

CHCCOM002

Use communication to build relationships

Release 2

Learner guide

Aspire version 1.3



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Release 2, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
Release 2, version 1.2	January 2019	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program
Release 2, version 1.3	July 2019	Updated to reflect the new Aged Care Quality Standards

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CHCCOM002 Use communication to build relationships Release 2

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Level 1, 464 St Kilda Road
MELBOURNE VIC 3004 AUSTRALIA
Phone (03) 9820 1300

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Contact details

Participant

Name:

Start date:

Phone number:

Email:

Work location

Name:

Address:

Postal address:

Workplace supervisor name:

Phone number:

Fax:

Email:

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

Name:

Address:

Postal address (if different):

Phone number:

Fax:

RTO contact name:

Mobile:

Email:

Contents

Before you begin	vii
Topic 1 Communicate with co-workers and people who have support needs	1
1A Identify and use appropriate communication techniques	2
1B Demonstrate respect and uphold rights in communication	12
1C Represent the organisation appropriately	19
1D Provide information in accordance with policies and protocols	27
Summary	37
Learning checkpoint 1: Communicate with co-workers and people who have support needs	38
Topic 2 Address communication needs	43
2A Recognise and support communication needs	44
2B Access interpreter and translation services	50
2C Identify and address problems and communication barriers	56
2D Defuse conflict and refer if necessary	65
2E Seek and respond to feedback on effectiveness of communication	70
Summary	73
Learning checkpoint 2: Address communication needs	74
Topic 3 Facilitate meetings	77
3A Develop an agenda and prepare to facilitate a meeting	78
3B Communicate details of meeting in accordance with protocol	81
3C Contribute to and follow meeting objectives	85
3D Provide opportunities to explore issues	89
3E Use strategies to encourage equal participation	94
3F Identify and address communication needs of meeting participants	102
3G Facilitate conflict resolution	105
3H Keep records in accordance with requirements	108
3I Evaluate and improve meeting processes	112
Summary	115
Learning checkpoint 3: Facilitate meetings	116

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCCOM002 Use communication to build relationships*, Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help 
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Communicate with co-workers and people who have support needs	1A Identify and use appropriate communication techniques	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B Demonstrate respect and uphold rights in communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Represent the organisation appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Provide information in accordance with policies and protocols	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 2 Address communication needs	2A Recognise and support communication needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Access interpreter and translation services	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Identify and address problems and communication barriers	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2D Defuse conflict and refer if necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2E Seek and respond to feedback on effectiveness of communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Facilitate meetings	3A Develop an agenda and prepare to facilitate a meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Communicate details of meeting in accordance with protocol	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Contribute to and follow meeting objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3D Provide opportunities to explore issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3E Use strategies to encourage equal participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3F Identify and address communication needs of participants	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3G Facilitate conflict resolution	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3H Keep records in accordance with requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3I Evaluate and improve meeting processes	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident



Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Identify and use appropriate communication techniques**
- 1B Demonstrate respect and uphold rights in communication**
- 1C Represent the organisation appropriately**
- 1D Provide information in accordance with policies and protocols**

Communicate with co-workers and people who have support needs

Communicating clearly and empathetically helps to build positive relationships with people you provide support to, colleagues and others. Effective communication includes listening actively, speaking assertively and responding to inquiries efficiently. You should recognise and respond to individual differences. It is important to make good use of specialist communication skills such as cross-cultural protocols, nonverbal communication and motivational interviewing.

1A Identify and use appropriate communication techniques

Workers in the community services sector need to draw on a range of communication techniques and apply the most appropriate technique to each situation. Workers must develop techniques and use them in their workplace interactions with people they support, colleagues and others. These techniques underpin every interaction you have and have an impact on the decisions you make.

You should use the following techniques:

- ▶ Listen carefully and show empathy
- ▶ Facilitate agreement between others
- ▶ Show cultural sensitivity
- ▶ Resolve conflicts using appropriate strategies
- ▶ Interpret situations correctly
- ▶ Negotiate solutions
- ▶ Use nonverbal communication
- ▶ Motivational interviewing

The active listening process

Active listening and questioning are essential to effective communication.

Effective communication can be broken into stages. One stage is responding to a person. A response from a person to a question may mean you then go back to clarify. Make sure you pay full attention throughout the interaction. Summarising is the last stage, but you may need to summarise at different points during the conversation.

By the time the summarisation stage is reached, individuals often uncover their own possible solutions to the problem. By giving individuals a forum where they can talk without being interrupted, ask questions and have someone understand their issues, you often allow them to work out their own solutions. Sometimes they just want to express their concerns and receive some empathy.

The following are stages of active listening and questioning.

Stages of active listening and questioning

- ▶ Attend or listen to what the person is saying.
- ▶ Acknowledge that you have heard them.
- ▶ Clarify information, where necessary.
- ▶ Encourage and/or probe the person for more information.
- ▶ Paraphrase the information.
- ▶ Reflect the feelings expressed.
- ▶ Summarise the full story.

Listening blocks

Sometimes people do not listen properly. There are many reasons for this, including tiredness or distraction. These are called listening blocks.

Listening blocks stop people from understanding the real message. If you are aware of them, you can make an effort to avoid them. Some common listening blocks are discussed below.

Common listening blocks

- ▶ Mind-reading: Thinking you know what someone is going to say so not listening carefully to them
- ▶ Rehearsing: Being too busy practising how to answer instead of listening to what is being said
- ▶ Filtering: Hearing only what you want to hear and screening out everything else
- ▶ Judging: Ignoring the speaker and not paying much attention to what they are saying because you are thinking about who they are or what they look like
- ▶ Dreaming: Only half listening until the speaker says something that reminds you of something in your life; then you think about yourself and stop listening
- ▶ Identifying: As the speaker shares his or her experience, you relate it back to your own life instead of listening to what the person is saying
- ▶ Advising: Listening to a little bit and then offering advice; often the speaker feels they were not understood and often they are not looking for advice but just want someone to listen
- ▶ Placating: Agreeing with everything the speaker says to avoid conflict

Nonverbal communication

People can give the wrong impression when they are communicating. Unintentional facial expressions can conflict with the verbal message you are communicating. If you cross your arms, you may be unintentionally communicating that you feel defensive.

Paying attention to all aspects of communication is essential when you are establishing a relationship with someone you support, or a colleague. If you are handling a difficult situation, your body language could make the situation worse. Your tone of voice, choice of words, facial expressions and gestures are all very important when communicating.

Below is a list of features of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal aspects of communication to consider

Your tone of voice and whether it is pleasant, friendly, annoyed or angry

The volume of your voice and whether it is loud or soft

The pace of your voice and whether it is fast or slow

Your body language and whether you are nodding your head in agreement or pointing your finger

You facial expressions, such as whether you are smiling or frowning

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing is used to help the person you support to develop their own intrinsic motivation. If motivation comes from within them, the person is more likely to reach a goal or change behaviour. Motivational interviewing is person-centred, which means it focuses on the individual needs of the person. It also directly involves the person in the process.

Motivational interviewing was first developed by psychologists Professor William R Miller, Ph.D. and Professor Stephen Rollnick, Ph.D. (1991) to address people who struggled with alcohol addiction.

Motivational interviewing asks open-ended questions, which help the individual identify why they want to change their own behaviour. They are more likely to succeed in changing their behaviour if they identify reasons for changing it.

Principles of motivational interviewing:

- ▶ The interviewer asks open-ended questions to encourage the individual to think for themselves.
- ▶ The interviewer provides positive affirmations.
- ▶ The interviewer uses reflective listening and provides summarising statements for the individual.
- ▶ The process promotes using empathy, warmth and acceptance.
- ▶ The main goal is to engage the individual and encourage 'change talk', which helps the individual motivate themselves.
- ▶ Goals set should be small, genuinely important, specific and realistic for the individual.

Motivational interviewing versus a coercive approach

Motivational interviewing is preferred to using a coercive approach. A coercive approach involves forcing a person to do something, such as change a behaviour. A coercive approach is less effective, because the motivation is external. They will find it hard to motivate themselves in the future, because they rely on external sources of motivation, such as being told what to do.

For example, if a person has problems related to smoking, and a doctor tells them they need to stop smoking, they are less likely to change their behaviour than if they decide for themselves that smoking is a bad idea, and they would like to quit.

The motivational approach is also preferred to a coercive approach because it is more person-centred and empathetic. The individual is central to the process, and therefore more likely to succeed with behavioural change.



Conduct interviews according to procedures

You need to have effective communication skills in order to conduct an interview in your workplace. Interviews are formal meetings that involve someone asking questions of another person or group of people. Interviews are an important part of the community services environment. There are several different types of interview. For example, you may need to discuss staff issues, or collect routine information about staff or people you support.

When conducting interviews, consider the following:

- ▶ Be prepared before you conduct an interview.
- ▶ Have a pen and some paper and any documents you need.
- ▶ Have a set of questions to guide you.
- ▶ Make sure you follow correct organisational procedures.
- ▶ Follow specific legislative guidelines and organisational policies.
- ▶ It is illegal to discriminate or harass staff or clients in interviews.
- ▶ People must be treated equally.
- ▶ You should not ask questions about private matters that are not relevant to the situation.

Policies and procedures relating to interviews

It is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure their policies and procedures uphold the individual's rights in an interview situation, according to legislation and other human rights standards. Often organisational policies cite the relevant legislation; for example, a policy may indicate that information should be collected, stored and disseminated in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and relevant state or territory legislation such as the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW). The policy must outline the key principles of the Act/s that staff must follow.

You may be able to think of some other procedures relating to the interview process. Policies and procedures will vary from organisation to organisation. It is important that you are familiar with the policies that govern your organisation.

Below are some examples of specific procedures that relate to interviewing.

Examples of workplace procedures relating to interviews

- ▶ Workers must sign a confidentiality and disclosure statement on appointment.
- ▶ Workers must correctly store and manage national police clearances after appointment.
- ▶ Workers and people you support must be given the opportunity to bring an independent third person or advocate to an interview.
- ▶ Workers must document interviews.

Relevant program standards

When conducting interviews, you need to comply with all relevant national standards. For example, the national standards relating to people who receive aged care services are contained in the Aged Care Quality Standards, which outlines eight standards with outcomes for consumers. For more information, go to: <http://aspirelr.link/aacqa-standards>

The Aged Care Quality Standards include details in each of these areas of care:

- ▶ Dignity and choice
- ▶ Ongoing assessment and planning
- ▶ Personal care and clinical care
- ▶ Services and supports for daily living
- ▶ Organisation's service environment
- ▶ Feedback and complaints
- ▶ Human resources
- ▶ Organisational governance

Ethical practice in interviews

Organisations and workers have a legal obligation to act in a reasonable way. They have a duty of care to ensure interviews are held in a safe environment and that there is no unreasonable physical or emotional risk for the participants. Only reasonable expectations should be placed on those involved in the interview process.

Conduct interviews in an ethical manner by doing the following.

How to conduct interviews ethically

- ▶ Act within the bounds of legislation.
- ▶ Act within the bounds of the organisation's policies and procedures.
- ▶ Act within the bounds of duty of care.
- ▶ Support the rights of the person being interviewed.
- ▶ Declare any conflict of interest.
- ▶ Provide an advocate or independent third person where appropriate.

Interview skills

Be well prepared before you present yourself at an interview. Know the purpose of the meeting and what you expect to achieve. Know what information you need to gather. Be prepared with answers to questions other people might ask. Establish a comfortable, professional atmosphere by welcoming the person being interviewed, speaking clearly and explaining what you are going to do. To be an effective interviewer, you need to use a range of communication skills: speak clearly, listen actively, ask questions and summarise as you go along. Identify anything that needs to be done after the interview.

Here is a typical interview process.



Introduction

Introduce yourself and all of those in the interview.



Explanation

Explain how you will conduct the interview. Explain that you have questions to ask but there will be opportunity for others to raise queries or concerns.



Ask questions

Ask the questions and record the responses.



Discussion

Discuss any issues or concerns that have been raised.



Summarise

Summarise the outcome of the interview, then identify any follow-up action.

Types of information gathered in interviews

Interviews are held with people who receive support, their families and others to assess the individual needs and develop care plans. Other interviews are used to gain feedback about a person's care, to resolve complaints and conflicts involving people who provide support or workers, to recruit new staff or to conduct performance appraisals. The type of information you need to collect affects the type of interview you should conduct.



Routine information collection

Interviews are a regular part of most team or organisational tasks. Supervisors may be asked to report monthly on the activities of the team or department. Managers may be asked to present financial figures. Handover could be considered a form of interview, as one party is handing over information to another party. Workers may be asked to report daily observations.

Gathering information for new admissions to care or services is also often considered a routine task as it follows a set pattern. You may have to interview the person receiving support, family members and others to collect information to develop a care plan that meets the individual's needs. Be familiar with the documentation you are expected to complete when preparing a care plan.

Here are some of the topics covered when conducting an interview for care plan purposes:

- ▶ Personal details
- ▶ Religion
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Mobility
- ▶ Likes and dislikes about food, activities and so on
- ▶ Hobbies
- ▶ Traditions

Communication techniques

The communication techniques you use may vary depending on the context. There are similarities, such as always using clear, empathetic communication. But there are differences, such as using a more assertive tone in a conflict situation.

Below is a brief description of some of the communication techniques you could use in four different contexts.

Facilitate agreements

When you facilitate agreements, you mediate between different sides and perspectives. You need to remain neutral and objective, and ensure both sides are satisfied with the outcome. Encourage each person or group to listen to the other party. Ask open questions, and allow each person or group enough time to answer the question. Summarise what has been said for the benefit of all parties. Ask both parties if they are satisfied with the agreements. Document the process.

Resolve conflicts

You may be involved in a conflict. You may also be mediating a conflict between others. When resolving a conflict, the goal is to find a win-win solution that satisfies both parties. To reach this outcome, help parties listen to each other's perspectives. Ask open-ended questions, and encourage active listening. If parties become heated, you may need to ask parties to separate momentarily, or use calming techniques, such as a soft and low – yet assertive – voice. Resolving conflicts can often happen over several sessions.

Interpret situations correctly

Having a clear perspective on a situation can be difficult if a situation is very emotional or complicated. People also have their own agenda, and it can be hard to see the perspective objectively and clearly. Interpret situations correctly by asking open-ended questions, and practising active listening. Try to focus on what the other person is saying, and remain as objective as possible.

Negotiate solutions

You may need to help others negotiate solutions, or may be involved in a negotiation yourself. When negotiating solutions, allow each person to speak clearly about their perspective, while the other person listens. Using summarisation to summarise what was said. Present the solutions to both or all parties and ask for feedback or comments. If conflict arises, practise conflict management techniques, such as being assertive and encouraging empathy.

Example

Use listening skills effectively

Diego is the supervisor of a planned activity group. He is busy welcoming participants when Mrs Dalazzi, a participant, asks to speak with him.

As Diego is balancing several tasks at once, he does not feel he can give Mrs Dalazzi his full attention. He makes a quick assessment to determine whether the matter is urgent and then tells Mrs Dalazzi he will definitely speak with her in half an hour when the activities are underway. Mrs Dalazzi agrees.

When Mrs Dalazzi comes to Diego’s office at the designated time, he makes sure the area is free from distractions. He tells the office assistant to hold any phone calls for him and closes the door to his office. He sits facing Mrs Dalazzi, maintains eye contact and gives her his full attention. He apologises for not being able to speak with her earlier and explains he wanted to be able to give her his full attention.

Diego took the following steps.

Interview steps followed by Diego

- 1 Attend**
Diego has arranged the situation so that he can give Mrs Dalazzi his full attention.
- 2 Acknowledge**
As Mrs Dalazzi begins to speak and express her concerns, Diego does not interrupt. He sits forward in his seat and nods his head to show he is listening. He makes sounds like ‘Uh huh’ and says ‘Yes’ to acknowledge what Mrs Dalazzi is saying.
- 3 Clarify**
Diego asks questions to clarify what she means. ‘I understand you are not happy at the centre. Can you tell me why?’
Mrs Dalazzi says she does not like the way one of the workers in the group speaks to her and the other participants. She says this staff member, Stephanie, is not respectful.

Encourage

4

Mrs Dalazzi does not want Stephanie to get into trouble. She is hesitant about fully explaining her concerns. Diego reassures Mrs Dalazzi she has a right to voice her concerns and reminds her that he will not repeat anything they discuss without her consent.

Probe

5

Diego asks Mrs Dalazzi, 'What exactly do you mean when you say "disrespectful" and "bossy"? Can you give me an example?'

Mrs Dalazzi says Stephanie often raises her voice when she gives instructions for activities. Stephanie speaks to her like she is a child and says things like, 'Be a good girl'.

Paraphrase

6

Diego paraphrases what Mrs Dalazzi has explained. He says to her, 'Your main concern is with the way Stephanie speaks to you, in particular, the volume of her voice and the words she uses'. Mrs Dalazzi agrees.

Reflect feeling

7

Diego goes on to ask, 'So you don't like Stephanie talking down to you and you are angry because you feel there is no respect?' Mrs Dalazzi agrees this is how she feels.

Summarise

8

Diego summarises the issues raised by Mrs Dalazzi. Then he asks, 'What would you like to see happen now, Mrs Dalazzi?'

Practice task 1

1. Is the job of a community services worker to solve issues for a person they support during discussions of issues with that person?

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.....
.....

2. What are the steps should you follow when using active listening to discuss issues of concern to a person you are providing support to?

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3. Describe three different nonverbal communication techniques you could use when conducting an interview.

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4. Why is a motivational approach preferred to a coercive approach when conducting interviews? Give one example.

.....

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.....

.....

Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Demonstrate respect and uphold rights in communication



In the community services sector, everyone has different experiences, backgrounds and beliefs. They will often differ in age, gender and culture. Effective workers are aware of these differences between individuals and develop communication strategies that respond to the individual needs of other workers and people receiving support. They respect people's rights and ensure their communication upholds the rights of people receiving support and other workers.

