



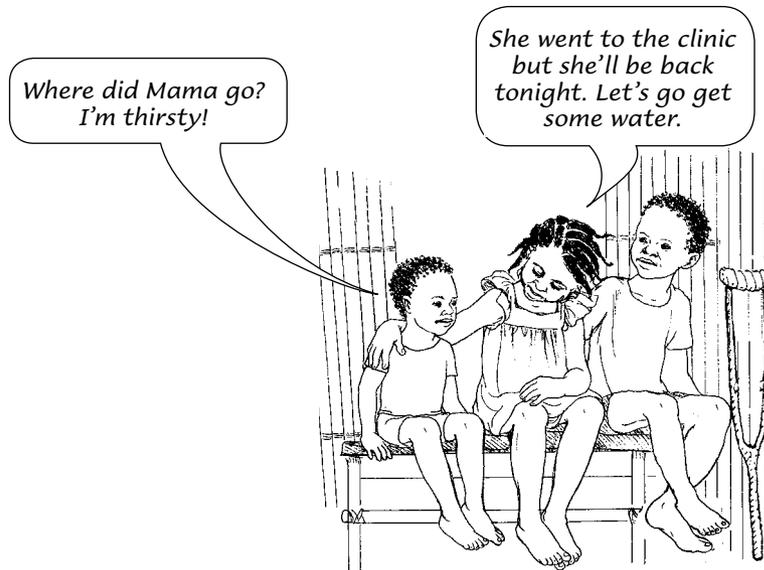
CHAPTER 4

Communicating with children

People are happier and healthier when they feel listened to and understood. This includes children. When your baby cries and you respond, he feels loved and secure, and he learns his communication can make something happen.

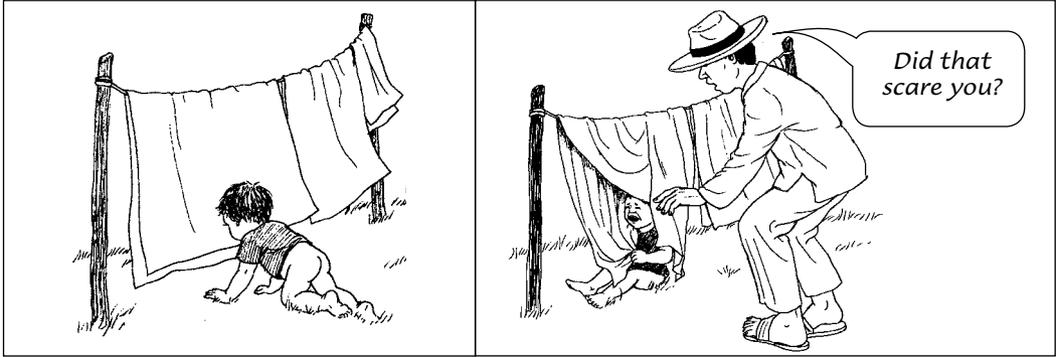
As children get older, we watch and listen to them, explain things, answer their questions, and comfort them. We can also help them understand and express their own ideas, needs, and feelings, and understand ours or those of another person. When we help children communicate — express themselves and understand others — their health, growth, learning, and cooperation will all be better.

Communication can also help children cope with illness and taking medicines, with the loss of a parent, or with unfair treatment because of stigma. Communication is one way we help children know they matter, gain understanding when difficult things happen, and feel less alone.



How we communicate

We communicate with young children through many different actions: sounds, smiles and frowns, touch, hand and body movements, and also words. Our actions of caring for a child's needs — or our failure to act — are also communication.



We use our whole body to communicate

Babies and young children use their bodies, faces, and sounds to communicate when they are hungry, wet, uncomfortable, interested in something, or sleepy. To understand a young child, watch her face and body carefully:

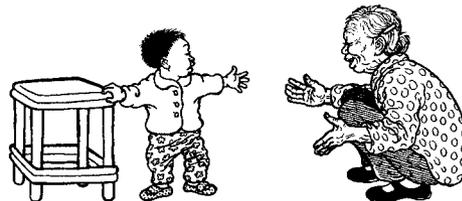
- Does she look comfortable or tense?
Is she crying, smiling, or sleepy?
Does she seem afraid or curious?



- How does she respond to your care?

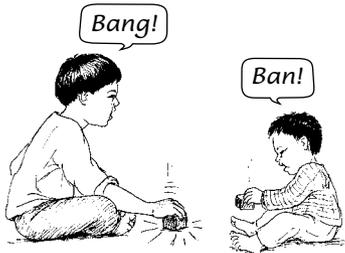


- How does she respond to others?
Who or what does she watch?
Does she hold her arms out to someone, or push them away?
Does she move into a group or does she hide?



