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Dr. Priyanka Bassi
Assistant Professor,
PG Department of Journalism
and Mass Communication,
BBKDAV College for Women,
Amritsar, Punjab, India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Priyanka Bassi
Assistant Professor,
PG Department of Journalism
and Mass Communication,
BBKDAV College for Women,
Amritsar, Punjab, India

Communication pattern of blinds with their parents: Problems and solutions

Dr. Priyanka Bassi

Abstract

The need to communicate in human beings is as basic as the need to food, shelter and clothing. Communication plays an important role in everybody's life and the way we communicate with others determines our relationship with them. The more comfortable we are in communicating with a person, the more intimate relation it can be. India is home to the world's largest number of blinds. Besides the advancements in Medical Science, the emergence of IT era, this statement is shocking. The first training to communicate with the world starts right from our parents and it is very important for a child with special needs to share a loveable, congenial and affectionate bond with their parents; as the bond with parents act as a pillar of strength. The strength with which a child can face the outer world confidently. The patterns of communication varies from person to person and in this paper an attempt is made to find out the communication pattern of blinds with their parents, the problems faced by them while communicating and the solutions to overcome such problems. This study was conducted on Andh Vidyalaya, Amritsar where 43 students are residing. Schedule method was used to conduct the study and the respondents were interviewed individually. Besides Schedule method, non participatory observation method was also resorted to for the study.

Keywords: Communication, communication pattern, blinds, residential schools

Introduction

Communication is a basic life skill, as important as the skills by which you make your way through school or earn a living. Your ability to communicate largely determines your personal happiness. When you communicate effectively you make and keep friends. You are valued at work. Your children respect you and trust you. If you are less effective at communicating you will find your life deficient in one or more areas. (Mckay, M., Davis, M., & Fanning, P. (2003) ^[4]. *Communication skills* (p-1) New Delhi, India: B. Jain publishers)

Every human being is blessed with five sense organs namely eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, tongue to taste and skin to feel; that helps an individual to understand the surroundings and the environment. These senses help in our motor development, physical and social development. From the very beginning when a child is born, he tries to make the exploration of world around him through his eyes.

The loss of eye or impairment possesses a very serious threat to the social and economic security of the individual. It is one of the most important senses. We see the things and this is how our learning starts. Vision is inside one's thoughts and imagination like when we dream we see; in our imagination we see. So is the case with blinds. Though they are deprived of sight but their vision to understand the world is the area where this study would like to focus. The world of any individual consists of the people the person is surrounded with. And we make relations with others through communication; be it through silence, words, understanding, empathizing, showing anger, frustration all are the forms which are present in relationship.

Communication patterns are modes of communication that we use frequently in certain situations or with certain people. Some patterns may be prevalent, that is, appearing in most communication regardless of the situation, while many are situation specific, that is, used with certain people (friends, spouse, children, boss) or in certain situations (at work, in conflict, in fear). Communication pattern may include apologizing frequently, self criticism, criticism of others, complaining, self justification, blaming, praising, avoiding, judging, lecturing, questioning, insulting, supporting, gossiping, expressing emotions by yelling, crying, throwing things, banging doors etc.

Patterns can be any way of communication or the way an individual communicate, the frequency of communication and the ease of communication. This paper focus on the perception of blind students (who are studying in the blind institutes) about their parents and would also try to find out the difficulties as perceived by them in communicating because of their lack of vision or we can say partial vision. After having a careful investigation into the problems, an attempt is made to locate some solutions to minimize the problems faced by them so that this particular group of special people are better understood and well accepted by the society.

The first exploration of communication of any child starts from the home and then as the child grows he/she is sent to school for formal education. So is the case with blinds. Andh Vidyalaya, Amritsar is a residential school where blind students from across the state and nearby states stay there and receive their education.

Gideon, John and others (1992) have defined residential school as:

“A school in which the pupils are provided dormitory accommodation and live apart from normal family environment other than holidays and weekends.”

