

Professor seeks to help adults better communicate with children

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Narissra Punyanunt-Carter co-edited the book 'Communication Begins with Children,' which helps adults who have children or work with children effectively communicate with them.

"Don't touch the stove, dear, because the stove makes things hot and hot things can burn us," someone says to their 4-year-old as the child nods along in apparent understanding and agreement.

While that is a logical statement to adults, it can be confusing to [children](#) who can't condense large amounts of information like grown-ups.

Narissra Punyanunt-Carter, a professor of [communication](#) studies in Texas Tech University's College of Media & Communication and an assistant dean of International Affairs, wants to help adults who have kids or work with kids better and more effectively communicate with children.

"My research really focuses on [family communication](#)," Punyanunt-Carter said. "I am a mom of two boys, so I'm always interested in ways to effectively and appropriately communicate to children so they understand and comprehend what you're trying to get across."

Punyanunt-Carter notes that children process information quite differently than adults, which can lead to miscommunication.

"Oftentimes, if we were to talk to a child and say, 'Do not touch that stove,' they don't really process all that; it's just too many words," Punyanunt-Carter said. "So, we need to learn how to condense that in a way that children can understand. Children usually remember the first and the last thing you say, so it becomes 'Don't touch.' You break it down like that, and they're more likely to understand. If you say, 'Don't touch the stove because it's hot,' then they really only remember 'don't' and 'hot.'"

To further delve into learning about how to best communicate with children, Punyanunt-Carter worked with family communication researcher Thomas Socha. Together, they co-edited the book,

["Communication Begins with Children: A Lifespan Communication Sourcebook,"](#) which looks at approaches to communicating with children age 12 and under.

"Thomas and I had talked about this project five years ago, and then we were going to figure out what should be included in the book," Punyanunt-Carter said. "We wanted to talk about media because, oftentimes, children are getting their information through what they watch, so we wanted to make sure there was something included about media. We also wanted to include something about divorce.

"There's even a chapter on how to deal with your child's imaginary friend. There are different aspects we thought would be really important for anyone who works with children to know."

But why is it so important for adults to clearly and effectively communicate with children?

"In this day and age, to teach children how to have compassion and kindness really stems from how you communicate," Punyanunt-Carter said. "Children are absorbers of information. They absorb everything they observe. So, everything you're modeling in terms of how you communicate with your staff, how you communicate with the other people in your life, they're absorbing that and they're thinking that's acceptable. Having a sourcebook really can help children overall in the future because if adults are equipped with this [information](#), it can really change the future. That's the main goal: to have a kinder, more compassionate world."

More information: Communication Begins with Children: A Lifespan Communication Sourcebook: www.peterlang.com/view/title/23020

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