

9/19/08 *Notes from Nirvair*

In the Montessori learning community, parents and school are partners, working together to prepare the next generation for success in the world they will inherit. KCO co-chair, Sherman Scurry, and I met with parents last week for a conversation about the skills the twenty-first century will require of our children. Leaders in business, education and government collaborated in recent years to identify these skills. In addition to technology and core curriculum fluency, the list they developed included skills such as creativity, problem solving, team work, cultural literacy and communication. "Out of the box" thinking and the ability to establish positive and productive working relationships to participate in the exchange of ideas are valuable skills for our changing world. These skills are nurtured in the collaborative Montessori learning environment and extended community. The parent-school partnership can be a good role model for communication, collaboration and team work.

What we teach is everything we are. We can work together to teach relationship and communication skills by providing our children with good role models of collaboration and effective communication.

Effective communication is compassionate, respectful, free of judgement and blame, labels or assumptions. It includes careful choice of words, thoughts, tone of voice and body language. It is supported by a smile and eye contact. It communicates your belief in the other person, your warm regard for them.

Communication is a two way street, listening as well as speaking. Listening is an important part of it. Deep listening increases understanding for both the speaker and the listener.

Some key elements of listening:

Listen beyond the words, emotions, body language and delivery. Listen for feelings, needs, requests, stated or unstated. How do they feel? What do they need? How can I help?

Ask questions. Before reacting, rushing to judgement, making assumptions about what's needed, or advising, ask questions. Ask open-ended questions that require answers of more than one word, such as, "what happened next?", "if you had a magic wand what would you do?", "what ideas do you have about it?" . Avoid questions that imply judgments such as "why would you do that?"

Listening is about "you", not about "me". When I listen, I put my own ideas, solutions, preferences aside. I listen to hear and reflect their ideas, help them gain clarity, find their solutions. It is time to be, here and now, with what is real for another human being.

Listening conveys trust in the person who is speaking. Trust their insight, trust their capacity, trust their ideas, trust their integrity, trust their ownership.

How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Kids will Talk, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish and Non-violent Communication, by Marshall Rosenberg are resources we have found helpful for increasing communication and understanding.

