

Effective Communication Handout

Communication

- People communicate in many different ways - the differences are not just cultural
- *There are many different ways in which people communicate*
- Language, body language, signs and symbols, written communication, art and music
- Recorded information also enables communication to take place

Types of Interpersonal Communication

■ Language

- Spoken, 'signed' or written
- For communication *and*
- Provides a basis for people to develop 'concepts'
- 'Concepts' influence the way we think and enable us to understand events we have experienced
- Language is not always 'sound' based - e.g. British Sign Language

■ Body Language

- Facial expressions
- Body posture
- Muscle tone
- Messages as to how we feel or what we are thinking

■ Signs and Symbols

- Gestures made with hands or arms
- Written symbols
- Diagrams
- All communicate messages to people

■ Written Communication

- Books, e-mail, text messages etc
- Braille (written communication is not always visual)

■ Music

- An effective communication system for expressing emotion

■ Recorded Information

- Books, magazines, newspapers, films, videos etc.

Communicating Different Messages

- Most communication is ambiguous
- Different people can experience different messages from the same piece of information
- It is important to understand this

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- Effective communication means engaging in a ‘communication cycle’ which takes into account the way information is received by the other person

The Communication Cycle

- | |
|---|
| 1. Expressing our Thoughts |
| 2. Watching non verbal response and body Language |
| 3. Interpreting 2) and working out what they are Thinking |
| 4. Listening to their response |
| 5. Trying to make sense of the response |
| 6. Expressing new ideas to try and clarify our ideas |

Communication as a Two-Way Process

- Communication needs to be a two way process
 - Each person should try and understand the other person's viewpoint
 - The ‘communication cycle’ requires professionals to have
 - Advanced listening skills, and
 - The ability to check their understanding of others’ responses

Listening

- Listening is not the same as hearing sounds
- Listening involves hearing the words being spoken - then thinking about what they mean
- ‘Active Listening’
 - Good listeners also make sure their non-verbal communication (body language) demonstrates interest in the other person

Skilled listening

- Looking interested and ready to listen
- Hearing what is said
- Remembering what is said
- Checking understanding with the other person

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- *It is usually easier to understand people who are similar to ourselves*
- *Skilled listening takes practice*

Checking our Understanding

- Hearing what the other says
- Asking the other person questions
- Putting what they have said into our own words and saying this back to them to see if we did understand what they said

Listening Skills

- When we listen to complicated details we often form mental pictures based on what a person is telling us
- Listening skills involve checking these mental pictures to make sure we understand correctly
- Checking our understanding is called 'reflection'

Barriers to Effective Communication - MEETINGS

For effective communication in a group situation there should be full participation by all. One of the roles of the meeting facilitator is to encourage such participation

Generic Barriers to Effective Communication

- Communication can get blocked if individual difficulties and differences are not understood
- *3 main ways that communication gets blocked*
 - A person cannot see, hear or receive the message
 - A person cannot make sense of the message
 - A person misunderstands the message

A person cannot see, hear or receive the message

- Visual disabilities
- Hearing disabilities
- Environmental problems, *such as*
- Poor lighting
- Noisy environments
- Speaking from too far away

A person cannot make sense of the message

- Differences in languages, including 'signed' language
- Different terms in language, e.g. jargon, slang
- Physical/intellectual disabilities (including memory loss, learning disability, being ill)

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A person misunderstands the message

- Cultural influences - different cultures interpret non-verbal & verbal messages (and humour) in different ways
- Assumptions about people - race, gender, disability etc
- Labelling/stereotyping of people
- Social context - statements understood by friends/family may not be understood by others
- Time pressures - people withdraw from wanting to know more
- Emotional differences - personality clashes/differences
- Very happy or very angry people can misinterpret communication from others

Communication and Culture

- Non verbal communication is a language
- Many languages in the world do not have the same concepts and sounds
- Non verbal communication is not the same everywhere
- E.g. in Britain the hand gesture with palm up and facing forward means 'Stop, don't do that'.
- In Greece it can mean 'You are dirt' and is a rude gesture

Personal Space and Culture

- In many cultures standing close is normal and good manners
- In others standing too close or 'touching' is threatening
- Resulting in defensive behaviour or loud behaviour

Supportive Body Language

- Muscle tone, facial expression, eye contact and posture can send messages of being friendly
- Smiling, expressing interest through eye contact and maintaining a relaxed posture indicates a readiness to talk and listen
- Be aware of how your non-verbal behaviour is affecting others