Children notice a great deal about how people act and speak around them.

- To communicate well with a child, get down at his level and speak gently with him.



- Children learn to communicate mostly by watching, listening to, and copying what their caregivers do.

- You may communicate things you do not mean to if you talk loudly or harshly to a young child, or to others nearby, or if your face looks worried or angry as you care for your child.



Children learn to communicate in stages

As with learning other skills, babies and children learn to communicate in stages. Simple skills lead to more abilities to communicate.

In the first 3 years, a child's communication usually develops through these stages:

- birth to 3 months



Cries when hungry or wet, makes cooing noises when comfortable

- 4 to 8 months



Babbles — listens to sounds and tries to copy them

- 9 to 12 months



Says a few words and uses gestures

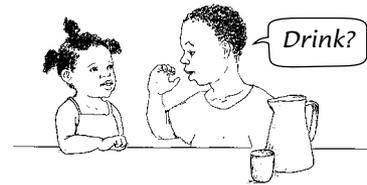
- 1 to 3 years



Begins to put words and ideas together

As a child grows, she sees and copies actions, and hears and copies language being used in daily life. That is how her understanding of how to communicate and her ability to express her thoughts, needs, and feelings develop. But a child who cannot hear well has difficulties learning to communicate.

HIV is one of several health problems that can cause hearing problems. With help, children who do not hear well can learn to communicate using hand signs and watching people's lips. Their families must learn to communicate with them in the ways they can best understand. See *Helping Children Who Are Deaf*, from Hesperian.



HIV can also affect a child's communication in other ways. Children weakened by illness or who live with people they do not know well may need to be talked to more to help them engage with their world or build relationships with their caregivers. And when caregivers are depressed, too busy, or always tired, or families are rejected because of stigma, children may not communicate as much. Eventually, their learning suffers.

Communicating with children as they grow

A child from birth to 1 year old

Babies communicate as soon as they are born. A baby cries, moves his body, smiles, gurgles and makes other sounds. These tell you he is hungry, sleepy, wet, uncomfortable, or not feeling well, or that he is happy or curious. As you care for a baby, you learn how his sounds and movements tell you about his needs.



When you think you know what a baby is telling you, and respond by giving her what she needs, you are communicating. If the first thing you try does not help, try something else. All this teaches a baby that her communication can make something happen, and she will want to keep exploring how to do it.

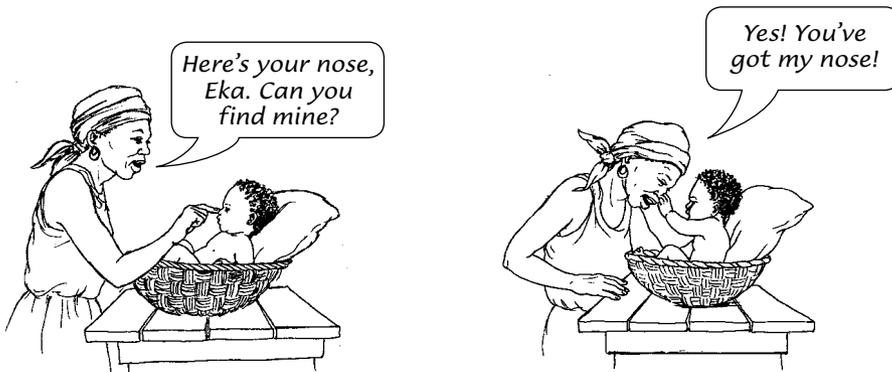
Communication is especially important for babies who were born early or small, or those who are malnourished. Both extra attention and feeding will help them grow.

Activities to help babies

- Sing or talk to a baby while you work or care for her. Respond to a baby's noises when she babbles at you. Babies like to copy sounds they hear.



- Play with a baby and talk about what you are doing. Tell babies the names of things as you play.



- Offer a baby the chance to breastfeed more often. This increases both nourishment and communication with the baby.

- Ask others you trust to hold, play with, and talk to your baby.



- Clap to music, wave, and play hand games with babies.



Problems responding to a baby's needs

Sometimes a baby may need something you cannot give him. He may be sick, and you cannot make his pain go away, or he may miss someone who has gone and you cannot bring the person back. Holding a baby, walking with him, and speaking or singing softly to him usually helps soothe him.