Advantages of Residential Schools

- Availability of specialized trained teachers.
- Access to a wide range of special equipment.
- As the size of each class is small, generally limited to 10 students it is possible to pay individual attention to each student.
- Teacher has adequate time for each student.
- Excellent system for the poor children as boarding and lodging is generally free.
- Well organized and clean environment.
- A shelter for abandoned or abused visually impaired children.
- Excellent facilities for the development of other skills i.e. music, chair caning, weaving etc.
- Adequate emphasis on plus curriculum i.e. Braille, activities of daily living and orientation and mobility.

Chapter VIII Education of the visually impaired. Retrieved from <http://www.bpaIndia.org/VIB%20Chapter-VIII.pdf>

So in case a child is blind his senses of touch, smell, taste, proxemics or spatial cognition should be enhanced and given training at right time. This training can be given initially at home by parents and then later on in the residential schools.

While communication starts right after the birth, the type of communication between parent and a child falls in the category of Interpersonal communication which means communication between two individuals. This type of communication is considered as the best form as there is maximum feedback and minimum scope of barrier. This may be true in the case of sighted people. In case of absence of sight, the communication becomes somewhat challenging. But since these students have been living with their parents from the very beginning, they evolve their own set of gestures and patterns to communicate with their parents. A person can communicate freely only with those with whom we feel comfortable to talk to. A level of intimacy, a bond of trust, faith, empathy, common field of

experience are few important factors deciding factors to judge the ease of communication.

According to Abraham Maslow there are five basic levels of human needs, arranged in hierarchy based on their importance.

1. Physiological – the basic level of primary needs for things required to sustain life, such as food, shelter, clothing and sex.
2. Safety- the need for security and safety from physical harm.
3. Social/love and belonging- the desire to have satisfying relationships with others and a feel of sense of love, affection, belonging and acceptance.
4. Esteem- the need to feel a sense of accomplishment and gain recognition, status and respect from others
5. Self –actualization- the need for fulfillment and a desire to realize one’s own potential.

Belch, G.E. & Belch M.A. (2003) ^[1]. Advertising and promotion- an integrated marketing communications perspective p-109 Tata McGraw Hill.

From the above statement it is clear that we communicate to attain certain type of need. The findings of the study conducted are as follows:

1. It was found that while communicating with parents 68.09% blind believe that at times when they feel depressed about their blindness they share their feelings with family as they feel their family can understand their need; but the rest of the respondents denied this saying that only a blind can understand what is the world of blind what they go through.
2. 74.47% blinds agree that their family treat them at par with their siblings whereas there are cases where parents treat them as a burden and have admitted them in the institute and have never looked back at them.
3. 75.13% blind believe that whenever they want, their family play and spend time with them.
4. 95.04% blind agree that they are sent to school to attain independence, as this is clear to the parents also that only education can give them independence, though few cases were found where parents didn’t want their ward to study and they want to force him/her into begging.
5. 89.36% blind agree that their parents encourage them to be independent and supported them.
6. 86.52% blind believe that their parents help and support them and if they have some work parents go along with them to do the work.
7. 84.4% blind show willingness to go for social gatherings with their parents. 34.75% blind admitted that their parents avoid taking them to social gatherings as they feel taking them along mean a simple burden and botheration; at times blinds want to accompany but they are stopped by saying as you can’t see so you won’t be able to enjoy there.
8. 41.13% blind admitted that they are punished by their parents in front of their relatives for not behaving properly.
9. 82.27% blind agree that their siblings help them in studies without hesitation whenever they approach them.
10. 39.72% blind that their parents maintain relation with those who don’t accept them. 11) 12) 66.67% blind agree that they are inseparable part of family; they are

given importance in the family.

11. 32.62% blind prefer staying in hostel during vacations as students want to be in the company of their friends as they feel empathetic by staying there.
12. 79.43% blind agreed that the training of basic hygiene was given at home.

From the above data, it can be concluded that blinds take initiative in sharing their problem when they feel low about their blindness. And few students are of the view that only a blind can understand what it means to be blind. So, parents can sympathize but can't understand their problems. And it can be seen that a large number of both blinds and partial sighted share a good bonding with their parents as they share their feelings with them. Parents become strength of a person and they feel that their parents are able to understand their problem.