The first step to being an effective communicator is assessing the other person's specific needs, then making a plan to respond to these needs. Individual profiles and care plans should detail important background information and the communication needs of people you support. Some clients may benefit from a communication plan or you may need to employ particular techniques or use communication aids. A communication specialist can help with this.

Person-centred approach

Applying a person-centred approach is important when delivering community services. Taking a person-centred approach means ensuring the individual is at the centre of decisions, which relate to their life.

A person-centred approach also ensures that the individual's strengths and competencies are central when planning daily activities, which consequently improves the individual's quality of life.

Support workers can promote empowerment by adopting a person-centred approach when they support individuals. This means ensuring the service meets the specific needs of the person. People in receipt of support services have the authority and agency to make decisions about their own lives.



Commonwealth and state legislation

Legislation and government standards seek to protect workers and people being supported. Community services workers must be familiar with the legislation, national standards, relevant awards, industrial agreements or certified agreements relevant to their work role. This information should be provided when you first start work. It is your responsibility and the responsibility of the organisation to ensure people are working in accordance with legislative requirements and standards. Below is a list of legislation designed to protect individuals. At the time of going to print the following laws were current but laws are subject to revision and amendment, so check with your supervisor.

Commonwealth legislation that protects individuals

- ▶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- ▶ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- ▶ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- ▶ *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- ▶ *Privacy Act 1988*
- ▶ *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*

Commonwealth legislation that protects older people

- ▶ For example:
 - *Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)*
 - *Home and Community Care Act 1985 (Cth)*

State/territory legislation that protects individual's information

- ▶ For example:
 - *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)*
 - *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic.)*

Human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes the rights that should be attributed to all humans. The Australian Human Rights Commission (initially called the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) was established in 1986 to deal with breaches of anti-discrimination laws and to promote human rights education.

This Act only covers actions or policies of the Commonwealth.

The Act promotes human rights for all people, and covers most forms of discrimination not already covered in the other Acts, including discrimination on the basis of medical history and criminal records.

Here are some relevant rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which you should think about when interviewing people you support, and other workers.

Relevant rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- ▶ All people are equal.
- ▶ No one should have their privacy, family, home or mail interfered with.
- ▶ No one should experience attacks on their honour or reputation.
- ▶ Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- ▶ Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Private and confidential information

Confidentiality is a legal and ethical responsibility of all staff in the community services sector. The *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and state/territory privacy information state that a person must have a valid reason for collecting, storing or distributing any identifiable information about a person.

Examples of legislation enforcing confidentiality:

- ▶ *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- ▶ *Aged Care Act 1997* (Cth)
- ▶ *Home and Community Care Act 1985* (Cth)
- ▶ *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW)
- ▶ *Information Privacy Act 2000* (Vic.)
- ▶ *Information Privacy Act 2009* (Qld.)

Follow confidentiality protocols

Information obtained from any interview or interaction must remain confidential unless you have a significant reason for passing it on to another person. If in doubt, ask for consent from the person before you disclose any information about them.

If another organisation or person asks for information about a person receiving a service, you need to have that person's (or their advocate's) consent before disclosing any information. It is preferable to have this consent in writing.



Organisations hold vast amounts of confidential information both about the people who use their service and about the actual running of the organisation. A non-disclosure agreement, also known as a 'confidential disclosure agreement', is typically signed by workers when they commence employment. Sometimes this is a separate document; other times, workers sign a contract of employment that includes a clause about not disclosing confidential information during or after employment with the organisation.

Cross-cultural communication

Australia is a multicultural society. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australians speak over 200 languages collectively, and more than 15 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. However, there is more to a person's culture and communication than just language. Cultural beliefs, traditions and values affect how people communicate. Some cultures have rules about eye contact, touching and how you communicate with someone who is senior to you in age. It is especially important to understand what various gestures mean in other cultures.

A person's cultural communication styles and preferences may impact your communication styles and techniques. Be aware of a person's specific cultural communication needs, and demonstrate respect by observing their cultural and customary practices.

Nonverbal differences in meaning

Beckoning

In the Middle East, Asia, Portugal, Spain, South America, Japan, Indonesia and Hong Kong, it is rude to beckon with the index finger to indicate 'come here'.

Pointing

In the Middle East and Asia, it is rude to use the index finger to point.

Eye contact

In some Indigenous Australian communities, there are rules about who a person can make eye contact with. Making direct eye contact can be considered very disrespectful.

Showing your soles

In Thailand, and in Middle Eastern cultures, to sit showing the soles of the feet or shoes is exposing the lowest and dirtiest part of your body and is therefore considered insulting.

Nodding

In Bulgaria and Greece, nodding the head up and down means 'No', not 'Yes'.

Demonstrate respect for cultures

There are many ways you can show you respect and understanding for another person's culture through the way you communicate. Showing respect and being culturally sensitive helps you develop a trusting relationship with the other person, and build rapport. For example, if you lower your gaze when talking to an Indigenous person, you are demonstrating that you respect their cultural customs.

Tips for working effectively with diverse people

- ▶ Show cultural understanding and empathy. Don't make negative comments about another country. Don't talk about events that may be painful to someone.
- ▶ Assist people to complete forms if they have trouble writing English.
- ▶ Show courtesy and respect; be polite. Know when it is appropriate to smile, make eye contact, touch, bow to a person or shake their hand.
- ▶ Don't call someone by their first name or pet names such as 'love' unless they want you to.
- ▶ Include everyone; don't leave someone out of a conversation because you have trouble understanding their accent. Never ignore people in a group.
- ▶ Talk to the person as an equal; speak in your normal voice. Don't shout or speak as if you are talking to a child.
- ▶ Use language everyone can understand. Speak to your supervisor if specific communication issues arise.
- ▶ Never make assumptions when considering specific communication needs based on a cultural background.

Cross-cultural communication protocols

Protocols are sets of rules that determine how to do something. Cross cultural communication protocols are the rules we should follow when communicating with people from diverse backgrounds.

Although there are no specific written rules, cross cultural communication protocols are rules that are agreed upon socially. They are underpinned by respect for other cultures and other people. The protocols are intended to help us communicate more effectively, and respectfully.

Cross cultural communication protocols include:

- ▶ demonstrating respect
- ▶ listening respectfully
- ▶ being adaptable and flexible
- ▶ feeding back answers to clarify understanding
- ▶ accommodating differences
- ▶ using appropriate body language
- ▶ recognising and celebrating differences
- ▶ using appropriate tone and volume of voice
- ▶ understanding that the meaning of 'yes' and 'no' may vary
- ▶ ensuring people have access to interpreters and translators or other aids
- ▶ asking simple, clear questions.

Multicultural support services

Organisations may support different cultures by translating documents into a range of languages. They may provide language interpreters, who provide insight into cultural values.

Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) is an initiative funded by the Department of Health. There are PICAC-funded organisations in each state and territory. The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing in Victoria provides a lot of information on its website.

PICAC's primary outcomes are:

- ▶ more aged care services delivering culturally appropriate care to older persons from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- ▶ older people from CALD communities having increased access to culturally appropriate residential and community-based aged care services
- ▶ older people from CALD communities having greater capacity to make informed decisions about residential and community-based aged care.

Respect people's rights

A supervisor is legally and ethically obliged to respect the rights of staff and people you provide support to in all communication. It is essential for face-to-face, written and electronic communication to respect the rights of all people. Written communication must not contain any discriminatory text or descriptions.

People you support and colleagues have the right to:

- ▶ receive information in an accessible form such as plain English, via interpreters or aids
- ▶ be treated equally
- ▶ be free from discrimination
- ▶ respond to any allegations
- ▶ have an independent third person or advocate with them.

Example

Communicate respectfully

Here are two examples of community services workers communicating with people receiving support.

Maintain cultural sensitivity

Jessica is a caseworker who has been working with a particular family for several months. The parents were born in Pakistan.

During a home visit, Jessica says that she is interested in learning more about Islam. The mother's face lights up. Ramadan had recently ended and her kitchen is full of treats made for the celebration that comes at the end of fasting. The woman makes tea and offers Jessica some sweets. She tells Jessica all about Ramadan. She also shares the story of her arranged marriage.

Jessica feels honoured to hear this woman's story. She learnt so much more than if she had read a book or attended a workshop. The trust and rapport that underscored the professional relationship was enhanced by this exchange.

Identify differences

Susan is a team leader in community services. She reports to Brian, a newly appointed manager. Susan finds Brian rude, demanding and intrusive. Brian thinks Susan is noncompliant, difficult and a troublemaker.

Susan is frustrated as she prides herself on her communication skills. She reflects on herself and Brian: their attributes, lives and ideas of how things should be done. She realises it is not surprising they are experiencing some conflict. There is large age gap between the two and gender difference. Susan comes from a sector where consultation and collaboration is usual. Brian comes from a hierarchical sector where autocratic management styles are valued. They will need to be aware of their differences in order to improve communication.

Practice task 2

1. What are two things you could do so no one in your team feels unappreciated or undervalued because of their differences from 'the group'?

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2. Think of one way you can take a person-centred approach when communicating with someone you provide support to.

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3. Think of two examples of rights you should respect when communicating with people in your workplace.

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4. How can cross-cultural communication protocols help you communicate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds? Provide one example.

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Click to complete Practice task 2

1C Represent the organisation appropriately

Communication may be verbal. However, it may also be via technology, such as the internet, social media, in newsletters and on the intranet.

When you communicate in the workplace, you represent the organisation. You need to be aware of workplace policies and procedures and represent these ideas faithfully. You also need to know the range of documentation required, its purpose and the procedures for completing them.

All communication must accurately reflect the organisation's perspective and requirements. This is important because your workplace will have all the legislative and regulatory requirements factored into its policies and procedures. This ensures that both you and the organisation as a whole are operating in a compliant way.



Types of communication

There are many different ways you may communicate with people within and external to the organisation. Internal communication may be by email, newsletter or intranet. External communication may be through social media, the organisation's website or newsletters.

The type of communication you use will depend on the context and purpose of the communication, as well as the purpose. Whatever mode of communication is used, remember you are always representing the workplace, so need to follow workplace policies and procedures.

Below are examples of different people you may communicate with and how.

Communicate with the team

- ▶ Communication that relates to staff and the team includes:
 - staff meeting agendas and minutes
 - announcements via newsletter, email or memo
 - position descriptions
 - recruitment and human resources documentation
 - recording incidents and complaints
 - documenting suggested changes and improvement.

Communicate with management

- ▶ Communication that relates to management and the broader organisation includes:
 - reports of the activities of the program or department
 - contribution to strategic plans
 - financial records
 - written communication that relates to external bodies
 - written referrals
 - responses to requests for service
 - emails about older people who access several services
 - minutes and actions of case conferences.

Communicate to promote the organisation

- ▶ Communication that promotes the organisation includes:
 - contributions to organisational publications such as brochures and websites
 - contributions to annual reports.

Communicate with people who receive support

- ▶ Communication that relates to clients includes:
 - letters to clients or their family
 - progress notes
 - assessments
 - care plans and reviews
 - medication records
 - incident reports
 - communication books.

Complete documentation

Before you complete any documentation, find out if the organisation uses particular templates. These will vary from organisation to organisation.

Write clearly and legibly in documents and forms such as incident reports, communication books, referral forms or checklists. Always re-read what you have written to ensure it makes sense and there are no spelling mistakes. It is easy to miss words if you are in a hurry. Only use abbreviations that are universally understood. If in doubt, use the whole word rather than an abbreviation. Have a dictionary nearby so you can refer to it if you are unsure about a word.

Below is a list of questions you should ask yourself before completing workplace documentation.

When completing documentation

- ▶ Is there a standard format for external letters?
- ▶ Does your organisation have a policy on email etiquette?
- ▶ Does your organisation have a process where a manager or person in the marketing department previews any promotional material?
- ▶ Is there an agreed format for promotional material?
- ▶ Where are completed incident forms filed?
- ▶ Is there a list of standard abbreviations for use in progress notes?
- ▶ Who has authority to sign different types of documentation?

Digital media in the community services sector

As times change, organisations rely more and more on digital methods of communication. Digital communication is communication made through digital devices, such as computers, tablets, applications and the internet.

Digital media allows communication to reach people faster. It is also convenient for those relaying the message, as digital media allows one written document, such as a newsletter, to reach many people. This reduces the time taken to send communication. Digital communication reduces paper waste, and is therefore more sustainable. It also gives the organisation a wider reach. Where in the past, organisations focused on local stakeholders, now the information shared by organisations can reach people on the other side of the world.

Examples of digital communication media used in the community services sector are provided below.



Web communication

Your organisation's website will display 'About' information, contact information, statement of policies, vision, mission and key outcomes, and may provide resource links.

The website is like a business card for your organisation, so should accurately reflect your organisation in full. Details should be up-to-date and relevant.



Email communication

Emails are an easy, efficient way to communicate with internal and external stakeholders. Email communication is generally a direct and simple form of communication and sometimes less formal than written documents. Emails representing the organisation will be more formal, and should be written using formal, polite language.

All forms of information can be sent by email, including written documentation, graphics, images and tables.

Remember that you represent the organisation when sending a work email, so always be respectful and polite. Check your spelling and ensure all content is correct. You should also check to ensure you are sending to the correct email address, and ensure that only people privy to the information will see the content.



Social media

Social media is a good way for organisations to build an online community, and reach a broad range of people. Social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Social media is primarily about relationship building. Again, you need to ensure that all information shared on social media accurately reflects your organisation.

Avoid sharing images of the people you support unless you have specifically asked for permission. Doing so without permission is a breach of privacy.



Podcasts and videos

Podcasts are audio recordings shared online. Videos can also be shared on social media, such as YouTube. Podcasts and videos are useful ways to share training material, or provide a comprehensive view of your organisation.

Again, ensure that all people represented in the video or podcast have given permission, and that the videos and podcasts accurately reflect the organisation.



Tablets and applications

Tablets like iPads are an easy mobile way to access the internet. Some organisations have intranet software or applications on the iPad, making it easier for workers to access information during their workday, as the devices are portable.

Applications are specific software created for the mobile device. They are usually linked to the internet. Your organisation may have an application for its intranet or its website. You may also use applications for other organisations, such as the ATO.



Newsletters and broadcasts

Newsletters used to be sent in the mail, which is more costly, and uses more paper. These days, newsletters are commonly sent via email. Newsletters and broadcasts may be sent out if there is a particular news event, such as promoting the opening of a new service, or they may be sent out on a regular basis, like the monthly newsletter, designed to keep stakeholders up-to-date.

Information should be current and relevant. It should also be accurate, so make sure all content sent out is approved first.



Intranet

The intranet is an internal web server that all workers can access on site, or from home using a password. It is password protected to ensure confidentiality of all information stored on the intranet.

Intranet can be used for displaying staff rosters, staff information and training, or sharing important work-related information.

Use a computer

Reports, agendas, minutes, position descriptions and letters are generally prepared on a computer. It is important to use short sentences and brief paragraphs. Only include objective facts, not subjective thoughts or feelings. Check if you are unsure about the accuracy of something you have written.

Avoid relying purely on a computer's spellcheck program. It only recognises if words are spelt incorrectly. It does not recognise if you have used the wrong word. For example, it will accept the sentence, 'Mrs Aldis has been having a lot of creams lately and is waking up feeling tired and irritable'. You meant to type 'dreams' but the word 'creams' is spelt correctly so the program does not identify this as a spelling mistake.

Workplace computers should be password protected, to ensure confidentiality. These passwords will be updated regularly. Be sure to keep your password private. Always log off after using a workplace computer.



Example

Complete documentation

Frank talks to his doctor about things he is finding difficult around the house. With Frank's consent, his doctor makes a referral to the aged care assessment team (ACAT). The team spends time with Frank in his home and talks about his needs and requirements. They complete an in-depth assessment and record this on a form.

Frank is identified as being eligible for home care services under the Commonwealth Home Support Programme. Greg, the local coordinator of the program, organises a home visit to find out more about Frank's needs and environment. During the home visit, Greg checks with Frank that the information on the ACAT assessment form is correct, then asks Frank's permission to record information about emergency contact details and significant people in his life.

In this case, the following documentation could be used.

Initial documentation

- ▶ A referral letter from a doctor to ACAT
- ▶ Assessment documentation about health, social supports and activities of daily living
- ▶ A Home Support Programme referral form
- ▶ A confirmation documentation regarding assessment details from ACAT
- ▶ A new client information form
- ▶ A work health and safety checklist for Frank's home
- ▶ A care plan outlining the support Frank is to receive and his goals

Ongoing documentation

- ▶ Rosters and staffing information for support workers
- ▶ A communication book, if there are a number of workers supporting Frank
- ▶ Documentation relevant to reviews of Frank's care plan
- ▶ Records of any incidents, changes, concerns or feedback regarding Frank's service
- ▶ This documentation must all be completed according to organisational standards and protocols. They may be required for verification purposes in legal situations

Practice task 3

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Dave is compiling information about a new service provided by the organisation. The service helps young people connect with various activities within their community, such as the local football club. Dave wants to tell stakeholders about the new service.

He writes:

We are really excited to announce “Link” – a new service that links young people to their community is now available. We had an official launch last Wednesday at the bowling club. Thirty people including clients and members of the community attended. There was a buzz about the new service.

‘I am excited about being able to try new things,’ said Hailey, one of the younger people we support.

Jeff is also excited. ‘I have always wanted to try hockey. Now I might give it a go.’

For more information on the service contact myself, or other members of the team.

Dave Kindly

1. How does Dave attempt to represent the organisation he works for in the communication?

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2. What digital media could Dave use to communicate this information?

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3. What considerations should Dave make when communicating about the organisation?

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Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Provide information in accordance with policies and protocols

Information shared with people you support, and other providers, should be in accordance with organisational policies and protocols. These include privacy and anti-discrimination policies and protocols. Policies and protocols are in place to ensure that all who work in the service work legally, ethically and demonstrate best practice.

