

Ep #94: Improving communication and increasing comprehension: Part 2

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This is episode 94, Effective Communication part two.

We welcome you to the ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast. Here to heal and elevate lives is your Parenting Coach Siope Kinikini.

Hello, my friends. How are you? I hope you're doing well. I am super excited this week to talk to you about Effective Communication. [We actually covered this in the previous podcast. This is part two, so if you haven't listened to the previous podcast, I highly recommend you go back and take a listen.](#)

So this week, we are going to be talking about Effective Communication, but I wanted to start off by asking you a question. Here's the question: how do you communicate with a child that is shutting you out? How do you communicate when there's a lot of tension and adversity? How do you communicate when the child does not want to communicate back?

These are common questions. And in fact, this is a common occurrence with a lot of parents. I think in some ways, every parent goes through this phase where their child just does not listen to them or does not want to communicate with them anymore. So during this podcast, I want to talk about adversity tension. Your child's shutting you out. I want to change your perception of what that all means, so we're going to talk about that.

We're also going to be talking about a very specific case that I worked on when I first got into this field of working with children and with families. So I'm going to share with you this story of Albert and his mom, Rose. And this is a story that's very dear to my heart because it was one of the original families I worked with. As I was going through my files, I really was moved by what I was able to remember and recall from my notes and my memory about working with his family. It reminded me of how powerful Effective Communication can be in working with children.

So I'll be talking about Albert, and then I'm going to give you some very specific tips on things that you can do when your child is shutting you out, or when there's tension in the communication that you're having. So we're going to cover those three things during this podcast.

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Now, let's start off with the first thing. Let's talk about tension, adversity, resistance, all those things that come with raising a child. What I want to do is change your mind about your perceptions of these things. I want you to imagine a world without any tension, without adversity, without struggle, without any of that, and if you can imagine a world like that, then you probably are imagining a world that has no stress, right?

However, a world like that really can never exist in reality because everything around us requires tension to grow. Or it requires adversity to grow and to manifest. I want you to think of our own muscles, for example. In order for our muscles to develop appropriately, there needs to be tension. There needs to be tension applied. We exercise and stretch those muscles in order to have them maintain their ability to function and for us to function. In addition, plants are the same way. Plants are seeds that have to grow through the ground as they reach up to the sun. There is an amount of tension and adversity required for that to happen.

There is tension and adversity everywhere. There's resistance everywhere, and so when we're dealing with children who are growing up to become successful adults, we have to understand that there is going to be tension there and that our mindset towards any type of tension and resistance and adversity should be embraced. We should look at it as opportunities where we can engage with them in positive ways to help guide them along their journey.

A child growing up without any type of adversity or without resistance, without tension is a child that is not prepared for the real world. That's a reality. This is how the world works is that we are able to cut through difficulties in order to develop and to grow.

So, I want you to embrace this idea that, "Hey, if my child is shutting me out and not communicating with me, this is an opportunity for my child to grow and to learn and to communicate even better down the road." [And that it's not, "My child hates me. My child is defiant, and my child is just rebellious."](#) I want you to throw those terminologies out the window, and I want you to embrace this idea that this resistance is part of their journey and part of their growth process and that you as a parent should recognize it as that. I'm going to give you an example of why it's important to embrace that mindset.

So, I'm going to share with you the story of Albert and his mom, Rose. When I initially started this work with families a hundred years ago, and I'm saying that jokingly, but it feels like it's been a hundred years that I've worked with families. I started working with Albert and his mother, Rose when I was really new into this field. Albert was 13-years-old. His mom, Rose, was a single mother. She worked full-time. Albert had been in the court system under juvenile supervision for four years by the time that I entered into their lives. And I initially met with them to talk to them about their goals and what they needed, and my goal was to help them and specifically to help them stay together as a family.