Babies around 2 to 4 months old sometimes cry and cry, and nothing seems to help. As another month or more passes, they cry less. No one knows why.

Try to stay calm. Walking, rocking, or sitting with a baby will comfort him, even as he cries. Sometimes when this kind of crying happens, mothers may be afraid they do not have enough milk and this is why the baby is crying. This is almost never true. If a baby is growing and gaining weight, and wetting 6 or more nappies each day, he is getting enough milk.

If you are ill yourself, you may feel worried, low, tired, or uncomfortable. This can make it difficult to have the energy and patience you need to respond over and over to a baby. Try to find support from others so you can rest each day, or do something that gives you pleasure. It will make you a better caregiver.



*Let me take the baby.
Go have a cup of tea
with Louise.*



Try to leave your baby with someone who will care for her kindly.

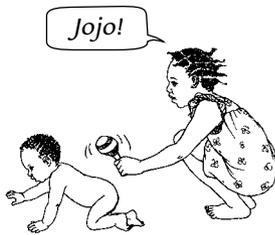
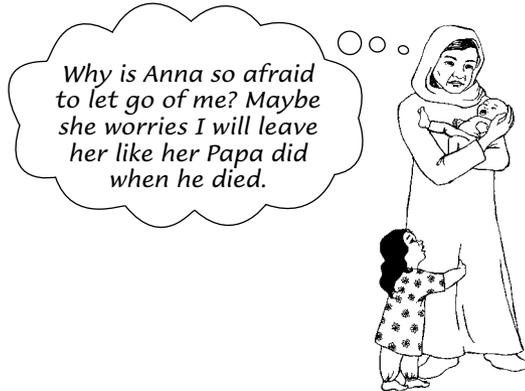
Sores in the mouth, common with HIV infection, can make eating, talking, and communication more difficult for both children and caregivers. See pages 235 to 240 for how to treat and soothe mouth sores.

A child from 1 to 3 years old

Children this age do not easily understand and trust unfamiliar people. They do best and communicate more and better if they and their caregivers know each other well. By talking with and listening to their close caregivers and others, children age 1 to 3 learn to understand and begin to use at least 500 words.

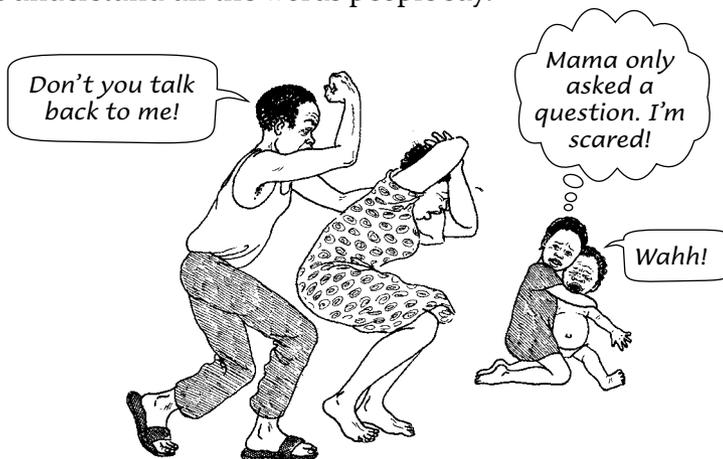
But even as they talk more, also watch how they look and act. This is still the main way they show how they feel and what they need.

Children who lose loved ones show grief in many ways. See Chapter 6: Helping children through death and grief.



Age 1 or so is a good time to check if your child can hear. Does he respond to his name or a noise you make when he cannot see you? For more about finding out how much a child can hear, and what to do if she cannot, see *Helping Children Who Are Deaf*, from Hesperian.

Young children understand a lot of what is going on around them, even if they do not understand all the words people say.