When sharing information, be aware of maintaining professional boundaries, both in the language you use and the content you share.



Information flow

Information in an organisation flows between management, supervisors, team members and people receiving support. Information may also flow out to other providers, such as other agencies.

Your organisation must have a system for managing information. The organisation may use an electronic filing system for items such as meeting minutes and a paper-based system for major reports and procedure manuals.

Here are some examples of ways information may flow between particular people.

From management to supervisor

- ▶ New procedures
- ▶ Business goals
- ▶ Changes in legislation

From supervisor to management

- ▶ Updates of any achievements in the team
- ▶ Feedback regarding the impact of policy

From team members to supervisor

- ▶ Suggested changes or improvements
- ▶ Requests for training

From supervisor to team members

- ▶ New procedures
- ▶ Shift rosters
- ▶ Information about clients (for example, behaviour, changed care plans)

From clients to supervisor

- ▶ Feedback about services
- ▶ Changes in needs or preferences

From supervisor to clients

- ▶ Information about services provided
- ▶ Changes in services or new services available
- ▶ Information about community options and events

Effective use of communication channels

Information in community services environments must flow freely so everyone receives information when they need it. The timely and accurate exchange of information is essential for staff and service users. Misinformation or late information may create mistrust and unease.

Communication channels must meet the needs of the people accessing the information. For example, an agency might have access to the national relay service so people with hearing or speech impairments can phone the organisation easily.

Make sure team members know when you are available to meet with them. Sometimes a face-to-face meeting is better than discussing something over the phone or in an email.

Some different methods of communication and examples for using them effectively are outlined below.

Touch

Example:

- ▶ Handshake
- ▶ Placing hand on shoulder

When this method is used:

- ▶ This communication method is used to build trust. Support workers must consider the appropriateness of this action.

Reading

Example:

- ▶ Reading aloud to an older person
- ▶ Reading workplace policies and procedures

When this method is used:

- ▶ This communication method may be required if the client has a vision impairment. Support workers must read their workplace policies and procedures to make sure they are performing their tasks correctly and according to all legal requirements.

Telephone

Example:

- ▶ Taking messages
- ▶ Contacting family and advocates or other support workers

When this method is used:

- ▶ Support workers must make sure they include the following information when taking a message:
 - the time of the call and the name of the caller
 - who the message is for
 - the message
 - the telephone number of the caller.

Sign language

Example:

- ▶ Using hand gestures
- ▶ Using sign language

When this method is used:

- ▶ Auslan is a sign language used in Australia for communicating with people who are deaf. There are many different sign languages used across the world.

Communication board

Example:

- ▶ A board with letters, words or symbols on it

When this method is used:

- ▶ This communication method is used if the client is unable to speak. They point to the letters or symbols on the board to create a message.

Lip-reading

Example:

- ▶ Face the person, stand in the light and speak clearly but not too slowly, to allow the person to read your lips

When this method is used:

- ▶ This communication method is used with people who have a severe hearing impairment.

Provide information in response to inquiries

Workers with supervisory responsibilities respond to a variety of inquiries during their work shift. Responding to inquiries is an important part of representing the organisation and yourself to staff, service users, agencies, government departments and the broader community. All inquiries must be responded to promptly. People may be waiting for your information before they can make a decision or complete a task.

Here are the possible people who may ask questions.

Possible sources of inquiries

- ▶ Potential service users and other professionals about service provision
- ▶ Service users and their families about current services, their rights, changes to programs, concerns or organisational processes
- ▶ Staff about organisational processes such as rosters, pay or leave
- ▶ Staff about policies and procedures
- ▶ Staff seeking advice on how to manage situations, make referrals or improve their performance

Select the appropriate mode of communication

Sometimes it is better to speak face to face than sending an email, particularly when a person needs emotional support and time to make a decision. Assess the situation, and use the most appropriate method of sending information. For example, if a supervisor comes to you with strictly confidential information about a person you support, you should only speak directly to relevant staff about the information, and not address all staff in a group email about the situation.

There are many different ways you can share information.

Information can be shared by:

- ▶ talking directly to a person
- ▶ addressing a team meeting
- ▶ writing an email
- ▶ writing a group email
- ▶ writing a formal letter
- ▶ sharing information on the organisation's website or intranet
- ▶ telephoning a person directly.

Ideas for managing inquiries

Service users or their families may contact you for information. Other providers may also contact you for information, such as details about a person's whereabouts. You may be able to handle some inquiries very quickly and easily. Other inquiries may require some research or you may need to contact other people for advice. Always ensure you practise confidentiality when sharing information, and only share information you have permission to share.

Below are some ideas for managing inquiries.

Managing inquiries

- ▶ Allocate time at the beginning and end of your shift for responding to phone calls and emails. Put this in your calendar as a regular appointment.
- ▶ When you tell someone you will get back to them, allow a little extra time in case your plans are disrupted. Always get back to them.
- ▶ If you are unable to get information to someone by the time you indicated, give them an update on the situation. People appreciate being kept informed.
- ▶ Try to clean out your email inbox weekly.
- ▶ Use functions of your email system, such as flags and reminders, to assist you to manage your inquiries.
- ▶ Have a system to manage your phone messages.
- ▶ Create templates of the letters or emails you send regularly.
- ▶ Remember to maintain confidentiality and follow organisational policies at all times.

Deal with family members

Respond promptly and accurately to family members when they inquire about their relative. Support the individual's family, while respecting their right to privacy. Check the identity of the family member first. Always check the service user's file to see if they have given their consent. If you are unable to respond immediately, inform the caller you will phone them back. Confirm with the service user to see if they are happy for you to speak with the caller.



Use objective language and facts when speaking about a person with support needs. Avoid opinions or any subjective information. If the person has not given consent for you to disclose information, encourage the family member to call the person directly. Tell them when it is a good time to call. If you are unable to pass on details, use assertive communication. Record the details of the phone call. Seek support from your manager if in doubt.

Professional boundaries

Sometimes, when you work closely with people, lines can be blurred. You may find yourself sharing personal information with people you support. However, when communicating with people you support and other service providers, you need to maintain professional boundaries. Professional boundaries are the limits between professionals and the people being supported.

Professional boundaries are intended to keep you and the people you work with safe. It also helps to maintain respect, and ensure that the people you work with understand your role as a service provider.

Ways to maintain professional boundaries

- ▶ Don't share personal information about yourself, or other service users.
- ▶ Use friendly but polite language.
- ▶ Maintain appropriate physical contact; don't touch people inappropriately.
- ▶ Have an open-door policy, but specify times when you are available.
- ▶ Don't share your home phone number or address with people you support.

Provide information to service providers

As well as providing information to the people you support and their families, you may need to provide information to service providers. These may be other agencies who also support a person you work with, affiliate organisations, or other organisations in your professional network.

If making a referral, you may be sharing information about the person being referred. You may need to share information about your organisation's policies and procedures. You may be sharing information, such as data about the industry, which other service providers will benefit from.

When sharing information with service providers, you may use:

- ▶ letters
- ▶ emails
- ▶ reports
- ▶ case notes.



Letters

Letters are formal methods used to communicate with other service providers. Letters may be sent when making a referral, or when seeking advice about a person you support.

The letter should contain a date, a return email and postal address, and your name and phone number. You should also include the organisation's logo and address. Ensure the tone of your letter is in accordance with organisational policies and protocols. Consult your organisation's style guide for guidance in grammar and formatting if necessary.

Most letters begin with 'Dear [name],'. Ensure you have spelt the person's name correctly. Use clear, simple language. Keep paragraphs short and concise. Each paragraph should only contain one idea; for example, the reason for writing the letter is often explained in the first paragraph.

Try to maintain the flow of the letter, and link paragraphs using a linking sentence, such as, 'Although we are happy with the services, we have a few questions, including ...'

Sign the letter and send it to the correct recipient. An example letter is provided below.

Letter to family member

Email: sinclair@community.org.au
 52 Warren Street, Sinclair 6322
 Ph: 8309 1724
 Fax: 8309 1726

25 January 2016

Dear Mrs Fletcher,

I am writing to thank you for participating in our recent discussion regarding the services we currently provide to Mr Fletcher.

To ensure we are meeting Mr Fletcher’s needs, it would be useful if we could schedule another meeting to confirm our plans and set some follow-up actions.

Could you please contact me on 8309 1725 to arrange a suitable date and time. I will be out of the office on 31 January.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
 Jude Lockwood

Email

Most organisations have policies or guidelines regarding the type of language they expect you to use when sending correspondence on behalf of the organisation. The same rules that apply to printed correspondence also apply to email correspondence. You need to know what is expected in your workplace. As with sending printed letters, emails should contain your contact details, your name and the name of the person you are writing to.

Things to consider when using email

- ▶ Emails should be written in clear, plain English using professional language.
- ▶ If you do not know the person you are writing to, then use the conventional ‘Dear Mr/Ms ...’
- ▶ Be careful of being too informal and friendly. You do not know who else might read your email.
- ▶ Emails should be brief and straightforward. Use short sentences and simple language.
- ▶ Do not overuse capital letters or bold font to emphasise points in your message.
- ▶ Never send aggressive messages or criticise other people in emails, even if you are justifiably angry about something.
- ▶ Remember to respect people’s privacy. Never forward someone’s email on to another person or give out someone’s email address without permission.

Reports



Writing reports is an important part of communicating with people within and external to the organisation. Reports let other people know what is going on in the workplace.

Reports are important for accountability. They are a formal record of an event, or a person's status. Reports may be used in legal cases, if needed. For this reason, the information you write in reports must be objective, accurate and very clear.

The format your report takes will be specified by your organisation's requirements. There will be report templates for different contexts. For example, you may have a template for reporting work health and safety (WHS) incidents. You may have a report for recording a service user's daily activities.

Reports will generally be signed and dated. Often, reports require authorisation from a supervisor or manager. Check with your organisation's report procedures and protocols.

Case notes

Case notes are used to record a person's progress in the service. They are used by support workers, and may be also used by the person's case manager, legal advocate or doctor.

The format you use to complete case notes will depend on your organisation's requirements. Your organisation may provide a specific case note template or book, and will specify when case notes should be completed. In general, case notes are continually updated, such as at the end of every day.

Case notes must be objective and factual. They are necessary for the accountability of the organisation, and may be used during an audit, or in legal cases. For example, if a person passes away in your care, the case notes will detail the events that happened leading up to the death. That is why it is important that the information you include is accurate. Be as specific as possible when sharing details about an event. Sign and date all case notes, and seek appropriate authorisation. The following example is a case note for Mr Singh.

Progress note

Date: 16/11/2016

Client name: Mr Singh

Comments: Mr Singh went to X-ray at 10.00 am. When he returned he looked blue around the lips and was having trouble breathing. Mr Singh said that his chest was still hurting. Referred matter to the supervisor.

Worker's name: Rose Strauss

Signature: *Rose Strauss*

Actions: Arranged for Mr Singh's GP, Dr James, to visit. Dr James ordered some antibiotics for Mr Singh. Arranged for prescription to be filled at the pharmacy urgently and assisted Mr Singh to administer his medication. He showed signs of improvement. Arranged for a follow-up appointment with his doctor for following day.

Supervisor: Judith Hopper

Signature: *Judith Hopper*

Protect privacy

Information collected and distributed about the provision of care or support services to a person is governed by the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth), which protects all personal information handled by businesses. Attached to this legislation are the 13 Australian Privacy Principles, which set the standard for handling personal information. The Australian Privacy Principles relate to collection, use, storage, access and disclosure of personal information. You can read more about The Australian Privacy Principles at: <http://aspirelr.link/app-reference-tool>



There is also state-based legislation that ensures client confidentiality. For example, the *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic.) protects the privacy of health records in Victoria. Support workers are ethically and legally obliged to not disclose personal information about the people they are caring for to unauthorised people. For more information, refer to your workplace policies and procedures or speak with your supervisor or team leader.

Example

Provide information to service users in accordance with communication policies and protocols

Jake works for a disability service. He receives a phone call one afternoon from Grace, who says she is Tim's mother. Tim is one of the people Jake supports. Jake has never met Grace, as Tim's father has sole custody.

Jake listens as Grace requests Tim's phone number. She says she is trying to contact him as it is his birthday.

Jake is sure it is Tim's birthday, but he is still reluctant to share the personal information with someone he hasn't met over the phone. He suggests that he can take Grace's phone number, and pass it onto Tim for him to call her.

Grace is happy with that outcome. Tim writes down her phone number and thanks her for the call.



Practice task 4

1. Why are professional boundaries important?

2. What are two ways you can provide information in accordance with communication policies and protocols?

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3. What are two written correspondence protocols you should follow when writing reports for a community services organisation?

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4. What are two written correspondence protocols and style requirements when writing letters?

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5. What are two written correspondence protocols and style guidelines to follow when writing emails?

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6. What are two written correspondence protocols to follow when writing case notes?

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Click to complete Practice task 4

Summary

1. Workers in the community services sector need to use effective communication strategies to build rapport, share information, resolve issues and defuse difficult situations.
2. To communicate effectively you must listen carefully and show empathy, give timely feedback, provide basic counselling, respect other cultures and negotiate positive outcomes.
3. Your communication should reflect a person-centred approach.
4. Interviews are an important part of many procedures in a community care environment. Adhere to organisational requirements when conducting interviews and use motivational interviewing techniques when appropriate.
5. People with support needs and staff should know their opinions and contributions are valued by the organisation. Feedback should be a two-way process. Staff members and clients should have the opportunity to share their experiences and provide feedback.
6. Being an effective communicator means assessing what specific needs people have and making a plan that responds to these needs. The profiles of service users and care plans should detail important background information and peoples' communication needs.
7. You need to manage inquiries and respond in a timely and appropriate way. Workers are seen to represent their organisation. The way they communicate should reflect workplace protocols and requirements.
8. Adhere to organisational guidelines regarding confidentiality and privacy to work legally and respectfully.
9. Workers need to communicate for a variety of reasons. The type of communication you use will depend on the context and purpose of the communication, as well as the purpose. You need to know how to communicate in a way that is appropriate for the medium and purpose. Follow protocols for written communication and make use of organisational style guides when you are not sure how to format written communication.

Learning checkpoint 1

Communicate with co-workers and people who have support needs

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in communicating with co-worker and people who have support needs.

Part A

Imagine that you need to interview a co-worker to find a solution for the fact that they are consistently late for their shift.

1. Explain six ways in which you would prepare for the interview.

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2. Explain how you could use a person-centred and rights-based approach to conduct the interview.

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3. What would be the most appropriate interview style to use with your co-worker and why?

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4. Prepare at least four interview questions that demonstrate respect, accept individual differences and uphold rights. Ensure questions comply with relevant organisational policies and procedures.

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5. Describe how you would manage the confidentiality of the interview process and follow up the interview.

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6. How would you maintain professional boundaries during the interview?

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Part B

Read the scenario, then answer the questions that follow.

Scenario

The service you work for is doing intake interviews. You are interviewing a new service user called Beverley to obtain details for her individualised care plan. Beverley is Sudanese and speaks minimal English. She appears very nervous in the interview.

1. Describe two different nonverbal communication cues you could use, and how they impact interpersonal communication.

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2. Describe four cross-cultural communication protocols you could follow during this interview.

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3. Identify three pieces of information you could provide to Beverley in accordance with communication policies and protocols.

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Part C

1. Describe the ways in which each of the following digital communication media are used in the community services and health services industry.

Medium	Use
Web	
Email	
Social media	
Podcast and videos	
Tablets and applications	
Newsletters and broadcasts	
Intranet	

2. Describe the ways in which each of the following written documentation should reflect organisational protocols and style guidelines.

Document	Organisational protocols
Letters	
Emails	
Case notes	
Reports	



Topic 2

This topic will address:

- 2A Recognise and support communication needs**
- 2B Access interpreter and translation services**
- 2C Identify and address problems and communication barriers**
- 2D Defuse conflict and refer if necessary**
- 2E Seek and respond to feedback on effectiveness of communication**

Address communication needs

Community services workplaces have specific communication needs. The needs will depend on the needs of the stakeholders who use the service. Stakeholders are people who benefit from or use the service in some way, such as service users, the person's family and other related services and agencies. The communication methods used in your workplace will depend on these specific needs.

In your role, you need to recognise and support communication needs. These needs may be related to communication styles and language barriers. You need to know how to access interpreter and translation services to support communication needs. You should be able to identify and address problems and communication barriers, and defuse conflict and refer if necessary. You should also be able to seek and respond to feedback on effectiveness of communication so communication can be improved if necessary.

2A Recognise and support communication needs

The people you work with and the people you support have specific communication needs. These may be related to their abilities, such as the ability to hear. They may be related to language needs. If disagreements occur within the workplace, it is possible that there is a specific communication need that has not been addressed.

Learn to recognise specific communication needs, and know how to support them. Building trust and maintaining relationships are important ways to provide support.



Recognise and support people's communication needs

The people supported by your organisation will have varying communication needs. Their needs may be particular to their physical and mental abilities. For example, if a person is hearing impaired, they may require hearing aids to be able to communicate fully. You may be required to speak more clearly, and face the person directly.

People from diverse cultural backgrounds may have language needs. You may need to engage an interpreting or translating service.

A person may be inhibited by their environment, and have difficulty asking questions, or seeking support. Learn to recognise nonverbal cues to detect if a person requires additional support.

Two examples of ways to recognise a person's communication needs and offer support are discussed below.

Hearing impairment

You may recognise a person is hearing impaired if they:

- ▶ don't respond
- ▶ don't follow instructions
- ▶ lean forward to hear you
- ▶ ask you to repeat.

Support:

- ▶ Ensure the person has the appropriate support. If hearing impairment is a new development, ensure the person is properly assessed, and receives the aids they require.
- ▶ Use visual aids, such as pictures and writing when sharing information.
- ▶ Speak clearly.
- ▶ Arrange for an interpreter.

Language barriers

You may recognise a person experiences language barriers if they:

- ▶ appear confused
- ▶ are unable to follow instructions
- ▶ you cannot understand what they are saying.