Well, during our initial discussion, Rose explained to me that he was initially put on probation for missing school. He just would not go to school, and so the court stepped in in order to help

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monitor him and be sure that he was making it to school. When they initially met with the court-appointed probation officer for Albert, it was said that he would be on probation pretty much for one year. Usually, kids were in there for one year, and then after one year, they would move on and get out of probation as long as they were able to follow all the rules and the expectations that were set by the court system. So, by the time I arrived, he had been in the system for four years. It's quite a span. When you think about a child that is developing when they are involved in the court system from the age of nine to thirteen, that's a long time. That's a big chunk of your childhood that is involved in adults talking about certain things and misbehaviors and all of that.

Now, when I was working with the court system and with families back in those days a hundred years ago. I'm just going to say a hundred years ago. I hope you're okay with that. But, when I was working with them, probation was very different. Probation was more punitive. And so whenever Albert would misbehave, he would have to go to detention, spend a couple of days there. Or he would have to go to an afterschool program where he would have to learn some things skills. It was more focused on punishing a child than it was on rehabilitation. I would like to say that since that time, everything has switched, and everything is now focused more on rehabilitation and what we can do a more therapeutic approach in helping youth. I was there during that transition, and I was able to see that happen. However, when I initially started with Albert and Rose, it was still very punitive.

So, I met with him during the initial visit. We filled out paperwork, and we talked about their journey and everything that was happening in the family. And Rose and Albert were there in addition to two other children, and Rose in the other children were paying attention. Albert was not paying attention. In fact, Albert was shutting us out, absolutely shutting us out. I talked to Rose about what we could do, and my work with this family required me to be in their home eight to 10 hours a week. That's a lot of time if you think about it, but the work I did was structured in a way that I could become part of the family and really see what was happening inside their home and interact and engage and then teach in moments that were spontaneous or whenever it was needed.

So, the first week came along, and I would show up. Rose had cooked a meal, invited me to dinner, and I sat at the table. Albert sat at the table, but then he got up and left and went and sat in his room. And Albert just shut us out pretty much at the beginning. Now, Rose was busy working, and so I worked with Albert a lot. In fact, my goal was to help Albert through this whole process of getting him to a point where he would comply with what the court wanted in order to keep him in the home.

First, week came along, he was very resistant. Adversarial. Shutting me out. Would not talk. He would not communicate at all, and when I came into the room, he would just sit there. I would try and carry on a conversation, and he would not communicate anything back to me.

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So, that really was jarring for me because I thought, "Hey, I'm coming in to help you. Why aren't you responding to me? Why aren't you communicating with me?" And yet, this was his response. So day after day, because remember, I'm spending eight to 10 hours with his family a week, he do this. He would just not communicate. He would not say a word. He would just not even make eye contact with me.

I filled the silence with a lot of my thoughts and my words and describing things and trying to be his best buddy and his best friend and do all of these things in order to fill the empty space that was created by his resistance and him shutting me out in this communication. His mom would intervene every once in a while and come in the room and try to get him to communicate and work with me as well, but that didn't work either. So, I was at a loss.

I remember going in and speaking with my supervisor about this and saying, "I just don't know how to get to this kid. He's shutting me out completely." And so we were talking about ways that we could intervene and work with him, and we went over the steps of Effective Communication, because that was one skill that I had taught Rose, and we were using it together and with the other children. And we were looking at the components of Effective Communication. And as we were looking at it, my supervisor, fascinating, wonderful guy, we started to really delve deep into each of the steps that are involved. Now, if you don't know what the steps are, I'm going to repeat them here, because I think it's important for you to know what they are.

Step one is to look at the child who is talking and pay attention to what he or she is saying. Step two is once your child has finished speaking, use their words to describe what you understood. Step three, ask your child if what you said was what they meant. They will correct you if you're wrong. Step four is, in a calm manner, state your own thoughts on the subject. Step five, they must repeat what they heard, so affirm that they're right or correct them if they're wrong. Then step six is come to a solution if possible. If not, repeat these steps and use the skill of decision making.