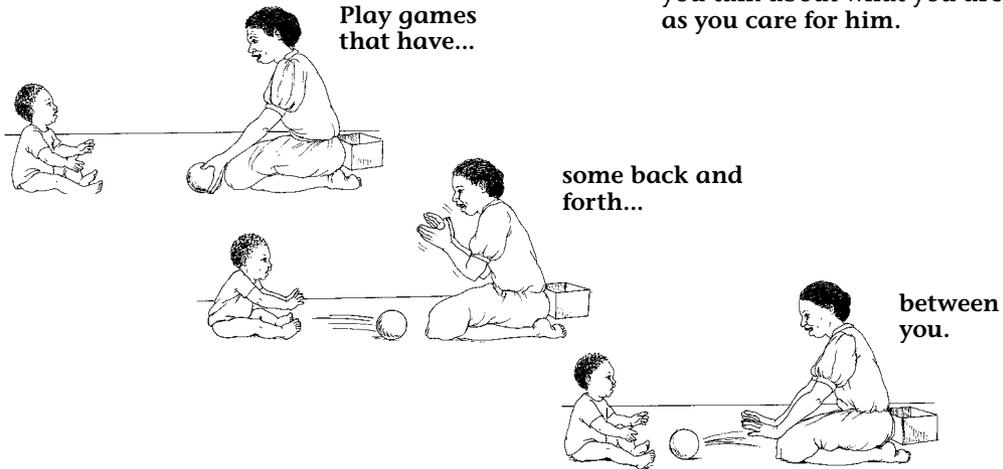


Activities to help your child

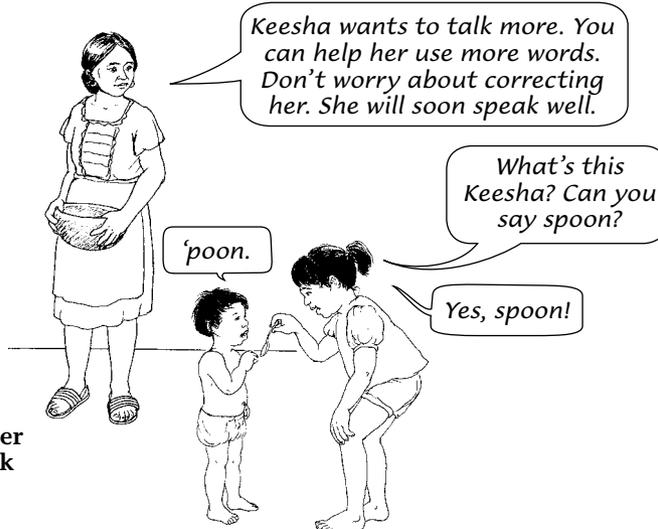
- Talk about what you do or what you see as you go places. Encourage others to do so as well.
- Tell children stories and sing to them and with them.
- Encourage your child in her play and exploration.



It helps a child understand when you talk about what you are doing as you care for him.



- Ask simple questions and listen to your child's answers. Answering your child's questions helps her learn.



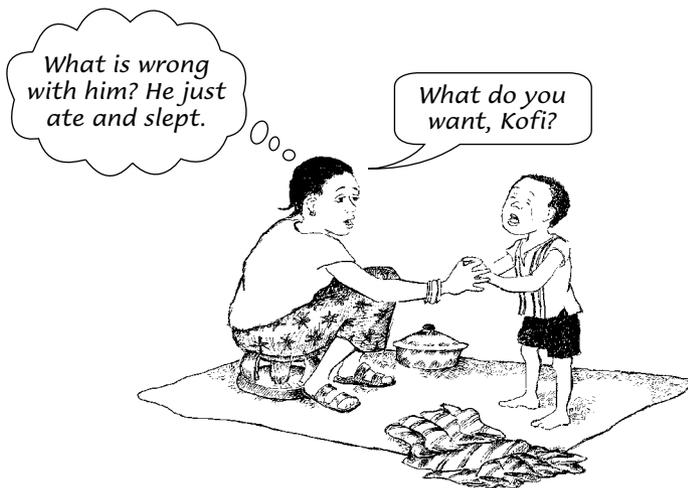
Encourage older children to talk and play with younger ones.

Problems communicating with your child

Children need a lot of attention. They are always asking questions and want to do things over and over again as they learn new skills. If you are ill yourself, or have to care for many children, you will be better able to manage if you can get help. Giving young children the attention they need can exhaust even a healthy, energetic caregiver.

A family member or friend may be able to watch the children sometimes. Or someone from an HIV support organization may be able to help you with problems such as not having enough food, or finding childcare. If you join a mothers group, other mothers may be able to help you better understand your child or find some household help. Any of these can keep you from overburdening older children with too much care of their younger siblings. When family responsibilities keep the older children from going to school, it is particularly harmful. See page 36 for information about community preschools.

Sometimes you may not know what your child is trying to say, either with his words or actions. Try different things to help the child. What is most important is to keep listening, watching, and trying to respond with love and patience.



A child from 3 to 5 years old

Children this age are learning to understand and communicate more and more. Most children learn and use about 2000 words by age 5 – and they prove it by asking a lot of questions! A child learns best when her family and others include her in activities of daily life, listen to her with interest, answer her questions, and talk with her freely. Keep hugging and holding children of this age to communicate love and acceptance without words.