Support:

- ▶ Ensure the person has access to translation services.
- ▶ Arrange for a multi-lingual staff member or family member to mediate.
- ▶ Provide visual and symbolic aids.

Emotional needs

You may recognise a person has emotional needs because:

- ▶ they appear distressed
- ▶ are unable to follow instructions
- ▶ you cannot understand what they are saying.

Support:

- ▶ Assure the person they are safe.
- ▶ Give the person time.
- ▶ Provide a safe space for the person to express their emotions.
- ▶ Validate a person's emotions and show empathy.

Recognise and support colleagues' communication needs

Communication flow within the organisation is important for effective provision of care. Workers need to understand what is happening, and have a clear idea of the protocols and procedures to operate within. Supervisors and managers should have a clearly developed communication channel, through which important information can be shared between management and workers. Your colleagues are an important source of information regarding the wellbeing of the people you support, and the events within the organisation.

Conflict within the organisation may relate to a communication need that is not being met. For example, a person may have trouble understanding the organisational procedures, and so is not following them correctly. Supervisors and colleagues can help support this person by providing an interpretation, and a clear explanation of procedures.

Be patient and respectful of the communication needs of others you work with.

Examples of needs are provided below.

Communication needs

Example: A person doesn't understand the procedures.

Take time to clearly explain procedures. Clarify questions. Ask your colleague if they understand.

Example: A person isn't attending meetings.

Ask the person why, and see if there is anything you can do to help.

Example: A person is not completing WHS reports correctly.

Take time to demonstrate the correct procedure. Offer the person feedback.

Example: A person is hostile towards colleagues.

Arrange for a team meeting to address problems, and find the source of the difficulty.

Build trust

The key to supporting a person with personal care tasks is good communication. You need to give and receive information clearly, build rapport or trust with a person and encourage people to do tasks as much as possible. It's not easy for someone to receive care from a stranger and it can sometimes make them embarrassed, scared, anxious or even angry. It is very important that you are aware of this and do what you can to gain the person's trust and make them comfortable. You should observe and talk to people to confirm their personal care needs. Take the time and make the effort to put people at ease and gain their trust so they will feel comfortable and safe. Reassure the person that you can provide the care and support they require and that you have read their personal care support plan and know what kind of assistance they require.



Recognising and clarifying communication needs is easier if your relationship with the other person is built on trust. If a person trusts you, they are more likely to express the need for support.

The ability to build and maintain relationships and establish trust is important. Communication is more effective when trust has been established between all parties. Trust is different to friendliness. It is a professional way of communicating respect for others and puts them at ease. Simple measures include trying to understand the other person's point of view by listening to them and being interested in what they are saying. To build trust with someone, it is important to treat them with respect.

Build relationships

The strength of your relationship with a person will help when identifying communication issues. Part of building relationships is giving a person time. When communicating with someone, allow time to listen. If a person feels you have time for them, it can be easier to develop trust and rapport. Giving someone your attention shows them that you value and respect their opinions. There are many factors that influence the amount of time a person needs to share an experience or issue.

When a person is sharing their experience, consider:

- ▶ the complexity of the story
- ▶ the person's level of health and physical wellbeing
- ▶ any disabilities (for example, speech or hearing impairments, cognitive disabilities or memory problems)
- ▶ the amount of emotional energy it takes to explain the situation
- ▶ language needs
- ▶ cultural barriers to communication
- ▶ your level of experience or familiarity with communicating in a specific situation.

External networks

It is often difficult for one agency to meet all the needs of one person. Being well-connected with other organisations and the wider community gives workers access to resources that assist in meeting different people's needs. The more information you have, the better you can meet the objectives of a program or the organisation's goals.

Being part of strong informal and formal networks allows the community to become aware of the services your agency offers. Every relationship you develop has the potential to be a resource for people you support.

Learn to recognise and support the communication needs of external networks you work with. Some examples are discussed below.

Formal networks

Formal networks, such as other community services organisations or agencies that represent the needs of people you support, may have particular communication needs, including:

- ▶ understanding specific, concrete details about a person, such as specific details of their medical history
- ▶ clear, polite and friendly communication
- ▶ both written and verbal information, to ensure no errors or omissions are made
- ▶ receiving up-to-date and relevant information.

Support formal networks to meet communication needs by checking in, asking for feedback, and responding by making improvements.

Informal networks

Informal networks, conference delegates, people you meet when training, and social media networks may have particular communication needs, including:

- ▶ up-to-date information about current events and news related to your organisation
- ▶ feeling connected and informed.

Check in with your informal networks to clarify communication needs. Ask for feedback, and make improvements.

Example

Recognise and support communication needs

Joseph is deaf and uses sign language. Joseph’s mother, Ming, emigrated from China and speaks Cantonese. Both Ming and Joseph use limited English, and meaningful communication can be difficult. Several significant conflicts have developed between Ming and Joseph and there is confusion and resentment about the options for aged care for Ming. Danielle is a case manager who is working with Joseph and his family.



Ming and Joseph agree to have a meeting to resolve some of their difficulties. Danielle books an Auslan and Cantonese interpreter. Danielle allows extra time for the meeting as using two interpreters may mean the meeting will take longer. It will be a complex discussion. There must be enough time for Ming and Joseph to express their views without feeling pressured.

Danielle allows for two and a half hours. The meeting is very successful. Ming says she has never had an opportunity to talk like this before. Both Ming and Joseph express their concerns and fears as well as their needs. The issues are not resolved in this one meeting but good progress has been made. Some actions are decided on regarding what to do next. Ming and Joseph agree it would be useful to hold another similar meeting. They set a date for the next meeting.

Practice task 5

1. Identify how to recognise two communication needs of people you support, and address how you would support them.

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2. Identify how to recognise two communication needs of your colleagues, and address how you would support them.

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3. Identify how to recognise two communication needs of people your external networks, and address how you would support them.

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4. Why is building trust and maintaining relationships important when recognising and supporting communication needs?

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Click to complete Practice task 5

2B Access interpreter and translation services

Many communication needs can be addressed by working with a translation or interpreting service. An interpreter or translator may be very useful when a person speaks or reads little or no English. Using an interpreter or translator may help to make the person feel comfortable, as they are communicating with them in a language they understand very well. It also ensures they have access to accurate information, and can provide accurate information.

Translators and interpreters serve slightly different functions when addressing communication needs.

Here is an explanation of each.

Translators

- ▶ Translators convert the written word from one language to another.
- ▶ Use a translator to provide information to someone who cannot read English.

Interpreters

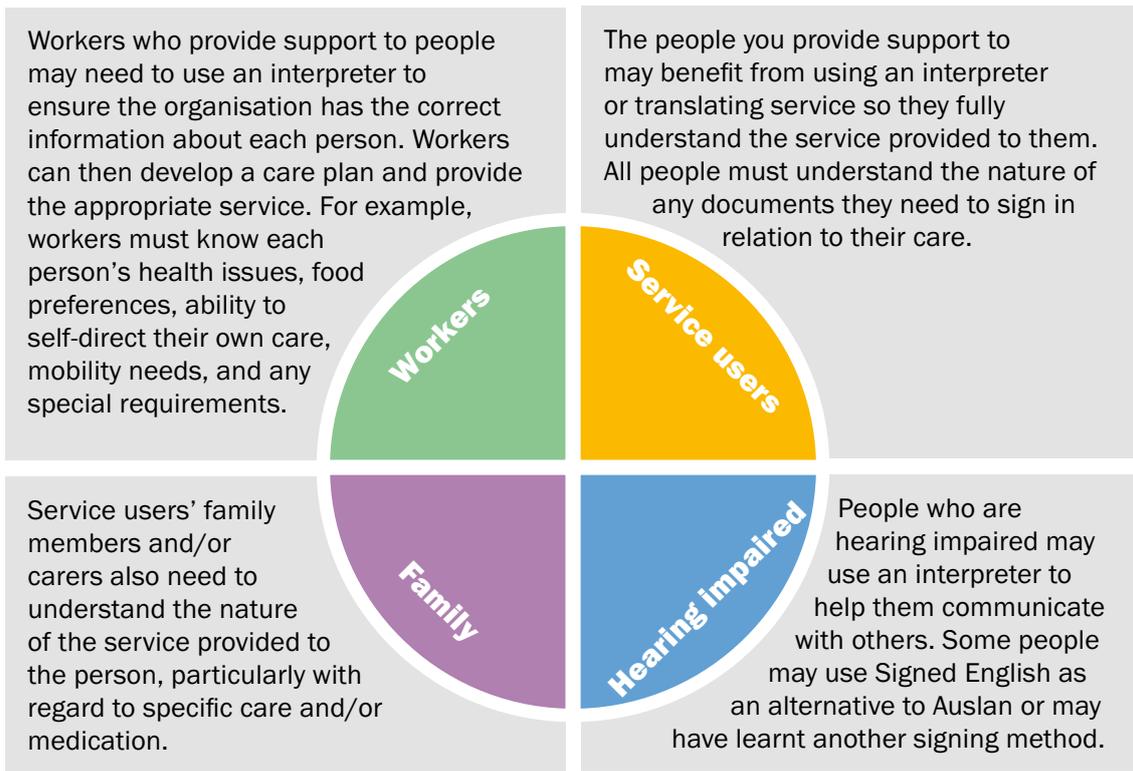
- ▶ Interpreters convert what someone says into another language.
- ▶ Use an interpreter to converse with someone who does not speak English.

The role of an interpreter or translator

Interpreters must understand exactly what the worker wants to communicate to the person they support. They listen to one person speaking a language and then interpret the words into the other person's language so both people understand each other. It is often necessary to get an interpreter when a person who doesn't speak English is admitted to a service.

By using an interpreter or translator, people you support may be able to direct their own care; self-advocate; make a complaint, request or suggestion; or make their own legal, medical and financial decisions more appropriately and effectively.

The following groups of people may benefit from the services of a translator or interpreter.



Choose an interpreter or translator

An interpreter or translator should be used in all situations if there is a communication barrier and decisions about care need to be made, including changes to existing care. Interpreters can be used in different ways, including face-to-face and through telephone conversations.

Consider the following when choosing an interpreter.

Interpreters from the same culture

- ▶ Workplaces that provide care to people from more than one culture often have a register of interpreters that includes names, contact details and the language/s they speak. An interpreter from the same culture can make a person feel comfortable.

Interpreters of the same gender

- ▶ Workplaces usually try to use an interpreter of the same gender as the person they support. This may help the person relax when personal questions are being asked. For example, an older woman who has a urinary tract infection may not want to talk about this with a male interpreter.

Professional interpreters and translators

- ▶ Always ensure the interpreter or translator you engage is fully accredited.
- ▶ The Translating and Interpreting National Service (TIS) can link you with accredited translators and interpreters.
- ▶ The Department of Immigration and Border Protection have a translating and interpreting service you can use.
- ▶ The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) has over 750 interpreters, who speak over 30 languages.
- ▶ The National Auslan Interpreter Booking Service provides bookings to sign language users.

Other interpreters

Sometimes a professional interpreter is not accessible, and you may need to ask support from someone else. Consider the authenticity of the interpreters or translators you use. You should also consider any privacy or confidentiality breaches that may arise from using non-professional interpreters.

The following are other people who may be used if a professional interpreter is not available.

Alternatives to interpreter

▶ Other interpreters	▶ Volunteers
▶ Staff members	▶ Family members
▶ Community groups	▶ Friends
▶ Other people from the care facility	

Auslan interpreters

Auslan is the official language of the deaf community in Australia. It is signed communication, using hand gestures.

Auslan interpreters can be booked by phone or the internet. NABS is the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service, which is funded by the Australian government. People can use the service if they require sign language to communicate and would like an interpreter to book healthcare providers. The service also provides resources for service providers.



Auslan provides an online video dictionary at:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/auslan-dictionary>

Access the Auslan interpreting service booking website at:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/nabs>

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a very important issue when using interpreters and translators. The *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) contains information about specific laws and requirements for privacy and confidentiality in workplaces.

Some people won't want to use family members as interpreters, so their information and conditions remain private. Similarly, some people may not want an interpreter from a local community group. Be mindful of who is engaged to offer translating and interpreting services. Always involve the person being supported in the decision.



The person and the interpreter need to understand the importance of privacy. All people have a right to keep their details private. Assure the person that a professional interpreter will maintain the confidentiality of their information.

Use an interpreter

When using an interpreter, you must ensure they speak the same language and dialect as the person being supported. Sensitivity to culture also needs to be considered. For example, if you are providing support to a person who is from Bosnia, you would not use a Serbian interpreter because these two countries were at war and it may cause cultural conflict.

Interviews and conversations may take longer when you are using an interpreter, as everything needs to be said twice – by the support worker and then by the interpreter. Using a professional interpreter from a professional agency may also cost money.

A professional interpreter ensures that a person understands everything discussed and can explain the contents of any documents that have to be signed. Below are some ideas for using an interpreter.

Tips when using an interpreter

Always speak to the person you are supporting, not the interpreter.

Allow the interpreter to finish before you start to talk again.

Make sure you use words the interpreter is likely to understand.

Don't use difficult medical terms the interpreter may not understand or be able to explain.

Example

Use an interpreter to obtain information necessary to provide good quality care

An organisation is providing home care to an older person who does not speak English. They notice that the person is becoming much slower in everything they do. This means that tasks such as showering are taking much longer. The worker reports this situation to their supervisor, who arranges to do another assessment of the older person to identify where they need to provide extra assistance. An interpreter is engaged to make sure everyone has all the information necessary to provide good quality care.



Practice task 6

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jerry is admitting a new person to the service. Jinying is a 79-year-old woman, and is Chinese. Jerry asks Jinying her name, which she spells for him. He asks for her date of birth. She looks at him blankly. He asks for medical details, and history. Again, Jinying doesn't answer. Jerry looks at the referral to check if Jinying has listed next of kin he can contact to help translate. There are no family names listed. He asks Jinying as simply and as clearly as possible if she knows someone who can translate. She just shakes her head. Jerry is not sure if that means no, or if Jinying doesn't understand him.

1. What is Jinying's communication need?

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2. Who should Jerry engage for translation and interpretation services?

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3. How should Jerry access the translator or interpreter?

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4. What considerations should Jerry make when engaging an interpreter?

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Click to complete Practice task 6

2C Identify and address problems and communication barriers

Communication barriers often inhibit effective communication. Barriers may exist because of language barriers, or physical communication issues. Communication barriers can lead to conflict, misunderstandings and errors. Part of communicating effectively in the workplace is the need to correctly identify, evaluate and investigate the communication issue. Step back from a situation and identify the issue before responding.



Identify and evaluate the situation

There are many potential causes of communication barriers. These may be language-based, or possibly relating to abilities.

Identifying the cause of the communication barrier before it causes further barriers can help you move forward, and provide the best support you can to service users. Earlier identification of communication barriers in the workplace can help reduce conflict in the workplace, and ensure that workplace practices can be carried out more effectively.

Below are tips for identifying and evaluating the situation.

When identifying and evaluating a situation

- ▶ Listen carefully to all parties involved in the situation.
- ▶ Ask further questions. Ask the parties to repeat their story to ensure you understand.
- ▶ Take time to evaluate the situation. Do not feel pressured to make immediate decisions. Reschedule conversations to give yourself extra time to respond appropriately.
- ▶ Develop your own strategies for remaining calm and practise these.
- ▶ Keep a written record of conversations to refer back to if needed.

Identify barriers to communication

For people to understand each other, they must also share an understanding of the meanings inherent in all verbal and nonverbal communication. If this understanding is not shared, the true intent of the message may be distorted by the receiver. There are many physical and psychological barriers to effective communication.

Physical and psychological barriers to communication:

- ▶ Background – age, education, gender, economic status, culture, religious beliefs and political ideology all affect how we receive messages

- ▶ Perception – we all see the world differently; our world is shaped by our particular background and life experiences
- ▶ Environmental factors – factors such as noise, distractions and heat may make communication difficult
- ▶ Emotional or psychological issues – someone with a personal problem may not be responsive to particular communication
- ▶ Poor communication and listening skills
- ▶ A disability – for example, a hearing impairment may mean the person needs aids or assistance with communication
- ▶ Overly complicated messages or messages with a lot of jargon

Other factors that may impact communication

As well as adjusting your communication methods to meet the needs of those with poor self-image or a closed attitude, you should consider the six factors outlined below.

Emotional state

How a person is feeling will affect how they communicate. If a person you support or work with is upset because a family member is very sick, they may not want to talk. They may focus on the sadness they are feeling and not be able to understand clearly what you are saying to them. Communication difficulties can also arise if someone is afraid, angry or frustrated about a potential outcome. For example, someone may be angry because they believe if team productivity is improved, they will be out of a job. Or a person may be fearful that if they tell someone their condition has deteriorated, they may be removed from their home and placed in residential care.

Mistrust

Mistrust of people, organisations, systems and/or processes are common in the workplace. If a person does not trust another person, they may not communicate openly with them. For example, a person may withhold information about their pain because they are worried you will not provide the care they need. You can prevent mistrust by communicating in a clear and concise way to people you support and work with, and by spending time building and maintaining the relationship.

Misunderstanding

Misunderstandings easily occur in the workplace. They may be related to information not being relayed correctly, or in full. Misunderstandings may occur because of misinterpreted body language. If a person does not receive a quick response to an email, they may misunderstand the reasons why.

To minimise misunderstandings in the workplace, be clear in your communication. Monitor your body language so it matches the words you say. Check in with people you work with, and ensure you understand each other.

Physical condition

Many people have physical problems or a disability. They may need a hearing aid or need to use sign language. They may not be able to access speech for a variety of reasons. Individuals may have a physical, sensory or intellectual disability or may experience cognitive impairment due to a disease or condition. These people may need to communicate without speech. Alternatively, they may need to enhance their speech with augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) strategies. For example, they may use pictures to represent words or sentences, a machine that works with symbols or an electronic device that speaks for them.

