

EMOTIONS IN THE PROCESS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. The article refers to the issues related with the importance of emotions in the process of communication. The article presents types of emotions; it describes one of the types of feedback, which is expressing sympathy, pointing to verbal phrases, which do not comfort the interlocutor. The authors also note the importance of non-verbal communication as a form of communication primarily serving the transmission of emotions, stressing that the face and eyes are the main means of expressing emotions. The article also presents the relationship between the nature of parental communication and self-esteem of the child, pointing to examples of positive and negative messages.

Keywords: emotion, family, communication, empathy, self-esteem

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Introduction

The transfer of information from the sender to the recipient using a variety of tools and forms of communication is the main function of the communication process. However, next to the information function, the communication process also serves another crucial function, such as building an impression made on others, influencing or expressing emotions.

The issue of emotions, the possibility of their expression and reading is an extremely complex issue, which is of particular importance in the face of family communication. Because the family is a place, where children are taught how to deal with the experienced emotions, how to express them, how to talk about them and how to interpret emotional information. The feedback plays an important issue in this regard, which can serve support, encourage the sender to a longer speech, indicate understanding of the feelings experienced by the interlocutor, identifying with his emotions, and finally assessing or advising.

The article is an attempt to answer the question of what place the family communication plays in the sphere of skilful expression of emotions, empathy and understanding. On the one hand, the authors point out the significance of emotions in communication, while on the other hand, they present the role which is played by the family in this respect because the family “is irreplaceable in the life of every human being. It is a place for communicating basic life experiences, as well as the future of the next generations.” (Janigova, Ferenčíková, 2016: 42). It is a place, where children learn how to use the communication tools, how to express emotions or which communication strategy to adopt in the face of conflict. “The family is the first and natural environment for raising children. [...]

The parenting style adopted by the family is a kind of a statue, which we pass on to the children.” (Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 23).

Emotions in the communication process

Transferring and acquiring information are the main functions of the communication process. In addition to the information needed to implement the basic necessities of life, in the process of communication the interlocutors also transfer emotions, which are the motivating force to undertake certain actions and to respond in a certain manner to a given communication situation. “So the emotions are the motivating force, as they not only organise the subjective experiences of people, but they also energize their reactions and provide these reactions with a direction.” (Turner, Stets, 2009: 25). Therefore, one can draw a conclusion that the emotions underlie the bases of, e.g., interpersonal communication, but also other types of communication, which determine the strength with which the basic goals of the communication process are implemented. “What’s more, after a moment’s thought it immediately becomes clear that emotions are a «binder» connecting people together and creating commitment into great social and cultural structures.” (Turner, Stets, 2009: 15). It is difficult to consider issues relating to the effective and efficient communication without paying attention to the emotions and their types. In the case of non-verbal communication it is worth noting that one of its main functions is the function of expressing emotions as this is the form of communication, which is an essential and main means of expression of emotions. (Leathers, 2007: 36). However, it should be kept in mind that “one of the unique properties of the people is that they base the construction of the social ties and the formation of complex socio-cultural structures on emotions.” (Turner, Stets, 2009: 15). Therefore, emotions can be likened to the driving force of the communication process, because they make the process of communication take on a specific form and direction. They determine the selection of the communication channel, time and place of a conversation. Emotions can be divided into positive and negative, but this is not the only division, because emotions can also be compared to colours. The basic ones “after combining” give a different colour, what is more, some colours are vivid, intense, while others are less so. R. Plutchik distinguishes eight primary emotions, indicating that these emotions function as reactions to the environment. According to him, these emotions include acceptance, surprise, fear, sadness, disgust, expectation, anger and joy. In his opinion, some emotions are primary, while others result from them – therefore, they are secondary. (Turner, Stets, 2009: 31). “He presents the primary emotions graphically, as something that works very similar to the colour wheel, and the «mixtures» of these primary emotions generate new, diverse types of emotions in people.” (Turner, Stets, 2009: 31). Therefore, a mixture of two primary emotions (original dyad) is, for example, anger and joy, which generate pride, or another example – joy and acceptance generate love and kindness (Turner, Stets, 2009: 31).