So those are the six steps to Effective Communication. And as I was speaking to my supervisor about this and how to get through to this child, the answers were actually right in these steps. My supervisor looked at me and said, "[Well, you're using words, but words are part of our communication system, but there are other ways that we communicate.](#)"

I looked at him, and I was puzzled. I'm like, "What do you mean?" And he says, "We're always communicating. Everything that we do is a communication, and so, pay attention to body language. Pay attention to the quietness and be okay with the silence that is happening around you. Because you filling of the space with your own words doesn't allow him to communicate at all because you've taken up that space."

I thought about it, and I thought, "Hmm, okay." So he said, "What I want you to do is I want you to go in, and I want you to pay attention to what he is saying," which is step one, "even if he's not using words. What is he saying? What is he communicating? Then in step two, you're going

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to allow your child to finish that. You're going to wait for them to be able to get that out, right? You're not going to fill the space with your own words."

It was kind of groundbreaking to really think about communication as something more than words. Because when I think of communication, all I think of are words. That's what I thought of. So I took his advice and I went back during week two, the end of week two, and I did what he said. I paid attention more attention to the way he was communicating with just his body and the way that he would sit, what he would do. I just paid attention and I sat in silence, which was something that was super uncomfortable. I did not like it. In fact, I found myself wanting to fill the empty space with words, with my words, right? And I remembered what my supervisor said, which was, "Don't fill it with your words because once you fill that space with your words, it will shut him out. So he won't communicate with words if you put your words there, so leave the empty space there and allow that to just exist."

So, I did that, and I went back and I reported it to my supervisor. "Well, it was one of the most quiet visits I have ever had in my life." And he said, "Of course it is, and that's okay. But what you've done is you've allowed him to exist in his space without infringing on that space." So he said, "I want you to go back and I want you to do it again." So I went back and I did it again.

I communicated with the mom words and things like that, and then I spent some time with Albert, and I just let it be what it was. I just let us exist in the same space without infringing on his space. I went back and I reported to my supervisor, and he's like, "Okay, good." He's like, "Okay, that shows some consistency. Now, what I want you to do is I want you to mirror some of his behaviors." And in mirroring his behaviors, what that means is if he is going to sit cross-legged, I'm going to do a form of crossing my legs as well.

So, I don't have to do it exactly the same as him, but I'm going to do something similar to that just to show that body language is starting to show rapport, build rapport with each other. So, if he puts his right hand on his face, I'm going to do something similar with my right hand near my face. It doesn't have to be exactly the same. Now, of course, when you're doing something like this, you don't want to copy exactly, but what you want to do is you want them to lead, and then you will follow. This allows some communication to happen as well without using a ton of words, right?

I went back and I started to do this and started to implement this, and this was a fascinating thing for me to learn, to be able to recognize communication beyond the words that usually constrict our interpretation or what we're trying to describe or work with each other.

So, I went back, and as I was doing this with him, I could start to feel this more comfortable interaction between us, and I felt like he wanted to communicate. He really wanted to communicate something. I found that as we started to progress and I started to learn more of the things he was interested in, and I started to take an interest in those things, he started to feel more comfortable opening up.

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It started with us discussing a video game, believe it or not. So, we were sitting there, and I was just there with him, and I had let him know that if he wanted to talk about anything, I was there, but if not, we would just spend some time, and I would just observe and see what he was up to. He pulled out a video game and he turned to me and he said, "Have you ever played this?"

It was the first thing he said to me, and this was in the third week of our intervention together. Fascinating, right? I said, "No, I haven't. Can you show me?" And he popped it in and he began to show me, didn't talk much, but I let the silence be what it was. I didn't infringe on that, and I let him kind of bring up the conversation and bring in this communication. This whole approach was really novel to me, and it took time. It took a lot of time, but I found that he began to open up and open up in ways that were surprising to me. T.

he kid that shut me out during the first and second week of the intervention, he became this wealth of communication during week four, and five, and six. He started to open up little-by-little.