You must respect and respond to AAC communication in the same way you would respond to spoken communication.

Listening skills

Older people often have conditions that make it difficult for them to speak clearly or hear clearly. These conditions will be recorded in their care plans.

If a person you are caring for has difficulty speaking, you need to be very patient with them and concentrate when they are speaking. People with good listening skills find it easier to communicate. Listening skills can be learnt. The care plan should also have hints on how best to communicate with them.

Age

Many older people have problems with communication related to the ageing process. The most common age-related communication problems are hearing impairment, vision impairment, aphasia and dementia. Some of the signs of dementia are loss of memory, intellect, reason, social skills and normal emotion. Someone who is experiencing dementia changes may have difficulty with understanding and reasoning and trouble making simple choices. The main signs of aphasia are difficulty in finding the right words, trouble understanding speech and difficulty with reading and writing.

You need to be patient and take time when communicating with these people and ensure they have understood.

Religious and spiritual needs

You must also be aware of people's spiritual and religious needs, and respect them. The best way to find out about religious and spiritual needs is to read the care plan or ask the person.

You are respecting the person's religious and spiritual needs when you are aware of when and how they like to practise their religion or spirituality. You may need to consider this when you are communicating with people. For example, Muslim people pray several times a day. If you are unaware of their prayer times, you might ask them to have a shower at this time and they may become upset with you for not respecting their needs.

Address specific communication barriers

All people are different. To communicate well with people you support and co-workers, you need to know and understand these differences. You also need to understand the way people communicate. You need to bear in mind the many barriers to effective communication. Past experiences and cultural backgrounds may have an impact on individual differences.

Here are some reasons why.

Past experience

What has happened in people's lives may affect how they communicate. Some people have lived a long time and have had many changes and experiences in their lifetime. You need to realise the people you work with will have different backgrounds and life experience; for example, you may care for a person who has come from a large family. They may be used to lots of family gatherings and feel isolated in the aged care facility. If you know about this past experience, you can try to spend extra time with them. You could make sure they are introduced to other people and are included in social functions.

Cultural background

Australia has people from many different cultures and countries. These different cultures make Australia an interesting place to live. The differences also make the workplace interesting. It is important to know about the culture of your persons and co-workers. The cultural differences might mean there are different languages or ways of behaving that affect communication. You need to know how to alter your communication to suit the culture of the people you are working with.

Overcome barriers to communication

Being sensitive and empathetic to another person helps you address barriers. Below is a list of ways to overcome barriers to good communication.

Overcoming barriers

- ▶ Understand that we are all different and have different communication needs.
- ▶ Be sensitive to and informed about any cultural differences.
- ▶ Repeat information in different ways to ensure understanding.
- ▶ Ask questions to clarify understanding.
- ▶ Make sure your communication is clear and concise.
- ▶ Choose an appropriate environment for the communication.
- ▶ Use aids and/or communication equipment as required.
- ▶ Use positive language.

Negotiate communication barriers

Anything that obstructs the actual meaning of a message is a barrier to communication. There are a number of strategies to use when negotiating communication barriers. It is much easier to work through problems if you have already established a trusting relationship.

How to minimise communication barriers

Be consistent

Check your workplace policies to ensure you are responding within organisational frameworks. Respond to similar issues in similar ways.

Be neutral and objective

Your role is to facilitate communication between two or more parties. Don't make assumptions. If there is a conflict, encourage people to describe behaviours rather than personality traits. For example: 'Jason punches me when I walk by', rather than 'Jason is such a bully'.

Be even-handed

Use practical strategies to ensure all parties are heard. For example, allow a set time frame for each party to communicate their experience or issue uninterrupted.

Identify areas of mistrust or conflict

Communication is the key to building good relationships with your colleagues, people you support, their family members and other professionals with whom you liaise. However, every time you communicate there is always the potential to confuse people or have them misinterpret what you say. This may lead to conflict or mistrust.

Some of the common causes of mistrust and conflict are listed below, with examples.

Lack of clarity

Information is not clear. For example, a person does not speak English well and does not understand what they are being asked to do.

Lack of training

A new staff member has not been trained in a specific communication need. For example, a person being supported becomes frustrated.

Understaffing

A program is understaffed and there is not enough time to focus on setting priorities and following processes. This may mean staff members are too busy to communicate with each other about activities for people being supported.

Authority problems

There is a problem with the levels of authority. For example, a staff member may not feel able to speak up against a manager or a person may not feel able to speak up against a staff member.

Lack of leadership

There is a lack of leadership in setting effective communication strategies. For example, a coordinator has not set a good example by using active listening and positive communication.

Lack of conflict resolution

There are no staff conflict-resolution strategies in place. For example, a supervisor ignores a conflict between two staff members and allows one to bully the other without intervening.

Intolerance

There are no procedures for dealing with intolerance or racism. For example, a person makes a rude remark about another person from a different culture.

Differing goals and needs

Different needs and/or goals are not fully reconciled. For example, a staff member needs to know their complaint is listened to, but the supervisor's goal is proving that a mistake has not been made.

Use communication strategies to address mistrust

When you identify an area that may lead to mistrust or conflict, use your communication strategies and leadership skills to resolve the situation quickly. This may mean talking informally with the people affected or following the organisation's conflict-resolution procedures.

Mistrust or conflict can affect all activities within a service and have far-reaching consequences for staff and service users. Conflict between staff can make communication ineffective. Poor communication will have an impact on the ability of staff to work as a team to meet people's needs. Mistrust may mean people are unable to believe what they are being told. This may promote anxiety, so it is essential for the supervisor to respond appropriately. Communication strategies you can use to address mistrust are listed below.

Ways to address mistrust

- ▶ The supervisor, coordinator or team leader should provide direction and leadership for the team.
- ▶ Know the people you care for.
- ▶ The more you understand people's communication needs, the better you can support them and prepare for potential difficulties.
- ▶ You should use a range of communication tools to assist people who are finding it difficult to express themselves.
- ▶ Don't wait for the situation to worsen. Act immediately.

Cultural impacts on communication

Language and culture affect the way people behave. It can influence how men and women communicate with each other; for example, who speaks first and the tone and body language used. Who is speaking and how they are speaking might show how important the conversation is. For example, in some Asian cultures, it is rude to look into people's eyes when talking to them. In Australian culture, keeping eye contact is a sign of respect, unless you are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island person, in which case it can be disrespectful. If you work with or are caring for someone from an Asian or Indigenous background, you may need to alter your body language when speaking with them.



It is important that you learn about a person's cultural background. You can get this information from their care plan or you could do some research at your local library or on the internet about the cultural practices of different ethnic groups. You can also ask the person directly.

Self-image and attitudes about self

How people see themselves can have a big impact on communication. So can their attitude. Below, self image and closed or unreceptive attitudes are discussed in relation to communication.

Self-image

You may need to adjust your communication methods depending on how a person views themselves.

For example, a person who has had a stroke and has trouble speaking may not have a good self image. A stroke can cause many problems for the affected person, including difficulty with speech, understanding, walking, dressing, eating and swallowing.

It may be easy to tell if a person is confident or shy or how they see themselves. Other times you may need to talk with them for a while to find out how they see themselves.

Closed attitudes

Many individuals have fixed ideas and are unwilling to change or discuss things. This can result in miscommunication or prevent you from progressing in discussion with them. They may not consciously wish to be negative and may be unaware of how their attitude affects others. Take time to understand their attitudes, beliefs and concerns by talking and developing a closer relationship with them.

By changing your attitude towards them, you may find that you can communicate with them more effectively. If you approach them with a negative attitude, they may continue to have a negative attitude.

Example

Identify and address communication barriers

Gary is facilitating an important meeting about team productivity. He finds that after team members contribute an idea, Piper, a support worker, always says something negative such as, 'That won't work'. Gary can see this is causing the group to start to get cynical about the whole process.



After the meeting, Piper agrees to catch up with Gary to talk about some of the concerns she raised in the meeting.

'I've worked here a long time Gary, and I do actually know some things,' says Piper.

'Are you saying that you sometimes feel you are not listened to?' asks Gary.

'Yeah, sometimes,' says Piper.

'I'm sorry if you feel that way, Piper. I wonder if you would be interested in giving me some of your ideas on how to resolve your concerns. Maybe that way we can move forward.'

'Okay!' says Piper.

The next week, Gary finds a document in his in-tray. Piper has developed some good strategies for resolving some of the team's productivity issues. Gary asks Piper to present her ideas at the next team meeting.

By listening to Piper, trying to understand her point of view and getting her involved in developing a solution, Gary has re-focused her mind on a positive resolution. Rather than constantly focusing on what won't work, Piper is given the task of finding what might work.



Practice task 7

1. Describe how emotional factors may contribute to the development of communication barriers.

2. Describe how mistrust may contribute to the development of communication barriers.

3. Describe how misunderstandings may contribute to the development of communication barriers.

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4. Identify three communication strategies you could use to address communication barriers.

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5. Identify three communication strategies you could use to build and maintain trust.

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Click to complete Practice task 7

2D Defuse conflict and refer if necessary

Conflict in the workplace may occur because of a communication barrier. It may stem from a misunderstanding. It may be caused intentionally or unintentionally.

Conflict may occur between you and other workers. It may occur between your colleagues. Conflict may also occur between people you support, or between you and people you support.

Recognising the cause of the conflict, and taking early action will help prevent the conflict from escalating. Referrals may be necessary. Respond to conflict in accordance with organisational requirements.

Facilitate the resolution of issues



To resolve day-to-day and other significant issues, you need effective communication. People may have a personal involvement in an issue that needs to be acknowledged. When helping to resolve issues, you must try to be as objective as possible. Use clear and assertive communication that defines and focuses on the issue, not on the people involved. An effective communicator supports others to break down the factors that contribute to the issue and develop clear and agreed methods to achieve appropriate outcomes.

Defuse potentially difficult situations

Difficult situations can arise in stressful environments when communication is misunderstood or emotions are heightened. For example, if a person you support has a behaviour of concern, the workers' response may be to yell at the person. Yelling exacerbates the situation, and conflict can escalate.

If a difficult situation occurs, provide a safe space for the situation to be dealt with. Calmly and objectively listen to each party. Be empathetic, polite and professional. If necessary, you may need to involve an external person such as a mediator, a counsellor or your supervisor.



Use communication skills to defuse conflict

Quite often, communication issues will be the source of conflict. Communication is also the best response to conflict. In general, aim for open communication in the workplace. This involves sharing appropriate information with your colleagues and supervisor, listening attentively, and communicating openly and effectively with the people you support. When supporting or responding to a conflict, maintain a safe space to address the conflict. Encourage parties to listen to each other. Be empathetic and sensitive.

Below are key communication skills you will need to develop and use effectively.

Be assertive

- ▶ Assertiveness is different from aggression. Being assertive is being self-assured and confident. If you are assertive, you are more in control of the situation. Use positive, clear language. Maintain positive, open body language. Avoid raising your voice. But speak audibly, and clearly. Be clear about your own position.
- ▶ For example, if defusing a conflict, you may say, 'Okay, let's step back for a minute, and think about this situation calmly. Then we can talk.'

Listen attentively

- ▶ Listening is a central part of communication. Listen to the other people involved in the conflict. Each person should be given time to share their perspective. Other people present should listen, and pay attention to what is being said. Try not to interrupt. Wait for the person to finish speaking. Paraphrase and summarise what you have heard to demonstrate you were listening. For example, you may say, 'What I hear you saying is that you are frustrated with the service.' Wait for the person to clarify that this is what they intended to say.

Be empathetic

- ▶ Empathy is the ability to see a situation from another person's perspective. Being empathetic can be hard if you are caught up in the emotion of a situation. Take a moment to breathe, and then try to focus on what the other person is saying.
- ▶ For example, if a person appears angry, you may use empathy to try and understand why they may be feeling angry, rather than focusing on the fact that they are angry with you.

Allow time

- ▶ The cause of the conflict may not be immediately apparent, especially if the situation is emotionally heightened. Allow parties, or yourself, time to cool down and think before trying to verbally resolve a situation. This could involve stepping into another room for a moment, or taking a day to think about what happened before addressing the conflict directly.

Take ownership

- ▶ If you are involved in a conflict, one of the most powerful things you can do is take ownership of your part of the conflict. This can be extremely difficult, particularly if the conflict is very recent, and emotions are high. But when you take ownership, the situation is likely to defuse, or at least change quite quickly. When you take ownership, you encourage the other party to take ownership too.
- ▶ For example, if the conflict is about a misunderstanding, accept that you may have miscommunicated the information, and ask if there is any way you can improve the situation.

Encourage win-win

- ▶ A win-win solution is when all parties are satisfied with the outcome. Help parties identify what they hope to achieve from the situation. Identify where overlaps occur. Both parties should be involved in identifying possible solutions. Both parties should agree on the solutions before proceeding.
- ▶ For example, if a person is complaining about too much overtime, help the person identify their desired outcome, and see how they meet the organisation's needs. Check with the person that they are satisfied with the outcome.

Defuse conflict in accordance with organisational requirements

Your organisation will have specific requirements for managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations. Your organisation may have a formal dispute resolution policy and procedures. These will indicate the steps to follow if a dispute occurs.

Usually difficult situations and disputes are resolved in-house, if possible. If a solution or agreement cannot be made, an external mediator or counsellor may become involved. If a referral to an external party is required, follow organisational requirements for making the referral.

In general, observe and respect the other person's right to confidentiality. Treat people fairly and respect the person's right to express an opinion. Don't discriminate on the basis of disability, gender, sexual orientation, race or age.

Talk with your supervisor to understand your organisation's specific requirements for managing difficulties.

For details of the Fair Work Ombudsman dispute resolution policy, visit the following website: <http://aspirelr.link/fairwork-dispute-resolution>



Make referrals to resolve conflicts

Sometimes you will not be able to resolve all the issues that arise in the workplace. You may need to refer issues or conflicts to your manager or use an external mediator. Make sure you follow your workplace policies and procedures in these cases. This may involve completing documentation, contacting specific people, and informing your supervisor if referrals are made.

You should refer someone to an external mediator when:

- ▶ you are not impartial or not perceived as impartial
- ▶ you are involved in the dispute
- ▶ the dispute is complex and involves several people
- ▶ you feel the conflict is beyond the scope of your role or skills
- ▶ conflict resolution impacts on you completing other parts of your job.

Engage a mediator

If you are engaging mediators for conflict resolution, you need to ensure they are skilled and experienced professionals. Here are some tips for finding a mediator.

Tips for engaging a mediator

- ▶ Check if your organisation has an employee assistance program (EAP) and if mediation is available as part of this service.
- ▶ Ask your manager if your organisation has a list of mediators who have been used before.
- ▶ Find out if there is a reputable counselling service in your existing network that offers a mediation service.
- ▶ Find out if you are funded by, or affiliated with, a government department that provides mediation or can link you to a government mediation service.
- ▶ Ask other trusted professionals for a recommendation.
- ▶ Ask incorporated mediation associations for recommendations. However, be aware that such associations may receive a fee for the referrals they make.
- ▶ Familiarise yourself with the Law Council of Australia's statement about the ethics in the practice of alternative disputes resolution.
- ▶ Consider interviewing a mediator prior to engaging their services.

Example

Defuse conflict according to organisational requirements

Andrea is the daughter of a person Tammy has recently been supporting. Andrea meets Tammy to learn more about the agency. After greeting her warmly, Tammy discusses the services her organisation provides. Andrea asks questions about finance. Her friends have told her service providers are only in it for the money, that standards are not high and she's concerned her mother will be 'ripped off'.

Tammy gives Andrea her full attention and does not interrupt while she is speaking. Without agreeing with her, Tammy shows that she respects her views and shows concern that she is upset. Tammy repeat some of the things Andrea has said to check Tammy understands the points she is making and to show she is listening. When Andrea expresses her concerns, Tammy asks her what might help her in this situation. Together Tammy and Andrea decide on the following actions:

- ▶ Andrea will bring her mother to a music night in the facility and stay for the duration so both of them can learn more about the environment.
- ▶ Tammy will give Andrea a copy of the organisation's most recent annual report and will make herself available if Andrea or her mother have any questions about it.
- ▶ Tammy will also make an appointment for her to meet the director of nursing so she can learn more about how the organisation is managed.



Practice task 8

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Mercy is Sudanese. She is meeting with the case worker, Doug, to review her current care plan. Doug is tired. He worked a late shift yesterday, and his newborn baby kept him up all night. When Mercy starts talking, Doug's responses are brief. He says he can't understand Mercy and he interrupts her mid-sentence. Mercy becomes irritated, and starts speaking loudly. Doug becomes defensive.

1. What are two communication strategies Doug could use to defuse this situation?

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2. How should Doug defuse the situation in line with organisational requirements?

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3. If the situation can't be defused, what referrals could be made?

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Click to complete Practice task 8

2E Seek and respond to feedback on effectiveness of communication

Regularly review your own communication performance to ensure you are using appropriate skills. Check you are using communication to build trusting relationships. Ensure you use culturally appropriate communication and interpret situations correctly. With experience, these skills come naturally, but seeking and then responding to feedback will help you develop skills.



Review effectiveness of communication

Self-reflection and review is important when monitoring your ability to communicate. Monitoring communication allows you to see where issues may be occurring, and helps you to develop an improvement plan.

Below are seven different ways you could review the effectiveness of your communication with other workers.

- 1 Check decisions**
Check whether the decisions you have made and communicated to others have been carried out.

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- 2 Check care plan**
Check whether a care plan you helped prepare has correctly identified the person's needs.

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- 3 Follow up**
Follow up feedback you gave to see whether it has been acted upon.

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- 4 Check reflective listening**
Check whether points you picked up in reflective listening have been carried out.

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- 5 Check outcomes**
Check whether there has been a reduced number of incidents following counselling sessions you have conducted.

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- 6 Check understanding**
Ask colleagues if they have difficulty understanding the directions or explanations you give or if they have difficulty understanding you.

