



STRATEGY AREA #5: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Just as is the case with the previous 4 areas, in Strategy Area # 5 we are learning to focus on becoming very intentional and therefore effective in our communication with our Adoptive and Foster Children. The goal is to first understand how trauma has impacted our children's communication skills and then we need to learn to speak their language.

Multiple impacts of trauma effect our child's ability to listen, understand, retain, comprehend, process and then express and articulate what they've learned, what they think and what they need. The primary attachment relationship that was lost/interrupted was meant to teach, model and practice those skills. So, in our effort to become the "primary attachment figure" we must understand that the fact that our child feels "understood" and gets to practice communicating within a safe healthy relationship is key. And that in turn, how the child receives communication defines: (1) the quality of the relationship and (2) how the child feels about themselves. Ultimately, how we say it is more important than what we say.

In Strategy Area #5 your action plan now has to include:

1. Starting our relationship with our child from the beginning.
2. The commitment to remembering that human language is almost entirely non-verbal and trauma impacts the ability to read it correctly.
3. Communication both receptive and expressive. Both need to be intentionally done.
4. Your understanding that Ineffective communication triggers your child.

ACTION STEP:

1. Do not end a direction with the word okay. (i.e. It's time to go to bed now, okay?) A. Your child does not understand the non-verbal language around this statement. You have asked a question and therefore your child believes they can give an answer...will probably be a no. That never ends well. B. If you have to ask if it is "okay" are you really the safety net in your child's experience? NO. They hear that you don't know so they have to take charge and 9 times out of 10 they will. Which is not where you were at at all.
2. If your child has done something wrong don't use W questions, they trigger. First, you don't really need your child to cop to the deed to be right, right? You already know the answer to those W questions. Second, we know to look behind that behavior to create change anyway.
3. Make a rule about responding – it doesn't have to happen immediately. (i.e. "I need a minute", I'll get back to you on that" then get yourself to neutral and use your tools) Listen to your child with their whole story in mind. What has happened in the last 48 hours and what's coming up? What are his real life experiences? What beliefs has he formed about the world and himself? What is he sad or scared about? All of it is valid and impacts his ability to communicate effectively. AND Slow down & stop what you are doing to listen. Concentrate. Get your stuff out of the way so you don't take it personally – it's almost never personal.
4. Use fewer words. Use more sensory experiences to communicate your desire to connect.

This is now the lens you must look through when being the best Parent you can be to YOUR CHILD. Constantly striving to both listen and speak with their whole story in mind...trauma, loss, perception, safety.