

Environmental Supports

Communication

Environmental communication supports focus on the information that program leaders want to share with participants. Effective supports assist all children to understand what is being said.

Use Simple Language

- Keep verbal communication short and clear. Often, less talking is more effective.
- Avoid long or complicated instructions - try to break things down into steps or give instructions one at a time.
- When you must use 'jargon' or program-specific phrases, explain what it means.

Positive, clear instructions

- Use directive and concrete language. Instead of 'respect others', provide clear instruction such as 'please use kind words' or 'keep your hands to yourself'.
- Positive instructions remind children what they **should** be doing, rather than focuses on what may be inappropriate. Saying '**walk please!**' instead of 'don't run' makes it clear what is expected and helps the child to make better choices.
- Some children may need support and clear instructions to help them respond in different situations. For example - not all children may recognize when you are busy. You can explain clearly that if your head is down and you are reading or you are talking to another leader, they need to wait to get your attention.

Not all communication is verbal

- What you say is only a small part of how you communicate. Your tone and body language do the majority of the 'talking'.
- Body language and non-verbal cues are powerful and influence how children may interpret what you are saying. When words and body language clash, people tend to believe the non-verbal signals the most.

Other considerations

- Speak clearly, avoid covering your mouth and be aware of background noises that may make it harder for others to hear you
- It can be helpful to get down on a child's level and speak to them face to face, rather than always towering over them from above.
- Recognize that different children may show they are listening in different ways. Not all children are comfortable making eye contact and some may actually listen better if they are moving their bodies or fighting.