Parents show a positive behavior by treating blinds and their siblings at par; parents don't treat their blind child differently than their sighted child. Family is supportive when their blind child demands for their time; they spare time for them, same feelings are seen from siblings side; they understand their blind sister/brother needs and help them in studies. Family understands the need of education and to make them independent they have sent their wards to residential schools. The mindset of parents has changed as the fact that education can make them and enable them to make their career and live independently. There is a difference in percentage of the willingness of blinds and parents when the question asked regarding the wish to go to social gatherings. Blinds take a step forward and want to be in the world of sighted but their parents stop them and ask them to stay back as taking them along is means botheration and somewhere they want to avoid the questions regarding their disabled child. It can be concluded that parents of blind child have accepted their child and they treat their child at par with other siblings, take them out for their work, educate them but society has not accustomed to blinds till now. Parents avoid taking their blind child to social gatherings as they feel extra care would be required and moreover they avoid the questions relating to their child. So, parents behave differently in front of society. As visually impaired/partial sighted can see so they say that people behave nicely with them but as when they know the person is blind they try to behave and pretend to be over protective. That nature of overprotective makes blinds handicap again. That's why blind avoid being in the company of strangers.

A difference in the percentage is also seen when students were asked if they love to stay in hostel during vacations, 32.62% blinds prefer staying in hostel. As blinds feel a level of comfort and satisfaction in their own world, they avoid being in the company of sighted and prefer staying in hostel even during vacations.

The training of basic hygiene started at home. Parents trained their disabled child at home from the very beginning regarding the personal hygiene so that when the student joins institute he/she won't face any problem and moreover by doing the work themselves fill the feeling of confidence in them.

There is a need to adopt empathetic attitude by the family and teachers to enable the congenial learning environment for the students.

It was observed that blinds are comfortable with sighted till they are showing the confidence in blind. They are

comfortable with their parents and siblings. As parents treat at par with the siblings, blinds feel comfortable and share their feelings with parents. But with the strangers they feel hesitate to talk, and don't want to maintain relation.

1. Blind Students feel that over protectiveness by the sighted people make them handicap again and at times the attitude of pity and sympathy is a problem. They feel the problem lies in the sighted people as they don't know much about the blind people or we can say they are ignorant to the needs of blinds and can't believe that blinds can work independently, a gap will remain there always.
2. Blinds feel upset when they are not given proper attention in a group of sighted people. It was observed that in the relation of blind with sighted a feeling of hesitation and withdrawal attitude was seen. Blinds feel the urge to take initiative. When they go for higher studies, they have to be in the group of sighted people and when they are not given proper attention by them a feeling of disappointment is felt.
3. The reason of such insecure feeling of relations on part of the blind people with sighted can be seen because from their birth, they are in protective environment. Parents then send them to school to special schools, where they are in company of blinds. Students grow and learn better being in the company of blind but somewhere the confidence to face and talk with sighted lacks behind as they are not given exposure to that.
4. It was observed that both blinds and partial sighted shares good bonding with their family. Blinds share their emotions with their family when they feel distressed. Even siblings show positive attitude and spares time to teach their blind sibling. Family supports them and reciprocates the same feeling to blind and at times takes them out for their work.
5. Blinds disclosed that they are punished by their parents in front of their relatives for not behaving properly with them. It was seen as both positive as well as negative behavior of parents. Positive aspect is that parents want their ward to learn the etiquettes and to behave properly so that he/ she can learn the living skills. Negative aspect is that blinds used to feel ashamed and such behavior of parents inbuilt the feeling of hatred towards parents. As a result, they avoid being with them and love to stay back in hostel during vacations.

So from the above findings we can conclude that there is a need to adopt a two way approach of communication with them. First approach is that society should be trained and accustomed to accept them in society as a normal human being and second visually impaired people should be given such congenial and friendly environment where they can feel free to share their thoughts and feelings with the community. The need of the hour is to empathize with them and provide them with an environment that can give them a sense of belongingness as a result they can feel more independent.

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