Ages and Stages of Communication
Adapted from Communicating with Children, Unicef.

Children at different ages and stages have different ways of communicating. As a mentor, knowing your mentee’s developmental communication stage can be extremely helpful. For instance, younger children tend to work out problems or frustration through play, whereas older children can use words to express their feelings and troubles.

The following charts outline the communication skills of children at different developmental stages and the implications of those skill levels. By understanding the level at which your mentee is communicating you will be able to connect more easily and communicate in ways that your mentee can understand.

### Birth – 6 Years of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Development</th>
<th>Behavioral and Physical Development</th>
<th>Social and Emotional Development</th>
<th>Communication Needs and Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Developing language</td>
<td>• Learn by playing and doing</td>
<td>• Experiencing new emotions</td>
<td>• Use nurturing language to develop positive feelings about themselves and others</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development awareness and sensitivity to differences among others</td>
<td>• Learn through repetition and routine</td>
<td>• Developing sense of autonomy</td>
<td>• Reinforce that the range of emotions and fear they have are normal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early formation of social attitudes</td>
<td>• Learning to express and control emotions</td>
<td>• Evolving awareness of their own and others’ emotions</td>
<td>• Help them to development resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulty understanding causality (cause and effect)</td>
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<td>• Understanding that others think and feel differently</td>
<td>• Use loving tones and simple language</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Concentrating on the concrete aspects of reality (what they can hear, see, and touch)</td>
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<td>• Learning to resolve very simple conflicts and to cooperate</td>
<td>• Encourage inquiry and curiosity</td>
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<td>• Showing signs of empathy, pro-social, and helping behaviors</td>
<td>• Facilitate learning through play</td>
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<td>• Use everyday experiences to explain concepts</td>
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<td>• Be open to playing pretend</td>
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<td>• Reinforce equality among peers and adults</td>
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<td>• Encourage dealing with difficult issues in healthy ways</td>
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<td>• Allow simple decision making and sharing of opinions</td>
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</tbody>
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### Age 7 – 10

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</thead>
</table>
| • Understanding inner motivation  
• Understanding causality (cause and effect)  
• Using more sophisticated language  
• Developing problem-solving and critical-thinking skills | • Gradually becoming more independent  
• Learning to follow rules of play and interactions  
• More interested in being a part of a team  
• More concerned about body image  
• Taking more responsibility for their own actions | • Friends gradually taking a more central role  
• Need supportive adults and positive role models  
• Clearly preferring same-sex friends  
• Learning about right and wrong; making moral choices  
• Developing exclusionary behavior | • Use nurturing language to develop positive feelings about themselves, others, and the larger world  
• Create opportunities for them to explore and test their own ideas and skills  
• Demonstrate understanding and respect their feelings and worries  
• Facilitate interactive problem-solving and critical thinking  
• Model pro-social actions (kindness, conflict resolution, empathy)  
• Introduce and discuss topics that show other children dealing with difficult social issues |

### Age 11+

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</table>
| • Capable of adult-like abstract and logical thought  
• Emerging concern for, and exploration of, options regarding future plans  
• Literacy levels might not be consistent with chronological age | • Increasing independence and breaking away from adult authority (depending on culture)  
• Interested in mastering physical challenges  
• Experimenting with new behaviors, including risky ones  
• Experimenting with identity behaviors related to gender, race, religion, class, etc. | • Often influenced by peer culture  
• Holding strong beliefs and principles on moral dilemmas  
• Exhibiting rebellious behaviors against authorities  
• Developing romantic and sexual relationships (depending on culture) | • Guide them into adult life by being open to discuss behaviors that put them at risk about responsible sexual behaviors  
• Recognize and respect their ideas and opinions  
• Allow them to learn from their mistakes and correct self-destructive behaviors  
• Present divergent points of view, opinions, and perspectives  
• Create opportunities to discuss and learn about role models with whom they can identify  
• Reinforce ideas such as equality  
• Talk about issues of concern to their particular age group (substance abuse, sex, violence, romantic relationships, bullying and discrimination, friendships)  
• Talk respectfully and not didactically: don’t “talk-down”  
• Use a lot of humor and creativity |