Activities to help your child

- Draw with your child, and ask him to tell you about his picture.



- Ask children riddles and questions, or visit friends who like to do that. Let children tell parts of stories they know well.

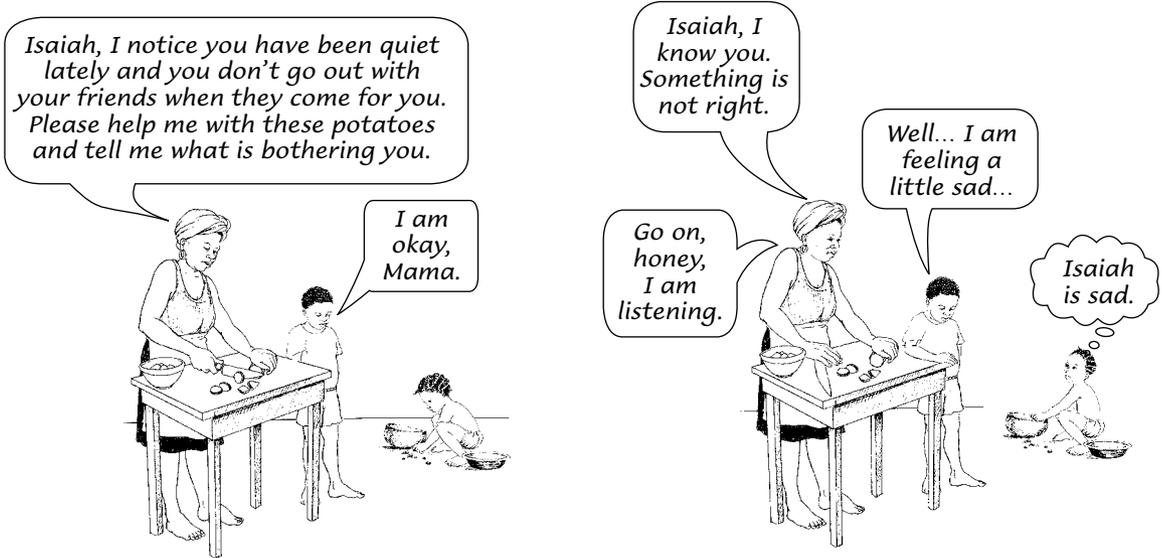


- Let children play together. Teach them how to share and take turns, and how to communicate when they have conflicts.

- Take children out with you and introduce them to others. Let them listen and talk. Continue to answer their questions and help them learn.



Use good communication yourself. When adults talk about their feelings and show how to listen well, it helps children learn how to do these things.



Problems communicating with your child

Children ages 3 to 5 become more aware of problems in the family. They often worry, and sometimes even fear they are responsible for a problem.

These years are sometimes called a time of “magical thinking” because children often believe they made something happen with their thoughts or unrelated actions. If they feel guilty or worried, we need to reassure them they did not cause bad things. See pages 88 to 89 for more about this.

Worried or sad children may become very quiet or withdrawn. Gently talk with a child about what you think may be on his mind. If needed, help him name how he feels. Show you accept the child's feelings, and let the child answer in his own way. Do not hurry the child if you ask a question.

Even if you cannot change the reasons a child is upset, you may be able to help him let his feelings out. This can help him feel better, especially if you show him you understand and accept his feelings. Boys, especially, need support to express feelings of sadness, loss, and fear.





If a child cannot talk directly about what he is feeling, he may be able to express it by drawing or play-acting. Because pretending can help children communicate feelings and ideas that are too difficult for them to communicate otherwise, “play” can sometimes be very serious.

Use puppets to learn about feelings

Puppets can help young children find words to describe and understand feelings. To make paper puppets, you need something to draw with, paper (or cloth scraps), scissors, sticks, and glue (or needle and thread). Sit with your child and ask her to draw the face of a person who is sad, a person who is happy, a person who is angry, and a person who is afraid. After the drawings are done, talk about them with the child. How do you know a person is happy? How does a sad person act? What does an angry person do? When do we have these feelings? Cut out each “person” and glue it to a stick. Then see if your child wants to make up a story using her new puppets.



Another way to help children express themselves is by telling and talking about a story. Stories can explore a child's problems using other children or animals in place of people. Talk with the child about the story as you tell it or afterwards.

