

## MODULE 4

# Improving communication between parents/carers/guardians and children



### Trainer's introduction

This module looks at communication skills and helping parents, carers and guardians to communicate more effectively with children of all ages. The module builds basic skills in preparation for Module 5, which addresses the important issue of disclosing HIV status to children. You may need to be clear about the importance of learning the skills of communication first before applying them to the topic of disclosure.

Approximate length of module: 2 hours 25 minutes

### Aims

The aims of this module are to:

- provide an understanding of what communication is
- help participants learn about effective communication and practise key communication skills
- explore how to communicate effectively with children of different ages.

### Key learning outcomes

By the end of this session participants will:

- have an understanding of what effective communication is
- have practised key communication skills
- have an awareness of how to communicate effectively with children of different ages.

### Trainer's preparation

#### Module plan (with suggested times)

- Understanding what communication is – **30 minutes**
- Learning about effective communication and practising key communication skills – **40 minutes**
- Exploring how to communicate effectively with children of different ages – **1 hour**.
- Reflection – **15 minutes**



#### Materials you will need

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 4  
 Overhead/flipchart 2: Exploring listening skills  
 Overhead/flipchart 3: Communicating with children  
 Handout 1: Communicating with children  
 Handout 2: Better communication

## Trainer's guidance

### Introduction

Some of the activities in this module cover similar topics in different ways, such as activities 1 and 4. You will need to choose the activities you think best meet the needs of your group.

Begin the module by explaining to participants that the purpose is to learn how to be a good communicator. Say they will practise some general skills that will help them communicate better with children of all ages. Explain that this module links closely with Module 5, which looks at how a parent, guardian or other person may disclose his or her HIV status to a child. The group needs to learn the skills of good communication first before applying them to disclosing their HIV status. Be clear that this module will not cover disclosure itself.

Go through the topics to be covered in the module and how it is structured.

#### Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 4

Please use the list in the module plan on page 33, but without the suggested times.

## Understanding what communication is

### Activity 1 What is communication and what gets in the way of good communication?

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Explain that the aim of the first activity is to help participants to develop a better understanding of communication.

1. First, ask participants to spend three minutes talking with the person next to them, to try to define the word 'communication'. Ask them to come up with their own definition in 15 words or less.
2. Ask each pair to give their definition to the group. Write key words on the flipchart. Allow 10 minutes for this.
3. After everyone has fed back, discuss the ideas with the whole group for about five minutes. Emphasise the words and ideas that fit with the guidance in this module. Have a definition of your own ready to share with the group. It might be something like this: *Communication is the two-way giving and receiving of information and ideas.* Explain that good communication suggests a shared understanding of each other's ideas and meanings.
4. Next, write the following question on the flipchart: *Why do people often misunderstand each other when they speak?* Ask the participants to consider the question for a few moments and then have an open discussion for 10 minutes. Write people's suggestions underneath the heading.

Add the following points, if the discussion does not include them:

- people tend to make assumptions about what the other person thinks or wants
- they do not listen carefully
- they are so eager to make their own point they do not give the other person space to communicate
- they do not check they have been understood.

Bring the discussion to a close by emphasising that there are no right or wrong answers. The point of the exercise is that often we do not communicate as well as we think we do. This might be because we think communicating is more about talking than listening.

Ask participants to remember these points and reflect on them the next time they speak to a child. Ask them to imagine what it might be like for a child to speak with an adult, perhaps drawing on their own childhood experiences.

## Learning about effective communication and practising key communication skills

### Activity 2 Role-plays to develop listening skills

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Explain to the group that this activity aims to help participants understand the importance of listening and developing listening skills.

1. Ask the group to divide themselves into pairs and to sit facing each other.
2. Explain that each person will take turns to play the role of speaker and listener. For three minutes, the first speaker should talk as naturally as possible about something important to them. The topic is not significant, but it should be something that the listener can relate to.
3. When the time is up, swap roles for another three minutes.
4. When each pair has played both roles, ask them to discuss the experience for five minutes. Prompt the discussion with questions from the overhead/flipchart below.

#### Overhead/flipchart 2: Exploring listening skills

- What was it like to be the listener?
- What was it like to be the speaker?
- Did the listener's behaviour seem rude?
- Did the listener appear interested?
- Did the listener appear bored?
- Did they really listen?
- Did they pick up on any issues, seek clarification or request more details?
- Did they respond appropriately and sensitively to any difficult issues that came up?
- How well did the speakers feel listened to?

5. Bring everyone back together and ask for volunteers to share anything they found difficult about listening or anything they noticed about their own listening behaviour. Allow five minutes for this.

