

Module 5

Communicating with parents and managers in youth organisations



LEARNING OBJECTIVES



1. **Understand** how to use useful tools that will facilitate their communication with parents,
2. **Learn** through the use of tips provided, how to communicate to managers in youth organisations the needs and wishes of youth with autism,
3. **Identify** useful material that you can suggest to managers in youth organisations that will contribute in the creation of an inclusive and friendly environment for youth with autism,
4. **Distinguish** which of the tips provided can improve effectively the communication with parents of youth with autism,
5. **Adopt** an inclusive and friendly approach for youth with autism in their communication with their parents and managers in youth organisations.

1. Communicating with parents



In order to build a friendly and inclusive environment for youth with autism, it is important to have effective means of communication with their parents, as they know their children best.



Tips for communicating effectively with parents

1. *Begin with a positive interaction and keep it up*

When you first meet the families, start with something good.

- ❑ Introduce yourself,
- ❑ share something you enjoy about their child,
- ❑ or simply let them know you are available if they would like to speak



2. Be a good listener



Remember that parents do know their children best.

Ask, listen and learn from them with compassion and respect.

Always respect the family's confidentiality.

3. Be considerate of the family's needs and expectations

Be explicit about the kind of involvement that you expect and welcome from families but also respect the limits families may want to maintain.





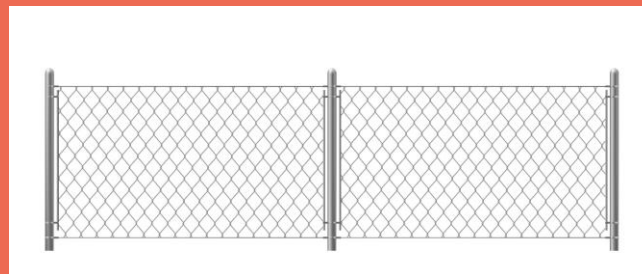
4. Find out how families prefer to be reached

Not all people are comfortable talking by videoconference. Others do not have time for a phone call at certain times of day.

Take into consideration parents' preferences.

5. Set boundaries

Safe boundaries will help both parents and you getting frustrated about when you can meet up. If you have agreed the timescale before-hand, make sure you give your full attention to them for the time you have promised (Autism Speaks, 2007).



Freepik 1

6. Invest in the relationship



Take time to get to know the family members and build a rapport.

This will go a long way toward developing trust.

7. Express your thoughts and concerns in a positive and solutions-oriented way



- ❑ When you talk to parents do not make it a list of everything the child has done wrong. Tell them significant news, what their child has accomplished and celebrate excellent moments (McCann, 2020).
- ❑ When presenting concerns about their child, make sure to frame them in a positive way and be ready to develop solutions hand-in-hand with the family (Azad, Kim, Marcus, Mandell, Sheridan, 2016).

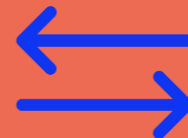
8. *Serious incidents*



Parents do need to know about serious incidents but these should be spoken about by phone or face to face rather than third hand (from other parents).

9. Feedback sharing between parents and you

- ❑ Significant for youth workers to hear from the parents what the youth are doing at home as it is for the parents to hear what the youth are doing in the leisure activity. Share what children are learning and how parents can offer support. Ask for feedback from families.
- ❑ This is especially important as the youth involved may have communication difficulties and will need the people around them to be advocates and communicate information for them.



10. Open door policy

You can choose an open door policy and invite parents into leisure activities. This will help all; the youth, the parents and you (Patel H., 2018).



Always remember that you are all working towards the same goal; to best include the young person in the leisure activities.

Explain them that you are there to learn for the needs of their child so as to make them feel more comfortable.



Activities you can implement

✓ Ice Breaking activities

- They will help help you create a relaxed environment where parents share their ideas and participate more fully.
- Introductory ice breakers can be as simple as simple as asking each person two truths and one lie about them, or they can be more complicated exercises designated to build trust and a desire to work together.

✓ Parent questionnaire

It may include questions like:

- What do you see here that you think your child will really enjoy?
- What are some of his/her fears?
- Do any particular sound, smells or tactile sensations bother him/her?
- How can we adjust the environment to meet his/her needs?
- What are his/her favorite books, games, television shows?
- What is he/she really good at?
- What does he/she do when upset? What helps him/her calm down?
- Are there specific things that he/she needs help with?
- Does he/she has allergies?
- Is the child a flight risk (i.e., does him/her run away)?

(Autism Speaks, 2007, 33)

✓ Use the Fairytale “The Forest”

This good practice suggested by the Institute of Educational Policy.

The fairy tale description:

Every thousand years there is a “Big Conference of Forests” where all forests gather to present themselves and share their ecosystems to the elders. The elders give a name to the forests to distinguish them from one another (Tropical Forest, Amazon Forest, etc.).

During this conference a new forest came and when it was about to present itself, it remained quiet looking in the distance. The elders asked it some questions but the forest didn’t respond to them, it clapped its branches and became more silent. Sometimes it would repeat the same words: “I’m a forest”. The elders decided to name it “The Forest”.