The 2 lion cubs

Papa and William were walking to the store. William had been fighting with his brother. He would not talk and just kicked rocks on the road. They walked in silence for some time and then Papa began to tell a story.

Once in the savannah lived a lion pride...



In this pride there were many cubs including 2 brothers, Abas and Abdulla, who were very close in age and had the same mother. The 2 brothers played together and laughed and splashed in the river and rolled in the tall grass. And sometimes they would fight. When they fought they scratched each other with their claws, and how they would roar!

One day they had a big fight and scratched and roared until their mother came and told them to stop. Abas, the younger, ran and hid behind a rock. After a while, the mother lion came and sat with him.

How do you think the story should end? Do you feel like Abas?



What happened, Abas? I see you are so sad and angry!

I hate Abdulla! I hate Abdulla! He makes fun of me! He says my tail is too short!



Papa and William talked for a while. William told Papa about things that make him mad. And he told Papa about some things he does to make his brother mad too. Soon William was done talking, was not so angry any more, and ran ahead to play.

The mother lion listened as Abas talked about his brother. Finally, she asked "How do you feel when your brother says these things?" "MAD! Really mad!" His mother then said, "Well, Abas, that would make me mad too. Have you told Abdulla how mad it makes you? He is your brother and he loves you. Sometimes what is a funny joke to a big brother is not very funny to a little brother. Would you like me to help you speak to Abdulla?"

A child from 5 to 8 years old

Children ages 5 to 8 are more able to think, talk, and remember things. They want to know more about everything that happens around them, and want people they know and trust to talk with them. They can do more for themselves, but still need love and support from a main caregiver.

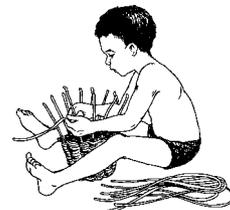
Many children this age who are affected by HIV want to know more about illness in the family, taking medicines, and why other people will not include them in activities. They may be upset about what happened to them or their family, and feel angry, sad, or afraid. Talking with them about why they are upset can help. For ways to talk to children this age about HIV, see pages 62 to 63.

Activities to help your child



- Spend time together, and show interest in what the child says and does. Listen more, and do not finish their sentences for them. Give children time to explain themselves.

- Show your child how to make or do things, and give him opportunities to help you and others. Praise his efforts to help.



- Help your child find ways to let out her feelings. Drawing, music, games, and other activities can all help.



- Work together with children and others to build a playground, or plant and tend a vegetable garden.

- Encourage your child to go to school. Teachers often know your child well, and may help you both understand how to get through difficult times.
- Children this age are interested in right and wrong. They watch you and older brothers and sisters behave to learn what is right and wrong. You can also teach them with traditional stories, songs, and games.

Problems communicating with your child

As children get older we expect more from them – we want them to do more and behave well. But children this age are still learning. They make many mistakes, which are part of learning. And children who have suffered losses may struggle with feelings of anger and distrust. It takes patience and understanding to help these children, especially if they are defiant or fight with others. Try to avoid speaking harshly or being cruel to children. See Chapter 14 for more about why harsh treatment is not good for children. The rest of this chapter suggest some ways to handle difficult child behaviors.



Sometimes caregivers worry about how to respond to a child who is very sad. We often say, "Don't cry, everything will be fine" to a crying child. But children need to know their feelings are normal and understandable. This is especially true for boys, who often learn that showing sadness or fear is shameful for boys, wrongly believing it means a boy is weak. In fact, boys who can express all their feelings are strong.

Children are comforted simply when an adult stays with them while they cry, perhaps rubbing the child's back gently. Try to accept a child's feelings and reactions, rather than making fun of them or urging them away. It is fine to be sad along with your child. When a child sees an adult coping with their own painful feelings, this can help the child.

If you are ill, or struggling with some of the same problems and feelings your child has, you may need support in order to talk freely with your child about his feelings. If your child's painful feelings or worries bring up too much of your own sadness, anger, guilt, or worries, try to talk to a friend or counselor about this, or see if you can find a support group.



Communication improves behavior problems

All young children are difficult at times. Babies are too young to know any better — they want things right away, throw things, hit, cry, and wet themselves. They need to learn to wait, to handle some things carefully, to use words, and to use a toilet. Learning these things takes time, and requires a lot of patience from caregivers. Caregivers who lose patience or do not know how to avoid or manage behavior problems may hit and abuse children. This is one reason it helps to share the work of caring for a young child. Few people can be patient with a small child all the time!