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- 7 Check cultural awareness**
Think about requests or comments made by persons to see whether you are being inclusive and culturally aware.

Methods of obtaining feedback regarding your effectiveness

Feedback can come in a number of forms. It can be formal feedback from a supervisor, as part of an appraisal. It can be informal feedback from people you work with. Be attentive to the feedback you get, and think about how you can make improvements based on this feedback.

Possible methods of obtaining information about your communication are suggested below.

Sources of feedback

- ▶ Supervisor
- ▶ Colleagues
- ▶ People you support
- ▶ Service user's family members and carers
- ▶ Professional networks
- ▶ Informal networks

Formal methods of obtaining feedback

- ▶ Formal staff appraisal
- ▶ Team meetings
- ▶ Feedback forms
- ▶ Surveys

Informal methods of obtaining feedback

- ▶ Conversations with supervisor and colleagues
- ▶ Checking whether others understand you
- ▶ Observing your effect on others
- ▶ Checking if your instructions were carried out

Respond to feedback on the effectiveness of your communication

Feedback is only as useful as your response. If a person provides you with formal or informal feedback, reflect on the feedback given, and try to make improvements where you can. Self-development is an organisational requirement. All people working in community services should do their best to make improvements where they can.

Talk to the person who provided the feedback about possible solutions. You may work with a supervisor to develop a self-improvement plan, which outlines goals and objectives for improving your communication skills.



If the feedback came from someone you support, talk with them about ways you could improve communication.

Avoid being defensive when you receive feedback. Think of feedback as a positive way for you to grow and develop.

Effectiveness of communication with external networks

Monitor how effective your communication is with external networks. If feedback is negative, talk to a representative from that network about ways to make improvements.

Examples of ways to monitor communication with external networks:

- ▶ conduct surveys of the organisation's website users
- ▶ ask external stakeholders for feedback
- ▶ observe yours, and the organisation's effect on other individuals and agencies
- ▶ collect data about the success of the organisation
- ▶ monitor the success of relationships with other organisations and individuals.

Example

Seek feedback on the effectiveness of communication

Here are examples of situations in which supervisors followed up decisions that had been made to address issues. Follow-up is one way of checking if there have been any unforeseen problems and it provides information on how effective communication was at the time the decision was made.

Follow up agreed actions

A supervisor recently met with an older person about a complaint. At the meeting, actions were agreed to. Two weeks after this meeting, the supervisor checks if the decisions have been acted on and also makes a follow-up appointment with the older person to see if their issue has been resolved.

Collect data

Team leaders express concern about how much of their time with staff is spent supporting their personal issues. Their supervisor organises a trial to provide staff with access to an employee assistance program (EAP). Three months after the EAP has been running, the manager collates data on how many staff have accessed the service and asks team leaders to note if they are spending the same amount of time counselling staff.

Practice task 9

1. Describe how you could implement one of the review strategies to improve your own communication.

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2. Data is collected before and after bullying and harassment training has been offered to measure the number of reported bullying incidents in an agency. Explain two benefits of doing this.

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Click to complete Practice task 9

Summary

1. Communication needs may relate to physical abilities, cultural needs or emotional needs. Observe the person, and their role in the interaction, and provide support where required.
2. If language or communication needs exist, you may engage a translation or interpreting service. Engage a translator or interpreter appropriate for the person. Ensure they are accredited.
3. Communication barriers may relate to communication breakdown, conflict, language barriers, heightened emotion or physical ability.
4. Identify and address communication breakdowns. Early intervention will ensure the best result.
5. Conflict can occur as a result of a communication barrier. Defuse conflict in accordance with organisational requirements. Make a referral to a mediator or counsellor if required.
6. Feedback helps you grow. Seek and respond to feedback about your communication using formal and informal methods.

Learning checkpoint 2

Address communication needs

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in addressing the communication needs of clients, colleagues and external networks.

Part A

1. Identify three communication barriers you may identify when communicating with clients and colleagues in your workplace, and explain how you could address barriers.

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2. Identify three communication strategies that you could use to build and maintain relationships and trust with a client or colleague?

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3. Identify two interpretation and translation services specific to the client group you work with, and how to access them.

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Part B

Read the scenario, then answer the questions that follow.

Scenario

You have recently been appointed team leader to the community services department in a local council. The department supports people who are ageing and people with disabilities.

The team you manage has extensive experience and several staff members have worked in the department for many years. You have worked in the department for 18 months. A couple of staff members in your team are a little uneasy about your appointment. One staff member, Judy, shows her discontent in small ways, such as being sarcastic, coming late to staff meetings or by not responding to your requests.

This problem has now escalated because Judy has ignored an instruction that could have significant consequences. You call to ask her why she did not follow your instructions. To this, she raises her voice and tells you how qualified she is and how you do not value her skills. She finishes by saying, 'What would you know anyway? I've been working in this field since before you were born.'

1. Explain how you could defuse conflict with Judy and refer in accordance with organisational requirements if necessary.

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2. Describe two effective communication strategies you could use in this scenario.

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3. Describe how you could seek and respond to feedback on the effectiveness of communication with clients, colleagues and external networks.

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Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Develop an agenda and prepare to facilitate a meeting**
- 3B Communicate details of meeting in accordance with protocol**
- 3C Contribute to and follow meeting objectives**
- 3D Provide opportunities to explore issues**
- 3E Use strategies to encourage equal participation**
- 3F Identify and address communication needs of participants**
- 3G Facilitate conflict resolution**
- 3H Keep records in accordance with requirements**
- 3I Evaluate and improve meeting processes**

Facilitate meetings

Meetings are opportunities for people to express their views and concerns, and address specific issues. Meetings may be one-on-one, or may involve more people. You may facilitate meetings with people you support to develop their individualised care plan. You may facilitate meetings with staff members to address a workplace issue. There are many different meeting objectives.

Implement and use mechanisms and strategies that facilitate discussion and encourage people to participate in this process. It is useful to plan these discussions. Set objectives and prepare agendas. Review and improve the communication strategies you use when facilitating discussions to ensure you are meeting the needs of all involved.

3A Develop an agenda and prepare to facilitate a meeting

Meetings are an efficient and effective way to communicate with others. The key to a successful meeting is effective preparation and organisation. Having a clear meeting objective and structure will help the meeting run smoothly.

An agenda outlines the structure and intended outcomes of a meeting. The agenda is then circulated to meeting attendees before the meeting, to allow them time to prepare.



Develop an agenda

Using an appropriate template or procedure, develop an agenda so the meeting can run smoothly, even if it is an informal meeting. This allows you to present and receive information in an appropriate sequence and time frame. An agenda should be short (no more than one page) and simple. Items are generally numbered. They may have the name of each speaker and a time limit for each item.

An effective agenda:

- ▶ ensures all participants are adequately prepared for the meeting
- ▶ saves time during the meeting
- ▶ provides a focus for the meeting
- ▶ ensures each agenda item achieves the desired outcome.

Agenda format

The format of the agenda should be quite simple and easy to read. Keep the agenda to one page if you can.

Use agenda templates provided by your organisation. Alternatively, create your own. Keep headings clear and concise. You may use a table format so sections are clearly visible.

Circulate the agenda to all people attending the meeting. Allow participants enough time to review the agenda, and prepare documents they need to prepare.

Items in an agenda:

- ▶ Objective of agenda, such as 'Addressing WHS protocols'
- ▶ Date and time of meeting
- ▶ Location of meeting
- ▶ List of attendees
- ▶ Name of facilitator
- ▶ Agenda items, such as minutes, previous business, apologies, discussion and actions
- ▶ RSVP date and contact details

Consult appropriate people

Once the agenda has been developed, you should seek approval from your supervisor. The supervisor may give you feedback about the nature of the meeting, or the suitability of time and location.

Once the final agenda is approved, circulate it to appropriate people. You may send the agenda by email, or place it in staff pigeonholes. Ensure you have included an RSVP date and contact details, so attendees can let you know if they can or can't attend the meeting.



If attendees have feedback about the agenda, such as questions or suggestions, consult and make changes as required. You may also need to consult attendees about communication needs, such as visual aids they require.

Prepare to facilitate meetings

Facilitating meetings is more effective, and easier if you are well-organised. As well as preparing a clear agenda, ensure you have all the documents you need to run a meeting. Also ensure you have enough copies of each document, if you are planning to disseminate documents in the meeting.

If you are using visual material in your meeting, such as a slide projector, make sure you have spoken to an IT consultant or appropriate person about using the equipment. It is often worth arriving 30 minutes early to a meeting to make sure you have time to prepare.

Ensure that the location is suitable. There should be enough light, and ventilation. If attendees have special needs, such as requiring wheelchair access, ensure these needs are met.

Things you need to prepare for a meeting are listed below.

How to prepare for a meeting	
▶ Disseminate agenda	▶ Prepare documents
▶ Prepare room	▶ Check numbers of documents
▶ Prepare equipment	▶ Ensure refreshments are available
▶ Test equipment	▶ Check communication and other needs are met

Example

A formal agenda

<p>Warren Avenue Advocacy Group committee meeting</p> <p>7 February 2016</p> <p>7.00–9.00 pm</p> <p>Warren Avenue head office</p> <p>Meeting objective: Monthly update of program and planning for upcoming months.</p> <p>Attendance:</p> <p>Apologies:</p> <p>Approval of previous meeting’s minutes:</p> <p>Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Funding for staff training – Council response to letter <p>New business:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Planning for annual general meeting – Profile of potential service users to access service – Use of agency car <p>Reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coordinator’s monthly report – Treasurer’s report – Report from policy review subcommittee <p>Next meeting: 13 March 2016 at 7.00 pm</p>
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Practice task 10

1. What is the advantage of having an agenda for meetings?

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2. What is the most desirable length for an agenda?

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3. Who should you consult with prior to the meeting?

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4. What are three ways you can prepare to facilitate a meeting?

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Click to complete Practice task 10

3B Communicate details of meeting in accordance with protocol

Communication is an essential element of running a successful meeting. Before, during and after, communicate with all participants and other stakeholders, such as those affected by outcomes in the meeting.

Communication may be done by email, phone or face-to-face. Invite others to ask questions, clarify and provide feedback. If people are involved in the process, they are more likely to engage with the objectives of the meeting.

Follow your organisation's style guides and communication protocols when preparing reports before and after the meeting.



Document all information



An important part of distributing information and maintaining communication flow is to ensure agendas, minutes and any information discussed in a meeting is available as a document soon after the meeting or discussion. Make sure this information is in a form that is accessible to all participants.

Be aware of each participant's needs so everyone is treated equally. Remember to apply the full range of communication skills.

Make a list of tips you can give to someone planning a meeting that they can use to ensure people's individual needs are catered for.

Organisation communication protocols and style guides

Your organisation may provide a specific template to use for taking minutes, and collating a report about meeting outcomes. These templates should be used as they ensure consistency and quality and that ethical and quality standards and practices are maintained. Your organisation will have specific guides for preparing written communication and documentation. A large organisation is likely to have developed its own style guide.

Style guides may specify:

- ▶ the type of language to use (formal, informal)
- ▶ key information to include (date, time, location, name of facilitator)
- ▶ use of organisation logo
- ▶ use of organisation vision and mission statements
- ▶ whether documentation should be digital or printed
- ▶ anti-discrimination, equality and privacy standards and procedures.

Reports

Reports may be presented at meetings. They may also be used to summarise the outcomes of a meeting.

Reports are clear, concise and formal methods of communication. They are necessary for the accountability of an organisation, so must therefore be accurate and succinct.

Reports may be used in a meeting to collate and present information about a case, present statistics, outline key organisational objectives, review progress, review spending and summarise feedback.

Follow organisational procedures and style guides for developing reports for meetings. You should aim to meet particular standards.

Reports should be:

- ▶ clear and concise
- ▶ in line with organisational protocols and style guides
- ▶ organised into clear sections
- ▶ contain any relevant graphics, such as tables and graphs
- ▶ objective and factual
- ▶ referenced correctly
- ▶ dated
- ▶ authorised.

Example

Use a report to communicate meeting details

Here is an example of minutes prepared in accordance with an organisation’s communication protocols. The minutes have been written with a minimalist approach. They are a clear report of the purpose, outline and result of the meeting, but do not go into detail about the course of the discussion.

Meeting report	
Present:	Katie Jacobs, Layla Blue, Ronnie Dixon and Yu Chen
Absent:	Sue Lamond
From:	Rani Simon, Supervisor
Date:	16/03/2016
Subject:	Sustainability practices in the workplace
Ref:	Meeting minutes 00611
Details:	<p>Meeting began at 09:00 16/03/2016 as planned in the meeting room and George Street offices, Maryland.</p> <p>The following agenda was agreed at the start of meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Previous minutes ▶ Apologies ▶ Meeting outline ▶ Key sustainability issues and practices ▶ Required actions ▶ Follow up
Key sustainability issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Poor recycling management ▶ Excess food wastage ▶ Paper wastage in office ▶ Excess travel expenses
Key sustainability practices and actions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Implement new recycling management system. ▶ Address food wastage by developing meal plans. ▶ Collect data about office paper usage and brainstorm more effective methods. ▶ Collect travel data and brainstorm alternative transport options.
Follow up:	<p>Yu Chen and Ronnie Dixon will meet in a fortnight to present their data collection.</p> <p>Meeting scheduled for 20/03/2016</p>

Practice task 11

1. Why should meeting documentation align with organisational protocols and style guides?

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2. Provide an example of one way meeting documentation can comply with correspondence protocols and style guides.

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3. In what way are reports used in meetings?

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Click to complete Practice task 11

3C Contribute to and follow meeting objectives

Having clear meeting objectives assists with the flow and smooth running of a meeting. It helps all participants to have a clear understanding about the meeting objectives prior to the meeting. With only one or two clear objectives, the meeting is more likely to stay on track, and on time. If more objectives arise during a meeting, use strategies to clarify what those objectives are, and suggest they are addressed in another meeting.



Objectives should be specific. It may be tempting to address broad topics such as 'Improve care practices'. But the reality is, a meeting will be more effective if the objective is specific and focused. Focus on one aspect of a broad topic, such as 'Improve documentation of care plans' rather than 'Improve care practices'. This is more achievable and realistic.

Presentation strategies

Effective and careful planning will be a key component of a meeting's success. You must first identify what you want to achieve in the meeting so that you can select the right content and the most appropriate method for presenting that content. All meetings have a purpose, whether it is to provide information, or to persuade people to take a particular course of action or make a decision on a particular matter. The intended outcomes of the presentation are your focus in the planning stage.

Different presentation strategies are suggested below. Any combination of these strategies can be used.

Presentation strategies

PowerPoint – Used to present visual material, such as brief summaries of meeting content, graphs, figures and images

Verbal – Clear, organised verbal strategies can be used to discuss meeting objectives

Nonverbal – Use appropriate and friendly facial expressions and body language to emphasise what you are saying and build rapport

Documentation – Use documentation in conjunction with verbal strategies to emphasise material, or present data

Demonstration – Demonstrate certain skills in conjunction with providing information

Discussion – Encourage participants to discuss key points and ask for feedback

Communication strategies to use in presentation

To be a successful facilitator, there are communication strategies you can use when delivering presentations and leading the session.

Below are some communication strategies you can use in your presentation.

Communication strategies to use in your presentation

- ▶ Present clear, simple points, which closely follow the meeting objectives.
- ▶ Follow a meeting structure, so your presentation is organised and easy to follow.
- ▶ Introduce key points you will be presenting, present evidence in the presentation, and conclude with a summary.
- ▶ Deliver your presentation assertively and confidently.
- ▶ Speak clearly and audibly.
- ▶ Avoid using jargon and technical terms without explanation.

Meeting consensus

A consensus is an agreement. If a consensus is reached in a meeting, all participants generally agree on the outcomes and are satisfied.

For example, one of the objectives of your meeting may be making a decision about sustainability practices in the workplace. You may organise for participants to vote. This could be done as a ballot, where participants anonymously write their preferred decision on a piece of paper. The votes are then counted. Voting can also be done using a show of hands. Fair and equitable practices should be used to reach a consensus. Ensure that all participants have the adequate information to make a decision, and have the ability to contribute to the decision.



If a final decision is not reached, you may allocate time discussing how to address differences, and possibly develop new solutions.

Contribute to and follow meeting objectives

An important role when facilitating meetings is to keep the meeting on track. Have a clear agenda, and a clear understanding of the objectives before the meeting begins. A clear agenda and clear objectives help ensure the meeting is organised, and runs on time.

Keep an eye on the time throughout the meeting, and track the progress of the meeting against the agenda and the objectives.

Some topics may generate more discussion than others. If you find one section of the meeting is consuming too much time, you may suggest postponing the discussion for another meeting.

If participants go off-topic, use communication strategies to guide them back to the meeting objectives.

Communication strategies you can use when following meeting objectives are listed below.

Communication strategies

- ▶ Simply and clearly communicate objectives throughout the meeting.
- ▶ Ask participants if they understand what the objectives of the meeting are.
- ▶ Be assertive, using positive, confident language and tone of voice to keep the meeting on track.
- ▶ Ensure that all participants have the opportunity to speak about the objectives.
- ▶ Clarify the objectives if participants become confused.

Example

Follow meeting objectives

Narelle has been asked to facilitate a meeting about sexual harassment in the workplace. She has disseminated the agenda to all participants, who are all female. She has asked participants to bring any key evidence, and anecdotes of sexual harassment in the workplace to the meeting. She has also pre-warned participants that the meeting may be emotionally draining, and she has allocated a half-day of leave to all participants following the meeting.



Narelle starts by introducing the objective of the meeting, which is 'addressing sexual harassment in the workplace'. She asks participants if they are clear about what this means, and they all agree they are.

Narelle follows the agenda she sent to all participants. When it comes to sharing personal anecdotes, several of the participants are very engaged with their story. Some of the stories go off track, and participants start talking about personal issues relating to the perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Narelle realises it is a sensitive topic, but she needs the meeting to stay on track, and meet its objectives, which is to develop actions to address sexual harassment.