As you understand, The Forest was different from the others, even humans were afraid of it. Even The Forest wouldn’t let anyone explore it. This created an urban myth about The Forest’s mysteries. I decided to travel to The Forest and explore its mysteries. Once I reached The Forest, it closed its branches creating a huge wall. I spent days trying to figure The Forest out.

One day I found a secret passage. At its end there was an upside-down world, millions of paths and mazes. Reality was quite different there. The smallest pebble would make the biggest sound, like an explosion.

Inside The Forest I discovered so many different details that I needed a magnifying glass to figure them out. I could feel myself go blind from a small firefly far away from me, the nuts smelled so strongly and the honey was so sweet. Even my feelings seemed different inside The Forest. No matter the feelings, I always felt happy. Since that day we have been best friends with The Forest. It was like no other forest I had visited before.

It's not easy to get to know it and at the beginning it closes up. It lets you get closer only if you are willing to explore it. You mustn't be afraid of it and you have to accept its differences. After you accept them, The Forest will open up and share with you its love. And in its centre, you will hear the biggest and warmest heart with millions of colours!

Note: You are welcome to enrich the story with details about the forest, its difficulties and treasures.

2. Communicating with managers in youth organisations



In your goal of creating an inclusive and friendly environment for youth with autism, it is rather important after your communication with them and their parents to communicate their needs and wishes to the manager of the youth organisation you are working and make some suggestions.



Tips for communicating to managers the needs and wishes of youth with autism

1. Explain them the fact that the needs of autistic people differ greatly and thus a personal plan should be created for each of them

Before a young person joins a group, it can be really helpful to sit with them and their parents to discuss their support needs. In this discussion both you and the manager shall participate, in order to write their personal plan.

You can find a [support plan template](#), in slide 25.

2. Inform them about the fact that other members of the activities should be informed.

As many autistic people can be anxious about talking to their peers about being autistic or viewed as different, you may create and distribute an information sheet (see slide 26) on understanding autism to other group members.

3. Small arrangements can make a difference to young people with autism

Discuss with your manager the possibility of making some arrangements in the hereunder areas that can make the life of youth with autism easier:

Noise and sounds

- Allow the young people to wear their ear-defenders or headphones inside if they wish to. You may also provide some. They can still hear what you are saying but it blocks out background noise.
- If the main room is too overwhelming, provide a quiet room and allow frequent breaks.

Lights

- ❑ Prefer the daylight and soft-lighting when needed.
- ❑ Allow the young person to wear dark glasses inside if they wish to.



Access

- ❑ Allow the young person to leave the room at any time if they want to. They know themselves best and leaving the room for a breather can be a coping mechanism.
- ❑ Engage specialist support, when necessary, e.g. speech and language therapists.

Useful material for them

✓ Support plan template

(The Pears National Centre for Autism Education, 14-15)

- Young person's name and emergency contact details (name, relationship, home address, e-mail, mobile)
- Section "*Where I need support*". Fields: Social communication, social interaction, social imagination, sensory issues
- Section "*Further questions*".

Example of questions:



- What do you want us to do in event of meltdown?
- How many breaks do you need in a session? If you leave the room do you want a staff member to follow?
- Do you need a different space for if you get overwhelmed? What does that space look like?

✓ Information sheet on Understanding Autism

(The Pears National Centre for Autism Education, 17)

- Explain that autistic people are similar to those around them, they just have a couple of differences that may not be easily detectable.
- The four areas of difference are: (1.) social interaction, (2.) social communication, (3.) routines and repetition (social imagination), (4.) sensory issues & provide more information.

Assessment



QUESTION 1: When talking to parents make a list of everything their child has done wrong and concerns you.

Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
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QUESTION 1: When talking to parents make a list of everything their child has done wrong and concerns you.

Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
Correct answer(s)	B. False
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Oops try again. The correct answer is “B. False”. See page 11 for more information

QUESTION 2: An open door policy, where parents are invited into leisure activities shall be avoided

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Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
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QUESTION 2: When talking to parents make a list of everything their child has done wrong and concerns you.

Possible answer(s)	A. True B. False
Correct answer(s)	B. False
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Oops try again. The correct answer is “B. False”. See page 14 for more information

QUESTION 3: You may suggest to your manager small arrangements that will make the life of youth with autism easier regarding

Possible answer(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Noise and sounds2. Lights3. Access4. All of the above
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QUESTION 3: You may suggest to your manager small arrangements that will make the life of youth with autism easier regarding

Possible answer(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Noise and sounds2. Lights3. Access4. All of the above
Correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to correct answer(s)	4. All of the above
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is “4”. See pages 23 and 24.

Bibliography



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- **Freepik 1:**  https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/wire-fence-isolated-white-background_4758522.htm#query=boundaries&position=8&from_view=search&track=sph Image by vectorpocket on Freepik (Date of access: 16.02.2023)
- **Good practice suggested by INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY**
http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/docs/pdf/odhgos_paramythia_apodoxh_diaforetikothtas/To_Dasos.pdf
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End of Module

