Effective Communication: ONE

BY
CAROLYN WILKERSON DUNCAN

Communication involves sending messages from one person to another using verbal and nonverbal methods. Effective communication can help the teacher and the administrator better manage their classroom or child-care center. Communicating effectively, however, involves skills and abilities that require thought, practice, and deliberate action. The skills are attainable by all child-care workers, but there are some pitfalls that must be avoided.

*Pitfall One: Making Vague Statements, Using Ambiguous Words.* Such practices can result in misunderstandings, or confusion, and can undermine the authority that the message sender might have in a particular situation. For example, a memo circulated on Thursday afternoon read “There will be a staff meeting on Friday morning 9:30 A.M. Please plan to attend.” Three staff members did not attend this meeting and when questioned by the administrator gave the following reasons for being absent:

Staffer one, a new teacher, said he went to the lounge and waited; since the other staff members did not come, he assumed the meeting was for the following Friday.

Staffer two had made no effort to attend the meeting because she thought it was scheduled for the following Friday.

Staffer three, a cook, said she did not attend the meeting because she thought it was for teachers.

At this particular center, staff meetings are normally held in the conference room, but due to minor renova-
tions, the last meeting, the only one attended by the new staff member, was held in the lounge; attendance at staff meetings is required; however not all support staff are required to attend every meeting. With these considerations in mind it is possible that the three absent staff members had legitimate reasons for not attending the meeting.

Vague ambiguous statements in this memo created confusion and led to tension between the administrator and some staff members. The misunderstanding and the resultant tension could have been alleviated by using the simple who, what, when, where, and why rule.

Who: All Staff
What: Will meet
When: 9:30 a.m. Friday 03 October 1980
Where: in the Conference Room
Why: The revised personnel manual will be issued and explained.

Pitfall Two: Asking a Question or Giving a Choice When None Is Indicated. Sometimes communication is aimed at getting ideas or issues out into the open, discussing them, and arriving at a collective decision. In such instances it is appropriate to ask a question. For example, at the end of the fiscal year, the director assembled the teachers and asked them what kind of toys, materials, equipment, and supplies were needed in the classrooms. From the comments made by the teachers, a list was developed. Then the teachers and director decided which items were necessary and which were wanted because they would be nice to have. The list of necessary items was turned into a purchase order, the wanted items list was retained so that, as money became available, the items would be purchased.

In this instance the director asked a question and received many answers. In other instances, however, communication is for the purpose of letting others know what must be done. In such cases it is not appropriate to ask a question. For example:

Mary was in the process of getting the children cleaned up for lunch. She walked over to Tommy, who was piecing together a puzzle, and said “Do you want to wash up for lunch now, Tommy? Tommy said “no.” It was lunch time and all the children had to wash their hands before going to the table to eat. Tommy did not have a choice and should not have been asked a question. Rather Mary could have said “Tommy, it is time to wash your hands for lunch. We’ll save...