'I'd ask you all to stay on topic,' says Narelle. 'Shall we start brainstorming some actions we could take?'

The participants agree.

Practice task 12

1. Why is it useful to formulate and follow objectives and agendas for meetings?

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2. What two communication strategies could you use when following objectives and agendas?

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3. What two communication strategies could you use when delivering presentations?

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Click to complete Practice task 12

3D Provide opportunities to explore issues

To reach meeting objectives, you need to explore the issues in depth during the meeting. Engage participants to contribute to the discussion, and share their valued insight.

You may not have the time to explore the breadth of some issues in the meeting. Some issues will require further discussion. The meeting may initiate new discussion points. Talk with your team about suitable opportunities to explore issues further. These opportunities may be further face-to-face team meetings, individual meetings, online forums, group email circulation or letters.



You may need to use negotiation strategies to achieve optimal outcomes during the meeting, or after the meeting.

Explore the issues during the meeting

During the meeting, you need to use various strategies to ensure issues can be explored. All participants who want to contribute to the discussion should have the opportunity to do so. This means allowing the right amount of time for the discussion, based on the issue and the number of people present.

Be aware that some people in the group will be more reserved than others. Allow enough time for each participant to contribute to the discussion. If you have more participants, ensure the meeting objectives are very specific, and don't try to address too many issues in one meeting.

Ensure that participants with specific communication needs are supported, so they too have the opportunity to express themselves in the meeting.

As a facilitator, you need to:

- ▶ identify how long the meeting will last
- ▶ allocate enough time for participants to speak
- ▶ monitor each person as they speak to ensure no-one goes over their allotted time
- ▶ ensure that relevant information has been adequately presented
- ▶ encourage reluctant speakers to express themselves.

Validate participants' issues

Validation means confirming and supporting an individual's ideas and thoughts. Everyone should feel their contribution is valued. Someone may be hesitant to contribute if they suspect they are not believed or others think they have nothing of value to offer. You do not have to agree with what someone says, but you must respect their right to say it.

Consider the following issues when validating participants.

Validating all participants

- ▶ People have different perspectives about an issue.
- ▶ Incorporate all perspectives into the meeting.
- ▶ Address gaps in information by asking for input from others.
- ▶ Encourage people to contribute by stating at the beginning of the meeting that all ideas are valued.
- ▶ Active listening is a useful tool in validating people's issues and experiences.
- ▶ Show people you are listening by asking questions and using body language such as nodding and leaning forward.

Use communication skills to explore issues

As a facilitator, you need to use your communication skills to explore, validate and support any issues raised. There are many ways to explore issues in the workplace. It may be through an informal discussion or through formal mediation, which involves supporting two or more parties to reach an agreement in a one-on-one or group session.

Be objective, and use active listening skills. Be skilled at understanding different perspectives.

When exploring and seeking to resolve issues raised by participants, try to be impartial. You should never pre-judge or take sides. Sometimes, it is unwise for a facilitator to mediate if they are involved in the conflict. This is one of the reasons that you would engage an external, qualified mediator.



Explore issues safely

Provide a safe environment for issues to be explored in the meeting and guide participants to explore issues safely.

When working with others to address issues, you must:

- ▶ ensure the confidentiality of information shared by the parties involved
- ▶ ensure the information discussed is offered voluntarily
- ▶ ensure each party is willingly involved
- ▶ set appropriate rules and boundaries for the discussion
- ▶ ensure all parties agree with the proposed actions
- ▶ be impartial
- ▶ not contribute to negative actions.

Your role in exploring issues

A facilitator is a leader. You need to be assertive, and direct the progress of the meeting. You need to give all participants the chance to express themselves. You need to ensure participants are safe.

Here are appropriate goals for someone in your role when mediating an exploration of issues.

When exploring issues with staff or service users

- ▶ Establish the guidelines for communication and the process.
- ▶ Clarify and summarise.
- ▶ Facilitate effective communication.
- ▶ Assist parties to clearly describe the issue from their perspective.
- ▶ Intervene if communication is inappropriate; for example, to ensure parties do not interrupt one another.
- ▶ Test and challenge proposed agreements or actions; for example, by asking how a particular solution will work and if it is a realistic solution.
- ▶ Assist two or more parties in effective decision-making.

Explore the issues further

Issues may arise in the meeting that need further exploration. Participants may not reach a consensus on a point, for instance, and so negotiation is needed. You may need to engage an expert or your supervisor for additional input. Some issues may be too big for the length of the meeting, and so a second meeting may be called to follow up discussions.

Tips for exploring issues:

- ▶ Be realistic about how much information can be dealt with in one session. Hold another meeting if necessary.
- ▶ When working in groups, overestimate how much time it will take to discuss a particular issue.
- ▶ Reassure all participants that you are keen to hear all their ideas. Have a contingency plan if the discussion creates some interesting and valuable ideas.
- ▶ Avoid addressing complex issues in regular staff meetings. Set up specific meetings or working groups to deal with complex issues.
- ▶ Keep the discussions productive. If someone is getting stuck on one point, find ways to move them on.

Use communication strategies to negotiate for optimal outcomes

Negotiation is a structured discussion, which aims to reach an agreement. Meetings may raise contentious issues, which require you to use effective communication and facilitate negotiation skills. For instance, if you are meeting with a service user and their carer to discuss the person's individualised plan and the carer and the service user disagree on one aspect of the plan, you will need to use negotiation skills to help the parties reach a consensus.

Negotiation may occur between you and one or more participants. It may also occur between other participants, and you are required to facilitate the negotiation to achieve optimal outcomes.

Below are some reasons you may need to facilitate negotiations in a meeting, and communication strategies you can use to facilitate negotiations. Optimal outcomes are also listed.

Reasons for negotiation

- ▶ Reasons you may need to facilitate negotiation in meetings include:
- ▶ two or more participants disagree about one of the issues raised
- ▶ two or more participants are having difficulty communicating effectively
- ▶ a person feels they need further support
- ▶ a worker is negotiating a pay rise
- ▶ a worker is negotiating for better work conditions.

Communication strategies to use in negotiations

- ▶ Remain impartial and objective.
- ▶ Avoiding making a pre-judgement about a person or situation.
- ▶ Allow each party time to express themselves.
- ▶ Actively listen to participants, and encourage other participants to listen to each other.
- ▶ Identify the specific issue being negotiated.
- ▶ Identify the options.
- ▶ Identify common ground.
- ▶ Clarify and review options.
- ▶ Reach an agreement.
- ▶ Follow up with all parties to ensure all parties are satisfied with the outcome.

Optimal outcomes

- ▶ It may be challenging to reach a solution that everyone is happy with. An optimal outcome is the best possible outcome that can be achieved from the negotiation. The following are optimal outcomes:
- ▶ Both parties are satisfied.
- ▶ Both parties feel they have been heard and understood.
- ▶ Conflict is reduced.
- ▶ An opportunity for further negotiation has been planned.

Example

Provide opportunities to explore issues

Management at Westerway Community Care activity group have just received information from their funding body that all staff and volunteers must have a national police clearance within six months.

John, the team leader, has included this announcement as an agenda item at the regular staff meeting of his team. The meeting is an hour long and there are five other agenda items.



At the meeting, staff raise their concerns about how this will be implemented. People want to know why it is necessary and what will happen to staff members who have committed minor traffic offences.

John wants to provide an opportunity for staff to fully explore the issues but is also conscious that other agenda items need to be addressed in this meeting.

John tells the team that he values their thoughtful questions. He states he does not want to interfere with this issue being fully explored but he is conscious that there are other important agenda items to address.

John, in consultation with his team, appoints a group of four staff members to meet as a working group to explore the issues and report back to the team at a planning day in two months' time. John ensures that the staff members in the working group are those with a significant interest in the matter. He organises a small amount of backfill to enable the working group to meet without the pressure of time.

Practice task 13

1. What are two things you can do as facilitator to ensure meeting participants fully explore relevant issues and provide relevant information?

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2. What three communication strategies can you use to facilitate negotiation for optimal outcomes in meetings?

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Click to complete Practice task 13

3E Use strategies to encourage equal participation

Individuals have different communication preferences and skills, which may influence their participation in a meeting. Group dynamics and processes may also influence participation in a team meeting. Each person should have the opportunity to contribute their perspective without making others feel pressured to participate. Be aware of group dynamics and different communication styles and techniques, and learn to manage issues to achieve optimal outcomes.



Different communication styles and techniques

The way a person contributes to a meeting may depend on their individual communication style.

Communication styles may be related to personality, or to how the individual has learnt to respond in a group. They may be related to the group dynamics on that particular group. For example, a more introverted person may find it easy to express their opinion in a small, structured group. However, in a large group, with many vocal participants, that person may struggle to express themselves.

A person's personality, the group dynamics and a person's communication style may influence the communication techniques they may use.

Four common communication styles and techniques are discussed below.

Assertive

Assertive communication is the healthiest and most desirable communication style.

Assertive communicators stand up for their own rights and opinions while respecting the rights and opinions of others. They actively listen and respond effectively to the needs of others.

Assertive communicators:

- ▶ achieve their goals without hurting others
- ▶ are protective of their own rights and respect the rights of others
- ▶ are socially and emotionally expressive
- ▶ take responsibility for their own choices
- ▶ ask directly for their needs to be met
- ▶ accept the possibility of rejection
- ▶ accept compliments and constructive criticism graciously.

Aggressive

The aggressive communication style is about winning at the expense of someone else. It is an ineffective approach given the content of the message is usually lost because people are too busy reacting to the way it is delivered.

Aggressive communicators are generally hostile in their approach and often bully others into tasks, behaving as if their needs are most important.

Aggressive communicators may be:

- ▶ frightening, loud, threatening or hostile
- ▶ demanding and abrasive
- ▶ explosive or unpredictable
- ▶ intimidating
- ▶ difficult to work with.

Passive-aggressive

Passive-aggressive communicators put the rights, opinions and values of others above their own, or seem to. When dealing with a passive communicator it can be difficult to solicit accurate information because the client tends to defer to your expertise.

While passive communicators appear passive on the surface, they may be acting out their anger indirectly to deal with an underlying feeling of lack of power or resentment.

Passive-aggressive communicators may be:

- ▶ indirectly aggressive or resentful
- ▶ devious
- ▶ unreliable
- ▶ patronising or condescending
- ▶ two-faced
- ▶ pessimistic
- ▶ sarcastic.

Submissive

The submissive communication style is about pleasing others and avoiding conflict.

Submissive communicators behave as if other people's needs are more important than their own.

Submissive communicators may:

- ▶ be apologetic
- ▶ avoid conflict or confrontation
- ▶ find it difficult to take responsibility or make decisions
- ▶ yield to the preferences of others
- ▶ opt out
- ▶ feel or behave like a victim
- ▶ blame others
- ▶ refuse compliments or constructive criticism
- ▶ not express their feelings or desires.

Manipulative

The manipulative communication style is calculating, shrewd and scheming. Manipulative communicators are skilled at influencing others to their own advantage.

Manipulative communicators may:

- ▶ be cunning
- ▶ control others in insidious ways
- ▶ make others feel sorry for them
- ▶ use and express artificial feelings
- ▶ ask indirectly for their own needs to be met.

Work with groups

Understand the personalities within the group. This helps you encourage participation from all members. For example, some people are eager to participate in group processes, others need support and encouragement to assist them to participate. There will be various personality types present in each group.

Researchers have identified a number of personality types as described here.

The talker

Talkers have something to say about everything. If allowed, they will dominate the discussion and other members will not get to participate. The supervisor should aim to slow talkers down, not silence them. The rotation technique is effective with talkers. This means they have to wait their turn. You can also try gently interrupting and presenting your own ideas or calling on other members to present theirs. Start questions with statements such as 'Let's give those who haven't answered yet a chance'.

The silent one

For group discussions to be effective, all members of the group should participate. If members are silent, the group does not get the benefit of their input. It is the supervisor's responsibility to encourage silent members to participate without being obvious or overdoing it. To build up silent members' confidence, supervisors should call on them with questions they can easily answer or use a rotation method to get input by asking each team member in turn.

The wanderer

Wanderers distract the group from the agenda items and often like to complain. The supervisor needs to keep everyone on track. If the wanderer wants to socialise, regain their focus. Be kind, thank the member for their contribution, then ask others in the group a question to get discussions back on track. However, if the wanderer has a complaint that is legitimate and solvable, allow the group to discuss it and come up with a way forward. If the wanderer complains about irresolvable issues, the supervisor should make statements such as, 'You've got a point there but it's not something we can solve. Can we get back to the issue at hand?'

The bored one

There may be one or more group members who are uninterested in the task. They may be preoccupied, inattentive or fail to turn up for the meeting. They may feel superior and wonder why the group is spending so much time on the obvious. To keep people motivated, the supervisor can assign the bored member a task like collating information, recording ideas on the board or recording the minutes. Bring them into the group. If you allow them to sit back, things may get worse and others may decide not to participate either. Negative feelings can transfer to other group members.

The arguer

The arguer likes to be the centre of attention and enjoys arguing for the sake of it. The supervisor should resolve conflict but should not get into an argument with the arguer. Bring others into the discussion. If the conflict is personal, cut it off. Try to keep the discussion moving and minimise the opportunity for confrontation.

The shy one

Some people would like to participate but are too shy to speak up. They prefer to speak to one person rather than a group. They need to be encouraged and given positive signs that what they say is valued.

Group dynamics and processes

When facilitating meetings, it helps to be aware of how individuals within a group or meeting interact, and the effects this interaction have on other participants. This interaction is often referred to as group dynamics. Group dynamics are unconscious, psychological forces, or undercurrents, that influence behaviour and performance. Often people in groups adopt distinct roles and behaviours.

Dynamics are created by the nature of the work, personalities within the team, their working relationships with others and the team's work environment. Group dynamics can support team performance through positive behaviours, or hinder it through negative behaviours that result in unproductive conflict, mistrust and demotivation, for example.



Strategies to improve group dynamics

Teams or groups with positive dynamics trust one another, make decisions collectively, take responsibility for their individual and team performance and hold one another accountable. People's behaviours in groups with poor dynamics can disrupt work, impede decision-making and lead to poor choices.

Strategies for improving group dynamics

- ▶ Understand the phases of group development; Bruce Tuckman's (1965) stages of forming, norming, storming, performing and adjourning. Adjust your leadership style to suit the stage.
- ▶ Deal with problems quickly and fairly, and provide constructive feedback.
- ▶ Ensure that team roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.
- ▶ Keep communication channels open and clear.
- ▶ Watch for signs of poor group dynamics and respond with corrective action.

Strategies to encourage contributions

Use different strategies to encourage contributions, depending on the dynamics and communication styles of participants.

Strategies for encouraging participation

- ▶ Ask questions of specific group members who are less active.
- ▶ Pass a pen around the group. If a person is holding the pen, then they can talk.
- ▶ Split larger groups into smaller working groups.
- ▶ Give participants the opportunity to come to you before or after the meeting if they don't feel confident enough to share in the meeting.

Brainstorm

Brainstorming is a useful technique to encourage people to contribute. It gives them the opportunity to suggest as many ideas as they can without feeling they are being judged. Everything that anyone says is accepted and recorded. Sometimes you might need to pose a question to stimulate people if you find they have stopped contributing.

Below is a list of rules for brainstorming sessions, as well as ideas for running them.

Brainstorming rules

- ▶ People are told what the problem or topic is before the session.
- ▶ A leader is nominated to guide the session.
- ▶ All ideas are recorded, no matter how negative or ridiculous they might seem at first.
- ▶ No comments, discussion or criticism should be made about the ideas until the session is over.
- ▶ Respond quickly to any breaches of the guidelines.
- ▶ If you want everyone's feedback on an issue, give people time to prepare and ask each person to present for two minutes in the group forum.
- ▶ There must be time to review and evaluate the session.

Brainstorming ideas

- ▶ Divide a large group into smaller groups that report back to the large group.
- ▶ Use a round-robin approach.
- ▶ Have a pen or object that is held by each person as they are speaking.
- ▶ Meet with people individually prior to group meetings to get their ideas.
- ▶ Allow anonymous contributions.
- ▶ Have a rotating chairperson.

Encourage others to contribute by respecting different views

You have a legal and ethical obligation to treat everyone equally and ensure everyone is able to express their opinion.

It is essential that everyone is encouraged to contribute to all aspects of the meeting so the participants can explore different ways of solving problems, suggest improvements to work practices, and enjoy working together. A group, team or organisation that reflects a single view or perspective and is not encouraged to contribute may not develop or improve their performance. Opportunities for innovation may be lost.



Develop a culture that embraces diversity

If you are working in a supervisory role, you should try to develop a culture that embraces diversity and sees it as an opportunity to explore new ways of seeing and doing things. This involves encouraging everyone to contribute and share ideas.

Encouraging a contribution of everyone's views:

- ▶ Model acceptance and explore a wide range of views.
- ▶ Give participants the opportunity to express their views in meetings.
- ▶ Engage people in brainstorming and planning.
- ▶ Obtain feedback.
- ▶ Invite people to present information at meetings.
- ▶ Encourage people you support to have representatives on the committee.
- ▶ Encourage advocates or family members of the people you support to speak on their behalf if the individual cannot.

Acknowledge contributions

Acknowledge and validate all contributions shared in a meeting. Although you may not agree with the content, it is important to validate all contributions equally, in the interest of fairness and equality.

Acknowledging a person's contributions demonstrates that you have heard what they have said. It may give them the confidence to share in the future. The participant feels part of the process.

Ways to acknowledge contributions are listed below.

Acknowledge contributions

- ▶ Thank a person after they have finished talking.
- ▶ Summarise or paraphrase what was said.
- ▶ Respond to what was said.
- ▶ Ask questions, and ask others to ask questions.
- ▶ Provide follow-up and record what was said in the minutes.
- ▶ Thank all participants for contributing at the end of the session.