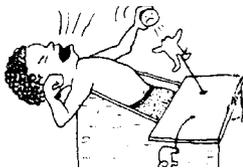
When children older than babies behave badly, it can be difficult to remember that their behavior is a kind of communication and they may not be able to behave differently at that moment. Children who experience loss, illness, or other difficulties in their families may struggle with feelings they do not know how to manage in other ways. Although their behavior may make you angry or hopeless, what children behaving badly need is your help learning:

- how to deal with anger, sadness, hurt, disappointment, or too much excitement.
- how to better communicate their feelings.
- how to calm themselves down.

To help children learn those skills, we adults often need to learn or better use the same skills.

Good communication can help when children:

- have tantrums or cry over small things.
- hit or hurt people, destroy things, disobey more, or act too wild.



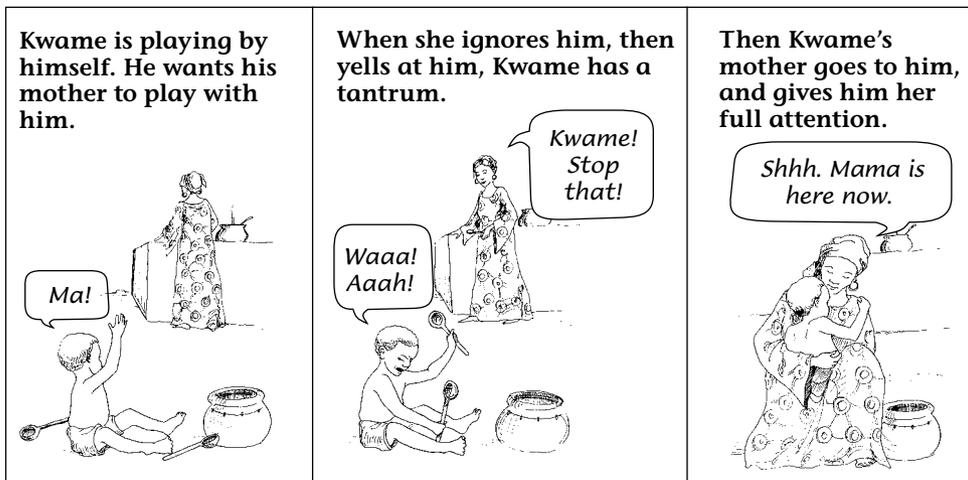
- fight going to sleep, wake in the night, or have nightmares.
- complain of aches and pains.



Responding to tantrums

A tantrum (or temper tantrum) is an outburst that usually happens when a young child cannot get something he wants. The child may scream, cry, lie on the ground kicking, or hit or bite the caregiver. Many children between 1 and 4 years old have tantrums sometimes, and usually stop having them regularly by the age of 4 or 5. Hungry, tired, or ill children have tantrums more easily. Children with disabilities may have tantrums if others find it difficult to understand them or meet their needs, or if they are very slow to learn.

Children do not have tantrums on purpose to annoy or upset caregivers. But if children do not get the attention they want when they behave well, they may have tantrums because they learn a tantrum gets them what they want.



Refusing attention when Kwame is being good...

and giving it only when he screams and yells...

encourages bad behavior.



Giving attention when Kwame is being good...

and refusing it when he yells...

encourages good behavior.

What to do when a tantrum happens

During a tantrum, a child loses control. You cannot expect more from the child at that moment. Hitting, pinching, shaking, or threatening a child often makes a tantrum worse. Even though you too may feel very upset, you must wait for the child to calm down so your communication can reach him.

1. Stay calm. Take some deep breaths while you decide what to do.
2. Stay near your child, even if you are not speaking to or looking at him.
3. Give your child time to calm down.
4. Do not bribe your child or give in to a tantrum. Doing so only teaches that a tantrum will get a child what he wants.

If your child has a tantrum in a public place, such as at the market or clinic, take the child away from the situation until he calms down. Once you and the child are calm, return to the activity. Do not teach a child that throwing a tantrum will get her out of an important activity, such as going to the clinic.

To prevent tantrums

- Have reasonable expectations for a child's age, and give children clear, simple directions.
- Notice and praise good behavior.
- Plan ahead when possible. For example, if you know you will have to wait at the clinic all day, bring a snack or toy to keep your child fed or occupied while waiting. Prepare children for changes.
- Watch and listen to your children so you know if distress is building. If you know when a child always wants something, such as walking by a certain shop, you may be able to distract the child before an upset takes hold.