We talked about the video game, then we talked about skateboarding. We talked about the park. We talked about school. I followed the steps, the exact same steps that I outlined earlier by being able to listen and then letting him fill the space with his words and with his body language, and then using his words and the body language to describe what I understood and verifying that that's correct before I even shared my thoughts. Which is step four. Can you see the beauty of the steps? I mean, when we follow each of the steps, you'll find that parents you're not supposed to share your own thoughts until step four, and that requires you to listen, repeat back, and verify that what they're communicating is understood.

We began talking about probation. We talked about his frustration with probation and how if he even made one mistake or one problem, it would push out his probation time for a month, two months, and now he was four years in probation. Where his friends were running around doing things that they wanted to do and with a lot of freedom, he was stuck at home and how bitter he felt and angry he felt.

It was a wonderful way to open up the communication with him. So with Albert and with Rose, during that communication, I was able to teach them some additional skills and set up an environment where he could follow through. And what I did during that is I was able to open up communication between Albert and his probation officer. Because he was able to communicate through me and build that trust and rapport with me, he was able to communicate better with his probation officer, which was by the way, the fourth probation officer he had in four years. So a lot of switching.

Initially he was more communicative with the first probation officer, but as time went on he began shutting out the probation officer, which wasn't helpful in his case. Because shutting out somebody who determines whether or not you need to stay in the system, when you shut them

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out, they are more likely to keep you in because they are suspicious and they don't trust you, and they feel like you're hiding things.

And although Albert understood these things, he didn't really comprehend these things. Even though he heard these things, he didn't get it. When we started to communicate as a team with Rose, with me, with the probation officer, there started to build a synergy of, "Hey, let's set up a plan on how to help him stay at home, help him follow the rules and do well."

Albert wasn't doing anything crazy. He really wasn't. He started off on probation for missing school, and then what happened was he extended probation because he would miss appointments with the probation officer. Or Rose couldn't take him to a class that he needed to take. And so because of those issues, that kept him on probation for four years.

So, we worked together closely during that time, and I actually extended my time working with this family, because I usually work with the family for six weeks, spending that much time. Six to 10 weeks. We delayed it a little bit longer so we could be sure that he was on a path towards getting off of probation and actually being able to have more freedom and more liberty and a better relationship with his mom and a more healthy relationship with his family. So, I extended it and I cannot tell you what a wonderful experience it was to go to the court and watch him being released from probation. It was a fantastic day. His mom was happy. In fact, his aunts and uncles all threw a party at the house, and we had a barbecue. It was wonderful. It was a super great, great moment for him.

And the one thing in our communication at the end, I talked to Albert and I said, "Okay, it's going to be very important for you to communicate using words because that's how people do it. With me, we had some time and I was able to work with you and let you use your space, but you're going to have to communicate better with adults and with your mom and with other people," and he agreed that that is what he was going to do because he saw the fruits of that. He saw that by communicating, he was able to get what he wanted.

It really touches me even now thinking about this whole experience that I had with Albert and Rose, because this was one of the initial families I worked with and I was able to see such transformation happen using the skill of Effective Communication, but in a way that's a little bit nuanced based on the needs of this child who was shutting me out.

Now, originally I talked about adversity and why adversity is good. Adversity is good because it teaches us lessons that we can't learn in other ways. With Albert, the adversity of dealing with a system, the probation system that kept him confined in a way that he did not like shut him down. And in turn, he shut everyone else down. What he learned through this experience was being able to step out of where he started to feel comfortable shutting everyone out and facing the tension and adversity and the resistance of his feelings of, "Hey, nobody understands me. Nobody trusts me." He was able to grow from that experience. He was able to realize that, "Hey,

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if I am able to communicate these things, I can get a different outcome. If I can do things differently, I can get a better outcome."