6. Ask participants what lessons they can take away from this activity. Some of the lessons might be:

- active listening is hard work
- it is easier to interrupt the speaker than to keep quiet and really listen
- if you lack the right words to explain yourself, this can lead to misunderstanding
- if you are avoiding saying certain things, this could affect the honesty of everything you say – your listener may notice this
- you need to use appropriate words to help your listener understand you.

Allow five minutes for summing up.

### Activity 3 Identifying the skills and qualities of a good communicator

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to explore the skills and qualities needed to communicate effectively.

1. Give participants five minutes to think by themselves about someone they think is a good communicator – *not* their mother, father or partner. It could be someone from

school or in the community. Tell them they will not be asked to name the person.

Ask participants to identify what it is that makes them think of this person as a good communicator. You might need to suggest a few ideas to the group to start them off, such as: Do they show interest in what you say? Do they speak warmly to you? If you think they listen well to you, why do you think this? Do they, for example, check that they have understood you?

2. Bring together the whole group to brainstorm the skills that people need to communicate effectively. Record their answers on a flipchart. As participants feed back, it may become clear that they see a good communicator as a person who speaks clearly and confidently and is interesting. Discuss their feedback and make sure the following skills are also included in the discussion:

- active listening, which involves listening carefully without interrupting, and showing you are taking in information by nodding, using appropriate facial expressions and vocal encouragements
- questioning when appropriate to check that you have understood
- giving feedback or responding to the other person when appropriate
- carefully observing how the other person is reacting to what you say.

Allow 15 minutes for feedback and discussion. Close the activity by clearly emphasising that one of the most important and difficult skills in communication is listening.

## Exploring how to communicate effectively with children of different ages

### Activity 4 Exploring how to communicate with children of different ages

Suggested time: 45 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to explore and address the challenges of communicating with children of different ages.

1. Ask participants to divide themselves into small groups and give them 10 minutes to discuss what prevents good communication between parents and children. Encourage each group to consider how this will differ according to the age of the children. Tell them you will need one volunteer from each small group to take two minutes to feed back the main ideas to the large group.

2. Record the main points from each group's feedback on a flipchart. These ideas might include the parent or the child not listening, the age of the child (they might be too young to understand), or an inappropriate time or place chosen for the discussion. Record the feedback.

3. Ask people to return to their groups and give each group two different problems to consider that came out of the discussion. Ask them to spend five minutes discussing possible solutions and support to help overcome these difficulties.

4. Bring everyone back together and ask each group to feed back in two minutes. Record their responses on a flipchart. Participants are likely to offer practical and realistic suggestions. However, be ready to go through the additional points on the overhead/flipchart below. Allow 10 minutes for discussion of the overhead.

#### Overhead/flipchart 3: Communicating with children

- Prepare well and, if you can, practise what you want to say with another adult first. Remember, put equal effort into communicating whether the child is a boy or a girl.
- Find a setting where you will not be interrupted and where the child feels relaxed.
- Use appropriate language for the age of the child. The younger the child, the simpler the language should be.

- Keep your ideas clear and separate. Break them down into pieces that are easy to understand.
- Do not try to cover too much information at once.
- For younger children who can talk, it helps to put what you want to say in the form of a story.
- Check what the children have understood by asking them to tell you in their own words what they think you have said.
- Check that you understand the child's responses and questions by saying something like "Let me see if I've got this right...", then say in a simple way what you think they have told you or asked you. You will need to be patient and listen carefully to what the child says.
- Be aware of how the child reacts to what you say. If he or she gets restless, stops speaking, looks away a lot or seems distressed, it is time to stop.
- Be aware that some teenagers may not be as emotionally or intellectually mature as they look. Teenagers often feel confused about the present and the future. Teenagers, as well as younger children, need to be treated sensitively.
- Younger teenagers tend to respond better to questions that give options for possible answers. For example: "Would you like this ... or that ... to happen?" Older teenagers tend to be able to cope with open questions such as: "What would you like to happen?"
- Remember to use your listening skills.
- Finally, remember children have a need and a right to know about:
  - personal and family history
  - relatives, clan and origins
  - information about managing the home, land, animals and so on
  - family property and inheritance (including wills)
  - guardianship arrangements: who will advise and protect them
  - arrangements for their education.

The information above also forms *Handout 1: Communicating with children* (see page 39). Give a copy of this to each participant after discussing the information.

### Activity 5 Looking at questioning skills

**Suggested time: 15 minutes**

Explain that this activity uses a presentation and a handout to increase the group's awareness of the importance of questioning. Say you will show how to ask questions that are appropriate and sensitive to different situations.