When considering issues related to emotions, attention should also be paid to instinctive and conditioned emotions. Instinctive emotions are experienced properly without our conscious participation, which is exemplified by fear. These emotions are triggered automatically, which constitutes a response to stimuli coming from the environment (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 220). The conditioned emotions are “triggered by «emotional scripts» or «emotional knowledge», which is acquired in the process of socialisation.” (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 220). Shame is an example of the conditioned emotions.

Given the wide range of emotions, it is worth noting that it is communication that enables the interlocutors to understand what the interlocutor experiences, his mood, and the emotions he experiences. In the area of transmitting emotions, the key role is played by non-verbal behaviour. It must be remembered that non-verbal communication is “the richest source of information about emotional states, but we are also aware that non-verbal signals are solid and stable indicators of emotions, which were transmitted or received.” (Leathers, 2007: 21). A special role in the field of transmission of emotional information is played by the face and eyes. The significance of the eye speech is evidenced by a wide variety of statements or proverbs, such as “icy stare”, “kill someone with the look”, “goosey eyes”, “frowning upon someone”. The eyes indicate the intensity of the experienced emotions. As D.G. Leathers observed, “the expression of our face reveals the type of emotion we are experiencing, while our eyes communicate the intensity of our emotions.” (Adler, Rosenfeld, Proctor II, 2006: 80).

Discussing issues related to emotions and non-verbal behaviour we should also pay attention to the fact that communication is a process, which not only allows transferring information about the experienced emotions, but what is more, it leads to infecting with emotions. We can infect the interlocutor with emotions, just like we can with a runny nose. Sadness shown by the interlocutor may lead to sadness experienced by the recipient, joy and smile of the interlocutor may evoke joy and smile on the recipient’s face. In fact, regardless of where the people are located, if they stay in the presence of others, they are at risk of “being infected with emotions.” J. Bauer observes that “whenever people stay together, they attune with great regularity with their emotions to the moods and situations, in which others are located, and they show this through various forms of body language, mostly by mimicking or imitating behaviours belonging to specific emotions.” (Bauer, 2008: 12). Of course, a smile on the face can occur not only during a conversation face to face, but also in the case of indirect communication. A photo of a laughing child may evoke a smile on the face of a viewer. Just like recalling pleasant memories, the viewed images or photos can bring a smile or facial expression reflecting sadness or regret.

Then, it is clear that non-verbal communication is used to transfer emotions, and it can even lead to “infecting” with emotions. However, attention should be paid to one more important function which is played by non-verbal messages in this regard. The face, eyes and body language can indicate the experienced emotions, but they are also a source of information for predicting how the given communication situation will look like later on and how the interlocutor will behave. “The facial expressions, stares, gestures and behaviours perceived in others [...] lead to the inner conviction about what we can expect in the further course of events.” (Bauer, 2008: 13). The non-verbal behaviour observed by the recipient is an important indicator not only of what the sender feels, which emotions he experiences, but most of all how he will behave and where the conversation is going. “Every day we need for the observed behaviour to provide us the directly accessible, intuitive knowledge about the development of the events.” (Bauer, 2008: 13).

With regard to the transfer of emotional information, it is worth noting that not only the body language plays an important role here. Although the face and eyes are the main sources of emotional information, it is also worth remembering that there are voice signals. D. G. Leathers notes that “in order to express emotions, we must be able to use the voice effectively, as well as to accurately identify the emotions expressed vocally by others.” (Leathers, 2007: 21).

Non-verbal communication provides the interlocutors with a wide range of diverse possibilities for transferring emotional information. Therefore, it is worth remembering that

although words are the primary source of information, the proper interpretation of verbal messages becomes easier thanks to non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is used to supplement and complement the verbal messages.

Emotions and communication in the family

When considering issues related to expressing emotions and interpreting non-verbal behaviours that serve as indicators of emotions, it is worth paying attention to the family communication. Because the family is a place, where children learn how to use the available tools of communication, how to use non-verbal behaviours and voice messages to properly interpret the emotional information. It is the parents and the school that “are co-responsible for the socialisation of children. Beneficial effects in this respect occur when the parents and school have common goals and a sense of mission to the children.” (Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 65).

It is worth noting that the way in which parents talk to children about emotions is an extremely important issue in the area of skilful expression of emotions – which in turn results in a skilful formation of relations. Because “the way parents talk to the children about emotions exerts a tremendous influence on the child’s development” (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 219). One can talk about two styles of such parental communication, i.e., “training emotions” and “dismissing emotions”. There is no doubt that parents, who choose the first style – “training emotions” – “teach the children the ability to express feelings, which later in their lives will result in establishing satisfactory relations with others.” (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 219).

