can see that there are communication techniques among the communication barriers that may seem positive, but which can still create resistance. Recognising communication barriers is not an innate characteristic. It requires awareness and the ability to monitor one's own feelings, as well as a number of social interactions. We can increase the effectiveness of communication by minimising communication barriers.

## 2.2. Cognitive Dissonance

In the history of psychology, the period between 1961 and 1975 has been called the era of trust and crisis. This period is the era of cognitive social psychology. In this respect, L. Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance<sup>43</sup> is decisive, and it has made it possible to experimentally explore the microstructure of everyday thinking, the quest for balance. It was also the period of the study of how people think<sup>44</sup> and feel<sup>45</sup>. Cognitive dissonance is a psychological theory according to which conflicting opinions create a feeling of tension in the mind. The theory is that dissonance, being unpleasant, encourages people to change their thinking, opinions or behaviour. Cognitive dissonance reduction is the process of trying to reduce the tension created by cognitive evaluation through various strategies. One such strategy is to change one or more

43 Festinger, 1957, 1962.

44 Kelley, 1973.

45 Reizenzein, 1983.

of the beliefs, opinions or behaviours that form the basis of dissonance. Reducing tension may involve devaluing the alternative not chosen, reducing the importance attached to dissonant thoughts, or even forgetting those thoughts altogether.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that one of the profound needs of human beings is the need for self-justification, which alters cognitive consciousness to be compatible with our own self-valuation. It is at this point that the role of self-esteem and self-esteem in the degree of anxiety that a person experiences when experiencing cognitive dissonance should be highlighted. It is particularly important for children to learn to manage this type of anxiety. Individuals with a low self-esteem experience much more anxiety and need a more complex, longer-lasting dissonance reduction process to reach a state of calm.

Another implication of the theory is that it can produce an extremely wide range of persuasion and manipulation. Cognitive dissonance has long been called "the manipulator's best friend".<sup>46</sup> It should be emphasised that it is not the dissonance but the response to it that is important to those who seek to influence others. Research shows that three essential qualities influence persuasiveness: authority, honour and sympathy".<sup>47</sup> In addition, an attractive appearance makes an individual likeable, also known as the Halo effect in social psychology. The more likeable a person is, the better they look, the more favourably their ideas are received. Research also confirms<sup>48</sup> that eye contact and confidence increase the appearance of credibility, whatever the message.

Interestingly, recent research on cognitive dissonance can add new colour to the existing body of knowledge. "Cognitive dissonance studies, however, show that well-intentioned disaster management messaging not only can produce an undesirable public reaction, but can also solidify public sentiment to resist or deny that very message. The research will demonstrate that a basic understanding of cognitive dissonance could help disaster communicators craft more effective messaging. (...) This 'upgrade' to existing risk communication frameworks represents an efficient method to close the theory to practice loop and begin to account for the power of cognitive dissonance in our national and international disaster communications"<sup>49</sup>. In the context of everyday life management and effective communication, it is also of utmost importance that children receive messages from adults that help them to reduce the stress of cognitive dissonance and at the same time even increase their self-esteem.

### **2.3. Incongruence**

"The set of non-verbal cues that accompany our words and influence their interpretation is metacommunication. In general, the two channels of communication – linguistic and non-linguistic – are consistent with each other and reinforce each other, thus

46 Levine, 2003, p. 202.

47 Ibid., p. 31.

48 Levine, 2003.

49 Wood and Miller, 2021, p. 39.

making the communication credible. However, sometimes the information received through non-linguistic channels contradicts the oral communication”.<sup>50</sup> This is called incongruence. Incongruent communication is when a person or a group of people speak in an inauthentic way. This can be caused by a lack of consistency between signals, a contradiction with what they have said before, or a hidden cultural difference that leads to misunderstanding.

Causes of incongruence include a lack of self-awareness, self-confidence or sense of self-efficacy on the part of the communicator. If, for this kind of internal reason, or simply because of some situational factor, the communicator does not want to be present in the situation and feels a sense of tension, this will be felt in his/her communication. It is worth analysing self-efficacy from the point of view of children. Self-efficacy is one of the most influential psychological constructs: the belief that an individual can successfully complete a specific task, can cope with the situation in front of him/her<sup>51</sup>. Self-efficacy is not an evaluation or criticism of one’s own abilities, but rather the extent to which one can use these abilities to achieve the desired goals. A distinction should be made between efficacy expectancy – the belief that the individual will successfully perform the required action – and outcome expectancy, which is an assessment of the results. One provides feedback on one’s own competence, the other reflects the expectations of the environment<sup>52</sup>. A short, 10-item, standardised instrument<sup>53</sup> is available for measuring self-efficacy, which is also used for developing self-efficacy competence.

