I Presume You Understand

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ABSTRACT

In this column, a childbirth educator explores the humorous side of miscommunication.

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“I think the doctor is on the floor,” I said. It was at that moment I witnessed the patient peering over the edge of the exam table with a stunned expression on her face. “Oh, no!” I tried to explain. “The doctor is not *actually* on the floor.” The patient may have been experiencing preterm labor, but I was experiencing “*presume* communication.”

Presume communication shows up in many ways. I presumed the expectant mother understood the double meaning of “on the floor,” even though English was her second language.

Sometimes, we presume our listener knows the context of our language even when there is no double meaning. A young child once asked where “gunpoint” was. He heard someone had been robbed at gunpoint. Someone else had been kidnapped at gunpoint. “Why would anyone ever go *there*?” he wondered.

A reader shared another example. Shortly after completing her bachelor’s of science degree in nursing, she became a mother. She experienced some breastfeeding challenges and began working with a wonderful lactation consultant. The new mother had taught prenatal and breastfeeding classes for years, so it was both humbling and embarrassing to feel stressed and in need of personal help. In the midst of experiencing postpartum fatigue and studying for her nursing boards, she stopped by the grocery store. No makeup. No sleep. Sporting a lumpy sweat suit and bags under her eyes, she looked up to see a former high school heartthrob joining her in the checkout line. “How’s the nursing going?” he asked. “Does the whole world know my nipples are sore?” she thought, as her cheeks reddened and she began to experience the tingle of a letdown reflex. She presumed he was talking about nursing her newborn when, in fact, he was innocently inquiring about her career!

Sometimes, we are misheard. Recently, the neighbor's little boy confided concern about his father, a pilot for Southwest Airlines. "Every week, my dad flies to Lost Vegas," the boy said woefully. "I hope one day he finds it."

Other times, we are heard in spite of ourselves. A number of years ago, my son requested a CD for his birthday. I made a mental note and, as the day drew near, I stopped at the local Target retail store. A sales clerk kindly asked if I needed assistance. I told him I was looking for a CD titled, *Sisters of the Dawn: Texas City*. A slow smirk crossed this young man's lips. With the slightest roll of his eyes, he guided me to the next aisle and handed me exactly what my son wanted. The real title? *System of a Down: Toxicity*. To this day, I am not sure what amazed me most: the kid's ability to translate or his ability to keep from laughing.

Here's to sharpening our sensitivity as well as our listening and speaking skills!

DEB GAULDIN is a childbirth educator who travels nationally presenting keynotes and workshops. Her CDs and tapes contain humor and songs about pregnancy, childbirth, and the adjustment to parenthood. For booking information or to purchase Deb's recordings, call 800-682-2347 or visit her Web site (www.debgauldin.com).

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