Another important issue in the area of family and parental communication is the feedback, which comes in the form of expressing empathy, and actually the use of phrases, which may seem an expression of identification with the interlocutor according to the sender, in reality indicate that the sender does not feel empathy. This type of behaviour can be exemplified by revoking others the right to their own feelings, downplaying the importance of the situation, protection of the “self” or a glass of cold water. (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 197-198).

Revoking the right to own feelings (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 197). is limited to the use of such verbal phrases, like: “Do not worry”, “It is not worth worrying about”. These are phrases, which do not allow reassuring the interlocutor, they do not belong to the phrases, which allow the expression of empathy, but they transmit a hidden message in the form of the following advice: “Stop feeling what you are feeling, because there is no point in being sad (anxious)”. Thus, “the interlocutor wants the person he is addressing to feel differently. Ironically, such advice will certainly not help, as it is unlikely that someone can or wants to stop feeling anxious just because someone advises him so.” (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 197).

Downplaying the situation is also a kind of feedback, which does not bring comfort. An example of this type of feedback is the phrase “It is just a test”. However, this “test” could have been an extremely important event to the interlocutor. The lack of understanding in this regard can be a serious problem and a “blow” for the man, who is aware of the consequences of the situation.

Another example of the lack of empathy refers to the situation, in which the sender cares more about the protection of the recipient than helping him. Identifying with the

interlocutor is not possible in a situation, in which the sender thinks only about justifying his own action.

The last message, which indicates a lack of empathy, refers to the message, in which the interlocutor provides information about his success, achievements, joy and happiness. A child coming back home and calling out, "I have got a B for a math test", is treated extremely badly and unfairly by the parent, who in response says, "Why not an A?". "Cooling someone's enthusiasm is the opposite of feeling empathy." (Adler, Rosenfeld, ProctorII, 2006: 198).

In the sphere of family communication an important issue is related not only to the expression of acceptance and understanding, but building the family communication based on openness. Because building an atmosphere of the home's hearth remains extremely important, it is based on expressing the experienced emotions, thoughts, needs and expectations. Healthy and effective family communication is open that is based on the principle, which allows an open expression of thoughts and feelings, and which points to the importance of listening.

Table 1

Examples of positive and negative parental messages

Negative messages	Positive messages
ignoring, rejecting child's feelings (sadness, joy), punishing, ridiculing, humiliating	expressing positive feelings towards the child, both in the form of words and gestures (e.g. hugging);
demanding that the child pretends to be someone else than himself, to make an appropriate impression on others, or to get something that He wants	talking to the child and listening to him attentively
comparison to others unfavourable for the child	providing the child with a sense of security, trust, devoting time to be with the child
disregarding the views and opinions of the child, especially in matters, which do not involve him	encouraging the child to manifest his own individuality, involving in household duties and learning important life skills, which will help him become independent in the future
denying a rational justification to the child	encouraging the child to express his own opinion, enabling him the ability to learn from his own mistakes, accompanying him in exploring the world
attributing a label destroying the individuality of the youngest family member	
accusing someone about leading the loved or respected one to destruction	

Source: (Lindenfield, 1998; Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 27-28).

Effective family communication, including the effective and open parental communication, determine not only the quality of the relations built, but also constitute an important tool for building the self-image by the youngest family members. It should be

remembered that “the way of communicating with the child is a reflection of how we perceive him.” (Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 27).

In the sphere of parental communication we can distinguish negative messages, which destroy the child’s self-esteem and positive ones, based on open communication associated with attentive listening to the child or using the supportive messages – both those of a verbal and non-verbal nature. (Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 27-28). Examples of positive and negative messages are presented according to G. Lindenfield in table no. 1.

Parental communication therefore represents a powerful tool in the hands of adult family members, who through the selection of appropriate forms and means of communication not only do not communicate the value, norm and the rules of conduct, communicating knowledge about the world around, but they also allow the formation of relationships, meeting the needs of security and belonging, and they determine the self-image of the youngest family members, because “the way of communicating with the child is essential for shaping his image of his own self.” (Pawluk-Skrzypek, Witek, 2016: 28).

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