In the family, at work, or among members of other communities, we may develop games, i.e. fixed communication scripts, ingrained reactions that are difficult to get rid of. These games<sup>54</sup> can also be a cause of incongruence, because in these cases the words that have been said over and over again no longer have any meaning, the actual messages are carried through hidden channels and the relationship will not be strengthened.

#### ***2.4. Communication Barriers Due to Generational Differences***

“In the past few decades, the notion of “communication skills” has become increasingly dominant in cultural discourse, as such skills are deemed crucial for success in seemingly various professional occupations and in diverse aspects of an individual’s life”<sup>55</sup>. The Palo Alto school of communication research first coined the term communication skills, (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, Watzlawick, Beavin, Ferreira) characterising direct human communication in five statements they considered crucial<sup>56</sup>:

50 Oláh, 2006, p. 284.

51 Bandura, 1977; Singer, 2001.

52 Singer, Hausenblas and Janelle, 2001.

53 Salavec, Neculai and Jakab, 2006.

54 Berne, 2021.

55 Fialkoff and Pinchevski, 2022, p. 541.

56 Marc and Picard, 2011.

1. ‘You cannot not communicate. Even silence signals something. Communication is a basic human characteristic.
2. All communication has a content component and a relational component. The level of communication is the content level. The second level qualifies the previous one at a higher level of abstraction. This relational level tells us how to interpret the “data provided”. For example, whether an uttered sentence should be considered a command or perhaps a joke.
3. The nature of human relations is determined by the articulation (interpunction) of the bilateral or multilateral communicative exchanges between partners. The recipient’s relationship with the communicator and the message is continuous, and so is its interplay. It constantly shapes the relationship between them. This principle is also true for the communicator, which is why communication is circular.
4. Communication is expressed through digital and analogue systems. These concepts are taken from the language of the computer. The term digital refers to properties where a code can be broken down into parts, components, and the relationship between them can be described. They are mainly specific to language. An analogical code is broader, it cannot be broken down into parts. This type of code is used for artistic and non-verbal communication.
5. Communication as a process can be of two types: equal, symmetrical, – the relationship between partners is equal (e.g. classmates, friends, colleagues), or unequal, complementary, – the difference between the parties is emphasised, the greater influence of one or the other (e.g. teacher-student, adult-child, boss-subordinate)”<sup>57</sup>.

For example, it does not take into account the socio-cultural determinants of the communication process<sup>58</sup>.

Direct human communication always takes place in a social space, always determined by the norms and rules of a given society. Think of the simplest rules of manners. A set of rules dictates what can/should and what cannot/should not be done in a given interaction. These rules range from the optional to the obligatory: for example, you may ask an indifferent, distant acquaintance where he/she bought the beautiful bouquet of tulips he/she is holding in his/her hands, but it is obligatory to salute when meeting a private soldier’s superior. Failure to comply will result in sanctions, the extent of which will depend on the degree of the infraction. An indiscreet question may be met with a disapproving glance, while in the military, for example, more serious reprisals are expected. Sometimes the norms of certain sub-groups of society may differ, causing friction in the interactions between members of different groups. Consider, for example, the prevalence of name-calling among the younger generations, so that even in shops, young shop assistants may put down young

57 Ibid.

58 Fialkoff and Pinchevski, 2022.

customers as they enter. But what if the customer who walks in – although they may not look their age – is of the generation that would expect to be called names. The fact that communication takes place in a social space also means that not only norms, but also social statuses and the roles they confer, play a significant role in determining communication.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the role of the two communicating parties determines the nature of the communication. Even a dialogue on the same subject must obey completely different rules if the parties are in different roles and discuss the same subject in different ways, for example in a teacher-student relationship compared to a parent-child relationship.