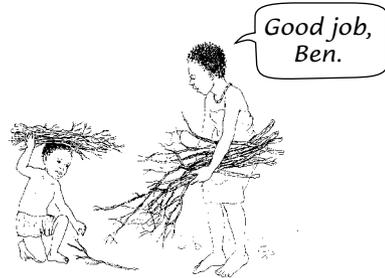
Responding to hitting, fighting, or destructiveness

When children older than about age 3 fight a lot, break or steal things, or are cruel to other children (or animals), it is often because they hurt inside. They may be angry, afraid, or sad about things that happened to them, and do not know how to express those feelings. Many boys act this way because they learn that fighting is something boys can do to gain respect or get something they want.

Children acting this way are often very insecure. They relate poorly to other children and do not make friends, which makes things worse. One of the worst things about this way of acting is that it pushes others away, including caregivers, when children most need support.

To help a child who fights or hits:

- Talk with him about things that might be upsetting him.
- Help him develop self-confidence. Show him affection and recognize him when he is helpful.
- Clearly explain what behavior is not acceptable and what will happen if he does not respect the rules.
- Try to stop other children from teasing him or starting fights. See if you can enlist friends of his or older children to help with this.
- Help him learn self-control and find better ways to express feelings of anger or discomfort. Talk with an older child about how he might ask for help, walk away from things that upset him, or think of something he likes to do instead.



Show a good example by staying calm and firm with the child when you are angry yourself or upset with him, rather than hitting the child or losing your temper. If you punish him, give a fair punishment that helps the child learn.

A child who is used to fighting, hitting or kicking as a way of handling feelings needs time to learn other ways. Try to be patient and keep working on it.

The boy who became mean

Josiah is 6 years old and does not know about HIV, but he knows his mother is ill. He walks with her to the clinic and they wait for her turn. Sometimes he plays with other children there. But recently his mother has been taking a new medicine and they must go more often to the clinic. She is more tired and sometimes stays in bed a lot. Now he has fights at the clinic, tells lies, and makes up mean stories about other children.

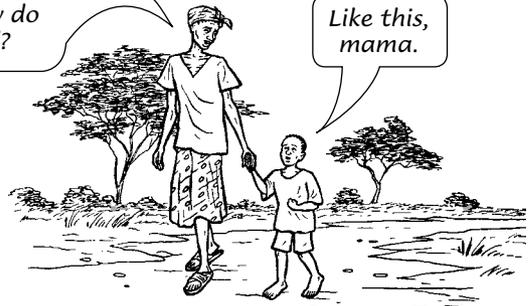
What can I do? I am so tired and ill. I don't have the strength to raise a child who causes so much trouble!



Many children are like this when their mother is sick. He sees you are weak and worries about you. But he is too young to know what to do, so he acts badly. Do you talk to him about your illness?

Josiah's mother thought about how she could talk to her son. As they walked home, she talked a little about her illness and then let Josiah ask questions. She tried to answer simply but as best she could.

When I am too tired to do much, how do you feel?



Like this, mama.

I know how that feels – it's like a stone inside you. I am sorry, baby. Whenever you feel that stone, you come give my hand a squeeze. When I feel that way, it helps if I tell someone.



Responding to sleeping problems

Some problems with sleeping may be helped by following a routine at night. Do not let the child play very active games, hear scary stories, or watch TV just before going to bed. Turn down the radio or TV. Make her comfortable and tell her a quiet story or talk about a good thing that happened that day.

If your child wakes from a nightmare, comfort and calm her. Tell her it was only a dream and she is safe. Let her tell you about the bad dream, but make sure she sees that she is safe first.

Sometimes children wake in the night screaming and cannot be comforted or touched. These are night terrors, and are harder on the caregiver than the child. To help, just watch the child and see that she does not hurt herself. Wait until the screaming stops and the child is fully awake. She will not remember her screaming and will usually go back to sleep quickly.



Responding to bed wetting

Children dealing with difficulties may slow in their development or act younger, losing abilities they had developed. A common problem is wetting the bed when the child no longer wears nappies or diapers. Bed wetting is hard for both children and caregivers.

Do not beat or scold a child who wet the bed — it will not help. He does not do it on purpose and usually he is already upset and ashamed. Make sure he has clean clothes and bedding, and does not smell of urine when he goes to school.

To make wetting the bed less likely:

- Do not let your child drink too much in the evening before bed.
- Have him go to the toilet right before bed.
- Just before you go to bed yourself, wake him to go to the toilet again.
- Keep a bucket in the room to make going to the toilet easier.