1. Start by covering the reasons why people need to ask questions. These include:
  - to find out what someone already knows
  - to gain information
  - to help encourage thinking, reflection and seeing things from different viewpoints.
2. Explain that there are two types of questions:
  - **Closed questions**, which often receive a 'yes' or 'no' response, or a short, often one-word, answer. For example: "Have you attended a workshop before?" or "How many children do you have?"
  - **Open questions**, which give people more choice of how to answer, in their own words and in more detail. For example: "What do you know about HIV?" or "How do you feel about telling children about HIV?"
3. Next give each participant a copy of *Handout 2: Better communication* (see page 40). Take 10 minutes to go through it, showing participants the questions they should ask themselves before they try to communicate something important or to question other people.

4. Close the session by asking the group if they have any questions for you.

## Reflection

### Activity 6 Reflecting on the module

**Suggested time: 15 minutes**

Tell participants that it is time to bring the module to a close by sharing key learning points with each other.

1. Ask the group to work in pairs for five minutes to talk about how useful they found the session. Ask them to be ready to say what ideas or thoughts they are taking away with them.
2. Invite three or four participants to share what they have learned and their thoughts on how the module was delivered. Give them two to three minutes each.
3. Close the session by summarising the module, using the following points:
  - Communication is a two-way process that involves both giving and receiving ideas and information.
  - Poor communication results from not listening properly, from jumping to conclusions too quickly or making judgments without enough information.
  - It is easier to be a good talker than a good listener.
  - Listening is essential to good communication and we all need to improve our listening skills.
  - It is important to create an appropriate atmosphere for communication, especially about sensitive issues like those related to HIV and AIDS.
  - Effective communication does not happen easily or automatically. It is important for all of us to try to improve our communication with those close to us.
  - You need to take many points into consideration when communicating with children.
  - Children are able to give useful and important feedback.

Finally, thank participants for their input and participation, and say you look forward to working with them on the next module.



## Handout 1: Communicating with children

- Prepare well and, if you can, practise what you want to say with another adult first. Remember, put equal effort into communicating whether the child is a boy or a girl.
- Find a setting where you will not be interrupted and where the child feels relaxed.
- Use appropriate language for the age of the child. The younger the child, the simpler the language should be.
- Keep your ideas clear and separate. Break them down into pieces that are easy to understand.
- Do not try to cover too much information at once.
- For younger children who can talk, it helps to put what you want to say in the form of a story.
- Check what the children have understood by asking them to tell you in their own words what they think you have said.
- Check that you understand the child's responses and questions by saying something like "Let me see if I've got this right...", then say in a simple way what you think they have told you or asked you. You will need to be patient and listen carefully to what the child says.
- Be aware of how the child reacts to what you say. If he or she gets restless, stops speaking, looks away a lot or seems distressed, it is time to stop.
- Be aware that some teenagers may not be as emotionally or intellectually mature as they look. Teenagers often feel confused about the present and the future. Teenagers, as well as younger children, need to be treated sensitively.
- Younger teenagers tend to respond better to questions that give options for possible answers. For example: "Would you like this ... or that ... to happen?" Older teenagers tend to be able to cope with open questions such as: "What would you like to happen?"
- Remember to use your listening skills.
- Finally, remember children have a need and a right to know about:
  - personal and family history
  - relatives, clan and origins
  - information about managing the home, land, animals and so on
  - family property and inheritance (including wills)
  - guardianship arrangements: who will advise and protect them
  - arrangements for their education.



## Handout 2: Better communication

How often do you stop to think about whether you could be a better communicator?

Look at these questions. They will help you reflect on your own communication skills, so you can prepare how to say something important to an adult or a child.

1. **Who** am I communicating with?

Who are the listeners?

What do I know about them – their characteristics, interests, views, prejudices?

How can I adapt the way I say something so that they can understand it?

2. **Why** am I communicating?

What is my purpose?

What response do I want?

What do I hope to achieve by this communication?

3. **What** do I need to say?

What does the listener already know?

What does she or he need to know?

What is appropriate for children of different ages?

What is appropriate for family members and non-family members?

4. **How** should I communicate?

How can I best achieve my purpose?

What method should I use – should I simply say what I need to say or, perhaps for young children, put it in the form of a story or even a drawing?

In what order should I make my points?

What language, words and tone should I use?

What is appropriate for children of different ages?

5. **When** is the best time for this communication to take place?

Will I have time to finish what I need to say?

What should I do to prepare?

6. **Where** will I communicate?

Do I need somewhere private?

Is somewhere else suitable if it is not possible at home?

Who else should be nearby for support?

7. Will I remember that I must **listen** as well as speak?

How will I check that my listener has understood me?

How will I encourage my listener to ask questions?

How will I support my listener if he or she becomes upset?

How will I sense when a child has reached her or his limit and it is time to stop?