A generation is a group of people born during the same period, mostly in similar historical, social and technological circumstances, and facing similar challenges. The generation to which we belong has an impact on many areas. For example, our values, priorities, attitudes to work, communication and social habits<sup>60</sup>. According to Krisztián Steigervald's classification of generations, we distinguish 6 generational groups<sup>61</sup>:

1. Veterans (born before 1945): for them, the reference point is the printed press or radio. The focus is on dedication, security and family. Their personality is defined by the dangers of the world.
2. Baby Boomer (born 1946–1964): the age of coming to terms with the world war. They are committed to their workplace. They value stability, loyalty, and personal responsibility, often viewing work as a core part of their identity. Many of them prefer traditional hierarchies and face-to-face communication over digital interaction.
3. X (born between 1965 and 1980): characterised by a strong desire to prove themselves and independent thinking. The period when the first household appliances appear (washing machine, television, radio, record player).
4. Y (born 1981–1995): they grew up at the dawn of the digital age. They seek flexibility and innovation in the workplace. It is important to deal with the individual. The last age group born into a purely offline world.
5. Z (born between 1996–2010): the emergence of the internet and the spread of mass products. Growing up in an era of digital technology, born into it, so to speak. Social media and online interaction are an integral part of their lives.
6. Alpha (born after 2010): technology becomes part of their everyday life. They cannot distinguish between the offline and online world.
7. There are differences in priorities and values between different generational groups, as different issues are prioritised differently. Generation X prioritises work and career, while Generation Y prioritises family and me time. It is important for them not to miss opportunities to develop and to try to balance work and private life. For Generation Z, research shows that earning money is

59 Buda, 1988.

60 Steigervald, 2020.

61 Ibid.

an important priority to achieve their dreams and aspirations. They can easily navigate the digital world but are not tied down to a job in the long term. The Alpha generation is still in the process of creating its values, but it is becoming clear that self-centredness will be a major focus. Members of the Veteran and Baby Boomer generations value security, both financially and socially. From a communication point of view, it is crucial to understand the other person's world of experience, their way of thinking and the interpretive horizon in which they view the world.

### ***2.5. Fricker's Concept of Epistemic Injustice***

Fricker's theory<sup>62</sup> goes beyond the psychological and communication theory approach discussed so far, and introduces a philosophical, ethical perspective that fits in well with the theme of this chapter. The concept of epistemic injustice means that when there is an imbalance of social power, the less powerful person is not treated as an equal source of knowledge. In other words, their opinion is ignored, not taken seriously, or is only acknowledged when it fits the dominant person's own views.<sup>63</sup> The pithy quote highlights how children can often find themselves in a situation of epistemic injustice, as adults' prejudices against them give them too little credibility. Furthermore, adults and children have very different hermeneutic force fields. „A first point to make is that this kind of epistemic injustice is fundamentally a form of (direct or indirect) discrimination. The cause of testimonial injustice is a prejudice through which the speaker is misjudged and perceived as epistemically lesser (a direct discrimination).”<sup>64</sup> This asymmetry can result in a subordination in the interaction, so that children do not have the chance to connect with the adult and express their own needs. Overall, an interdisciplinary approach is an important aspect for a deeper understanding of the topic.

## **3. Summary**

In summary, developing effective communication skills takes time, patience and practice. We should also remember that not all problems can be solved and not everyone needs help. We should listen to what the child or our communication partner wants and respond accordingly. The following are some guidelines to help you communicate more effectively:

1. Focus on the person who is speaking. Be attentive, authentic and supportive.
2. Pay attention to the content as well as the feelings.
3. Let us show that we understand what the person is talking about.
4. Let us summarise the main points.

62 Fricker, 2017; Dunne, 2020.

63 Nemes, 2020.

64 Fricker, 2017, p. 8.

5. Show alternative perspectives. Goal setting is based on action-oriented understanding.
6. We use coping strategies to ensure that the individual feels prepared for immediate action.

In this chapter, we have reviewed the most important communication competences, theoretical and practical approaches to effective communication, and the factors that hinder communication. The experience of the literature reviewed in this chapter confirms the importance of preparedness, ongoing psychoeducation, understanding of social embeddedness and generational differences, as well as mental well-being and personal integrity. The basic prerequisite for developing a healthy, well-functioning personality is the continuous development of the communication skills summarized in this chapter.

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