Adversity for me in recognizing, "Hey, there's more than one way to communicate. Words are one way that we communicate, but there's so much to communication. Body language, being able to build rapport with another human being, allowing silence to exist." I mean, those things are powerful, things that can be stepping stones towards communicating with a child who is shutting you out.

So, let me give you some of the tips that I learned while I was working with Albert and with Rose, specifically in regards to him shutting me out. One of the things that I found was that it's okay to be with your child in silence. Absolutely okay. If your child is silent, they're still thinking and processing the world around them. But when you're speaking in that silence, often you are occupying that space and it doesn't give room for them to exist and work through some things.

It is okay when things are silent, and if you are uncomfortable with silence, you have to ask yourself, "Why am I uncomfortable with the silence, because obviously my child is not uncomfortable with the silence?" And so it may be a different way of communicating, but you do need to find a way to be comfortable being around your child if there are no words being said, just letting it flow naturally.

The other part is being sure that you are consistent in the way that you are with your child in your communication. I want you to also recognize that communication is more than words and that the steps that we use for Effective Communication can be used in ways that we use our body, and the body language that we're communicating, that we mirror with our child and our body language is in-sync with their body language. That's another tip or suggestion that you can use as well.

One of the big things in the silence is to not give your opinion. Don't give your opinion. Save it. The steps in Effective Communication are structured in a way that require you to keep your opinion to yourself until step four. There's a reason for that. And the reason is because if you share your opinion first, it really doesn't allow your child to share theirs or to open up to you or to feel safe sharing their own thoughts.

When you're able to step back and say, "I want to understand you first, then I'm going to share my own thoughts and opinions about this." What you're saying to your child is, "This is a safe space for you to come out and talk to me about anything, and I'm going to hear you. I'm going to be sure that I understand what you're saying before I even insert what I think, what my thoughts are." So follow those steps. Don't give your opinion.

Those are some of the things that you can do and some of the things that I learned in this experience with Albert and with Rose. So really, really beautiful lessons that I learned from them. Please embrace it adversity. Please embrace tension.

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I was thinking of about this the other night, and I thought, "What would a movie be like if there was no adversity and no tension?" It would be super boring, right? It's through tension and through adversity that we also enjoy things. We enjoy the struggle. When we are watching the Olympics, it's a competition. We enjoy the tension of seeing who's going to win, the adversity that they have to go through to become Olympic athletes. I mean, it's everywhere, and so when you're thinking about your child shutting you out and that there's resistance there, and there's tension there, change your mindset and think of, "This is an opportunity for absolute growth for my child." I just wanted to state that and recap that, because we talked about that at the beginning of this podcast.

Effective Communication is a powerful tool that you can use with your child today. I want to expand your mind and expand your ability to communicate with your child using words, but also using body language as a way that they may communicate with you when they do not have the words to communicate with you. One of the things that I took from this in preparing this podcast is I'm going to look for them. I'm going to look for Albert and Rose, because it has been a long time since I've seen them, just to follow up and see where they're at. Once I do, I'm going to let you know if I can trace them down.

Albert now would be an adult and probably has children about the age he was when I began working with them, so hopefully, I can find them. I did initially try and reach them at the number that I found, but it was not the right number. But I am going to look for them and see if I can get in touch with him again and just see how they're doing and let them know what an effect they've had on my life.

Anyways, that's it for me. I want you to have a great day today. I want you to pay attention to communication. My challenge for you today is to spend some time memorizing the steps, but also using the steps. Using words. But also implementing it using body language if your child is shutting you out, okay? Allow them to exist in their space, move into their space respectfully, and use those tips that I gave you. Be okay with the silence. Don't give your opinion. Mirror what they're doing. And just allow them to come through that tension, and eventually, they'll communicate with you. Be patient. Be patient. They're growing and they're struggling, and it's okay. That's it for me, and I will talk to you again next week. All right. See you. Bye.

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