Assertion

- Staying calm and in control of your emotions, displaying respect and value for others, reflective listening and building an understanding of another person's viewpoint are central assertive skills
- Assertion is the skill of being able to understand another person's viewpoint whilst being able to help them to understand your viewpoint
- Assertive skills create a situation where negotiation is possible

Good Practice

Skilled Communication involves:

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- Watching other people
- Remembering what they do
- Guessing what words and actions mean
- Checking your guesses with the other person
- Never relying on your guesses, because these might turn into assumptions
- Understanding that assumptions can lead to discrimination

Communicating about Difficult Issues - Developing Relationships

- Communication is the basis of all relationships
- Regardless of whether the relationships are personal or professional
- A two-way process as each person gets to know the other

Stages of Interaction

- Communication between individuals is called an 'interaction'
- As you spend time in communication with someone the nature of the interaction will go through changes

Stage 1

- *Introduction, light and general*
- At first the content of the communication may be of no significance
- This stage is where both parties decide whether they want to continue the discussion and how comfortable they feel
- Body language/non verbal communication is very important in this first stage

Stage 2

- *Main content, significant information*
- The middle of any interaction is likely to contain the important message
- Where active listening skills are required to ensure that the interaction is beneficial

Stage 3

- *Reflect, wind up and end positively*
- People often have the greatest difficulty in knowing how to end an interaction
- Ending in a positive way where all participants are left feeling that they have benefited from the interaction is important
- *Always try to reflect on what has been said*
- *Try to offer a positive ending even if the content of the interaction has been fairly negative*
- *Acknowledging that the interaction has taken place is positive in itself*

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Difficult Situations

Stages in managing a conversation with someone who is angry

- Stay calm
- Try to calm the other person using appropriate non-verbal behaviour
- Build trust and meet the other person's self esteem needs
- Negotiate and try and solve problems

Communicating Change

- Effective communication of impending 'change' requires thorough planning and openness with everyone who will be affected
- People affected by 'change' should be treated fairly and valued, as their help and support is required for any process of 'change' to go smoothly
- Information should always be communicated in advance
- Proactive collective planning encourages a feeling of openness and honesty
- Change is never easy but by ensuring that people are kept informed and involved in the process, difficult decisions and messages are made easier

Feedback

- Feedback is an essential part of effective communication
- Being aware of different viewpoints can make communication easier
- Giving and receiving feedback is not easy, particularly if the message is communicated badly and at the wrong time

Good Practice

Difficult or complex issues

- Arrange the immediate environment to ensure privacy, make communication easier and aid understanding
- Check that individuals have appropriate support
- Use styles and methods of communication that are appropriate
- Give individuals sufficient time to understand the content of the communication
- Observe and respond appropriately to their reactions

Empathy

- Empathy involves the skill of developing an accurate understanding of the feelings and thoughts of another person
- It involves being able to understand the world of another person
- Empathising is a skill that develops from good active listening
- Many situations can be resolved and distress reduced if the individual can talk to someone who has good listening skills

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Generic Good Practice

- Maintain eye contact
- Show by your gestures that you are listening - sitting or standing half turned way gives the message that you are not fully committed to what is being said
- Folded arms and crossed legs can indicate you are 'closed' rather than 'open' to what is being said
- Nodding your head indicates you are receptive and interested
- Leaning towards someone shows that you are interested in what is being said
- Leaning forwards can be used effectively when you want to *emphasise* your interest or support

Using Questions Effectively

- Questions can be useful to prompt an individual or to try and move a conversation forwards
- Questions can be 'open' or 'closed'
- An 'open' question needs more than 'yes' or 'no' to answer it

Open questions usually begin with:

- What
- How
- Why
- When
- Where

Using Questions Effectively

- The main point to remember when listening to an individual is that whatever you are saying, you should keep it to a minimum
 - You should be listening not speaking
 - Don't interrupt - always let people finish what they are saying
- Wait for a gap before speaking

Saying No

If you have problems saying "no" try to practice by using the following principles:

1. Be straightforward and honest (but not rude) so that you can make your point effectively.
2. Tell the person if you are finding it difficult.
3. Don't apologise and give elaborate reasons for saying "no".

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4. Remember that it is better in the long run to be truthful than breed resentment and bitterness within yourself.

It may be that you have fears of how others may see or react to you if you do say no.

If these fears are not helpful or true, use the techniques that you have learned to challenge them.

Remember, you cannot be responsible for the reactions of other adults, but you can be responsible for your own actions.