Example

Encourage equal participation in meetings

Grace is facilitating a meeting with Susan and Susan's daughter Joan. Susan is 80 and is interested in using the service. The objective of the meeting is the introduce Susan and Joan to the service, and present the organisation's procedures, expected outcomes and answer any questions.

Although Susan can communicate for herself, Joan does most of the talking. She asks Grace questions and interrupts Grace while she is talking. Joan is worried that the service is too small, and she feels her mother will be too isolated. Rather than listening to Grace's point of view, Joan continues aggressively.

Grace tries to stay calm and keep the meeting focused. Her main interest is meeting Susan's needs, and providing suitable information about the organisation so Susan and Joan can make a decision.

'Thank you for your enthusiasm, Joan,' says Grace. 'I can see you care a lot about your mother, and have a lot of questions. I just want to hear from Susan directly for a minute. Susan, do you have any questions about your own needs?'

Susan is pleased to be asked. She does have a few questions. The meeting runs smoothly after this.



Practice task 14

1. Explain why it is important to think about different communication styles and preferences when facilitating a meeting.

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2. Describe how group dynamics may impact a meeting.

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3. Identify two ways you can encourage participation from all members.

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4. Identify two ways you can acknowledge contributions from all members.

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Click to complete Practice task 14

3F Identify and address communication needs of meeting participants

People attending the meeting may have specific needs. It is important that you recognise and address specific communication needs, such as providing additional visual material, documents in larger text, or audio explanations of diagrams for those who are vision impaired.

Communication needs include:

- ▶ visual aids, such as larger text, or for those with vision impairments
- ▶ visual aids, such as written documents or images for people with hearing impairments
- ▶ translator for language barriers
- ▶ Auslan interpreter for hearing impairments
- ▶ interpreter for intellectual and learning disabilities.

Identify communication needs

When you know who is attending the meeting, find out if there are specific communication needs. If participants are people you have not communicated with before, you may need to ask if there are specific needs. You can ask this when you disseminate the agenda.

At the beginning of a meeting, make sure all participants have their needs met. Again, you may need to ask.

Some people may not tell you about specific needs. You will need to rely on your own observations.

Identify communication needs:

- ▶ If a person doesn't respond when you ask them a question, they may not have understood the question because of a language barrier.
- ▶ If a person is not participating, they may have not be able to hear the other participants.
- ▶ If a person is not participating, they may not be able to read the documents.
- ▶ If two attendees are in conflict, there may be misunderstanding due to a communication need.
- ▶ If a person is having trouble reading a document, they may have learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

Address specific communication needs

It is important to address an individual's specific communication needs when facilitating meetings. Once a need has been identified, find out from the person, or your supervisor, how to meet the need. You may need to engage a translating or interpreting service, or use visual or audio equipment during your presentation. In general, provide visual and auditory material in your presentation to accommodate for a range of needs.

The meeting is most effective if all participants have the opportunity to contribute.

Here are some examples of specific communication adjustments to make for individuals and groups.

Individuals

- ▶ Use aids and techniques for people who use alternative communication to speech.
- ▶ Make use of sign language and spoken language interpreters.
- ▶ Ensure written information is accessible and translated when required.
- ▶ Use specialists if you are unable to meet an individual's communication needs in a group setting.

Groups

- ▶ Plan group discussions in accordance with people's rosters and availability.
- ▶ Rotate group meetings so the same people are not always missing out.
- ▶ Allow people who are unable to attend to contribute to group processes.
- ▶ Ensure all participants can access the information or presentation method.
- ▶ Write documents in plain English to make them easy to understand.
- ▶ Consider the physical needs of participants.

Example

Identify and address communication needs of participant

A local advocacy group is holding a planning day. Participants in the planning day include staff, volunteer advocates, board members and people who receive advocacy assistance from the program. The planning day is to be facilitated by a recognised activist in the area of advocacy for the rights of older people and people with disabilities.

One of the participants, Antoinette, uses an electronic communication device to communicate. She types in what she wants to say and, on command, the machine repeats out loud what Antoinette has typed. It takes Antoinette longer to articulate her responses than other participants. Antoinette begins to formulate her response to a topic that is being discussed. It is taking her a little while to do so. The facilitator says, 'Let's just skip you for the moment and come back to you when you are ready'.

Other members of the group can't believe this. The facilitator is taking away Antoinette's right to communicate. Although she said she would come back to Antoinette's point, her actions imply that anything Antoinette wants to contribute is not significant enough to immediately impact the course of the discussion.

One of the supervisors of the program intervenes on Antoinette's behalf and says it is not appropriate to skip Antoinette, as what she has to say might be a pertinent issue about the topic. Antoinette must be given the same respect as others.



Practice task 15

Make a list of tips that someone planning a meeting can use to ensure people's individual needs are catered for.

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[Click to complete Practice task 15](#)

3G Facilitate conflict resolution

Conflict may arise in a meeting because of differences of opinion, different perspectives, communication barriers and personality differences. Where possible, defuse and respond to conflict straight away to minimise the blow out.

Be clear about the limits of your role and skills in managing issues. If an issue is outside the scope of your role or experience, you must refer the matter to your manager or to an external mediator.



Develop mediation and counselling skills

Your communication should be inclusive when you are dealing with issues that arise in the workplace. You should seek agreement from all parties involved to ensure ownership of any proposed solutions. For example, if the parties do not participate in and agree with actions proposed to resolve an issue, it is unlikely these actions will be successful.

Consider the following points about developing your mediation and counselling skills.

Strategies for developing skills

- ▶ To improve your mediation and counselling skills, watch experienced people in action.
- ▶ Ask questions, apply the new skills you have learnt and practise these skills.
- ▶ Find out about appropriate courses or training programs.
- ▶ Make sure you know your organisation's procedures for professional development.

Negotiation strategies for facilitating conflict resolution

When used effectively, communication can be used to explore and potentially resolve issues. Below are some ideas for communicating effectively to resolve issues, and considerations about the aims that you should take into account when facilitating conflict resolution.

Effective communication

- ▶ Ensure the confidentiality of information shared by the parties.
- ▶ Ensure the information discussed is offered voluntarily.
- ▶ Ensure each party is willingly involved.
- ▶ Set appropriate rules and boundaries for the discussion.
- ▶ Ensure all parties agree with the proposed actions.
- ▶ Be impartial.
- ▶ Do not contribute to the actions.

Communication aims

- ▶ Establish the guidelines for communication and the process.
- ▶ Clarify and summarise.
- ▶ Facilitate effective communication.
- ▶ Assist parties to clearly describe the situation and the behaviours.
- ▶ Intervene if communication is inappropriate.
- ▶ Test and challenge proposed agreements or actions.
- ▶ Assist two or more parties in effective decision-making.

Collaboration versus confrontation

Collaboration is working with others to achieve mutually agreed goals. Confrontation is hostility between opposing parties.

Meetings are more effective when they are collaborative. Participants feel at ease and comfortable in the space. They are happy to contribute to outcomes. Outcomes are more achievable because people are working together and sharing ideas.

Confrontation can inhibit productivity in a meeting. If people come into conflict, it can be difficult to resolve issues addressed in the meeting.

Confrontation may occur if there are opposing personality and communication styles in the group, or if people have differing views.

Encourage participants to work collaboratively by:

- ▶ encouraging empathy
- ▶ modelling respect and tolerance
- ▶ encouraging participants to work in small groups to brainstorm ideas
- ▶ encouraging participants to ask each other questions
- ▶ providing a safe, calm space with ample time.

Example

Facilitate conflict resolution

Laura has practised general nursing and psychiatric nursing. Her area of expertise is working with older people as a gerontic nurse. Laura has had significant involvement in supporting staff, older people and their families to deal with issues.



She says that when family members are concerned about the person in their family who is receiving care, it can be a very stressful and emotional time for everyone.

Laura has some techniques for supporting staff members to come to their own solutions when issues arise with a family member. Her first response is to offer them some time out in a private space to talk about their issues. She does this at a quiet time or when there are other staff to cover the workload for a short period of time.

If this does not work, Laura invites the staff members to a staff-only meeting she facilitates. Each person talks for five minutes at the beginning of this meeting, ensuring that staff are heard and have equal voice in the process. From there, Laura asks questions to clarify the experience of people and supports them to come up with agreed actions to resolve the situation. Conflict is avoided because there is no perceived support for one party over another.

Occasionally, Laura has worked with staff who are unwilling to engage in the process of mediation or who do not follow-up on the agreed actions of the meeting. In these situations, Laura seeks the involvement of her manager and implements the formal processes of the relevant grievance or disciplinary processes.

Practice task 16

1. Describe how you could facilitate resolution if conflict occurs between two participants at a meeting.

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2. Describe why collaboration is preferred to confrontation in a discussion.

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Click to complete Practice task 16

3H Keep records in accordance with requirements

Minutes are written records of a meeting. They are taken at the time of the meeting and must be made in accordance with organisational requirements, such as the style guidelines.

Importance of having accurate written documentation of a meeting:

- ▶ in case someone cannot attend the meeting
- ▶ to use as a reference in future meetings
- ▶ for accountability of the organisation and the participants involved.

Document all information

An important part of distributing information and maintaining communication flow is to ensure agendas, minutes and any information discussed in a group setting is available as a document soon after the meeting or discussion. Make sure this information is in a form that is accessible to all participants.



Meeting minutes

Informing people of the outcomes and actions of a meeting is an important part of communication flow. You must make sure minutes are brief, accurate, unbiased, clear and summarise the most important points.

Here are five steps to follow when preparing meeting minutes.

Preparing meeting minutes

Record all essential elements such as the type of meeting, the organisation, date, time, venue, the chairperson or facilitator, main topics and when the meeting finished.

Follow the sequence of items from the agenda.

Record the names of people who made suggestions.

Do not try to record every single comment. Concentrate on getting the main points of the discussion. Think in terms of issues discussed, major points raised and decisions made.

Do not wait too long to type up the minutes. It is a good idea to do this while your memory is fresh.

Action notes

Action notes are commonly used instead of minutes. They are a more informal way of recording what happened at a meeting or discussion. Action notes are used to highlight future actions. They do not record the detail of who said things but they accurately record what was decided. They provide a list of people's responsibilities in following up items.

Action notes are most effective when they:

- ▶ say just enough to explain the point
- ▶ state clearly every decision made
- ▶ identify who has agreed to do what, and when they will do it by.

Organisational requirements

As with all workplace documents, minutes must follow organisational requirements. This includes ensuring the minutes are recorded in the style required by the organisation, using the appropriate communication, and following confidentiality principles.

The information shared in meetings is subject to confidentiality. You cannot share details of your discussion with that person after the meeting if the information is personal or sensitive – unless you have that person's permission.

Organisational requirements to consider when keeping minutes are outlined below.

Organisational requirements of minutes:

- ▶ Appropriate style is used
- ▶ Appropriate template is used
- ▶ Language is formal and objective
- ▶ Spelling is accurate
- ▶ Writing is clear
- ▶ Confidentiality is maintained
- ▶ Minutes are stored and maintained according to requirements

Meeting minutes

These minutes record details of decisions taken at a meeting and also give details of issues raised.

Minutes	
<p>Time: 09:00 Date: 12/02/2016 Location: Room 101, Level 2, George Street Attendees: Blake Brown, Suellen Partridge, Eddison Ho, Carrie Gills Facilitator: Kate Hill, supervisor Apologies: Zoe Smith Meeting objectives: Regular team meeting to discuss team progress and address issues</p>	
<p>Introductions and apologies: Apology from Zoe Smith, who is unwell</p>	
<p>Review last week's business:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suellen received more salary than she was due - Eddison spoke to supervisor about getting literacy support 	
<p>Hand-washing procedures: Issues raised about hand-washing procedures. Kate Hill has complained that staff are not washing hands correctly before serving food. Participants reached consensus that hand-washing procedures have not been well communicated. Participants agree that hand-washing procedures should be demonstrated by staff at the beginning of next week's training date.</p>	
<p>Document handling: Eddison Ho reported that he received an incorrect document this week. Kate Hill is concerned about confidentiality breach. Kate has suggested training be provided. The team agrees that training would be useful. Suellen suggested that procedures should be taped to office wall. Team agrees this is a good idea.</p>	
<p>Medication review: Kate Hill reported that three medication errors were made last week. She is concerned about safety. Kate explained the importance of medication administration. A training date has been set for 1/2/2016.</p>	
<p>Questions: Eddison asked Kate whether a second training date for medication could be made, as he is on leave in February. Kate will check.</p>	
<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kate will check to see if there is another date for medication review available. - Suellen will organise procedures for handing documents to be taped to wall. - Kate will look into training dates for document handling and will advise. - Staff will undertake hand-washing training at next training day. 	
<p>Follow-up: Meeting scheduled for 19/04/2016 Time TBC.</p>	
<p>Signed: <i>Carrie Gills</i></p>	

Practice task 17

- 1. Find out what your organisation’s requirements are for keeping minutes and briefly describe the processes.

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- 2. Observe a brief conversation between two colleagues or other learners. Practice recording minutes of the conversation, such as who was in attendance, and a brief summary of what was covered.

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Click to complete Practice task 17

3 Evaluate and improve meeting processes

Evaluation is important for the development. It helps you identify what is working and what isn't, and identify what changes need to be made. Evaluate all aspects of their communication, including team meeting processes. Evaluation can be formal or informal and needs to be an ongoing process as things can change. Any formal presentation or group discussion should be evaluated to see whether it met the needs of participants. You must also review the methods of presentation, such as the presentation technology used.



Review your role as facilitator and meeting processes

Review your own skills as a facilitator. Self-evaluation will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas for improvement. Consider how well you prepare for a meeting, whether you give everyone a chance to contribute and whether the meeting goals are achieved.

Reviewing the meeting in general will help you identify how to run meetings more effectively, so meeting objectives are met. It may help meeting participants make improvements for future meetings. Consider whether meetings generally start and finish on time, stay on topic and if all attendees participate.

Here are some strategies you can use to review meeting processes.

Reviewing meeting communication processes

- ▶ Distribute formal evaluation forms at the conclusion of presentations.
- ▶ Facilitate 360-degree feedback.
- ▶ Regularly survey or get feedback from clients and their families.
- ▶ Get anecdotal feedback.
- ▶ Review participation, attendance and motivation of group participants.
- ▶ Meet with people one-on-one to ask for their feedback and evaluation.
- ▶ Independently review using an external facilitator.
- ▶ Monitor follow-up.

Collate and report evaluation results

Collate the information you obtain when conducting an evaluation. This may involve summarising evaluation forms and making a note of key improvements in an evaluation report.

Reflect on areas of your own development. Make a list of personal and professional development you could undergo, such as attending an interpersonal and leadership training course.

Identify areas where the team can make improvements.



Communicate lessons learnt and opportunities for improvement

Evaluation is most beneficial if you and others can learn from previous experience, and make improvements.

Sensitively inform others about evaluation outcomes. Be objective and specific. For example, if meeting objectives weren't achieved because of communication difficulties, address the specific difficulties that occurred and discuss options for improvements.

Provide sandwich feedback to others in a positive way. Sandwiching involves giving person positive feedback about their performance, then constructive feedback, and ending with positive feedback. If feedback is delivered negatively, the person may become confrontational and defensive.

Ways to communicate feedback and opportunities for improvement are outlined below.

Communicate feedback

- ▶ Team meetings
- ▶ Emails
- ▶ One-on-one meetings
- ▶ Informal conversations
- ▶ Feedback report

Improvement opportunities

- ▶ Face-to-face training
- ▶ Online training
- ▶ Individual supervision
- ▶ Attending conferences
- ▶ Journals and articles
- ▶ Role-plays and simulated exercises

Practice task 18

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Ruby has just facilitated the annual general meeting. It is the first time she has facilitated the AGM. She was quite nervous about the feedback, as she felt a bit nervous during her presentation, and during the meeting.

Ruby handed out feedback forms at the end of the meeting, and asked her colleagues to give her objective, constructive feedback.

Most attendees were very positive, saying the Ruby was warm and understanding, had a clear agenda and led the meeting well. One person, Tom, said that he had trouble hearing Ruby sometimes, because he has a hearing impairment. He also couldn't see all the slides because he was sitting behind someone tall.

1. How did Ruby evaluate her performance?

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2. How could Ruby use this feedback from Tom as an opportunity?

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Click to complete Practice task 18

Summary

1. An agenda is important for informing participants about the purpose, time and date of the meeting, and for helping people prepare.
2. Communicate details of the meeting to people who will be attending.
3. Develop clear meeting objectives, so that the flow of the meeting is smooth. Objectives help the meeting stay focused.
4. Support all participants to explore issues covered in the meeting. Be aware of group dynamics and different communication styles, and how they affect participation.
5. Identify and manage communication needs. Needs may relate to visual, hearing and comprehension requirements.
6. If conflict occurs, you need to manage conflict using effective communication techniques. Try to remain impartial and objective, and encourage people to see the other person's perspective.
7. Keep records such as meeting minutes in accordance with organisational requirements.
8. Evaluate meeting processes to identify where improvements can be made.

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2. How will you prepare participants for the meeting in accordance with organisational protocols, style guides and policies?

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3. Describe the strategies you would use to encourage people to participate in the meeting.

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4. How might group processes and dynamics and different communication styles and techniques impact participation in the meeting?

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5. Describe how you would facilitate the meeting to accommodate the individual needs of the participants.

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6. Explain why it is important to contribute and follow meeting objectives.

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Part B

Run a simulated meeting with your co-workers or other learners. You could use the scenario in Part A as an example, or you could develop your own meeting objectives.

Develop an agenda, or use the agenda from Part A. Disseminate the agenda to the meeting participants.

- 1. During the meeting simulation, make action notes about the discussion. After the meeting, type up the action notes as minutes.

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- 2. Develop a checklist to review the communication strategies you used to deliver the presentation, how you provided opportunities to explore the issues, and communication strategies you used to negotiate outcomes.

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3. Imagine that two of the participants disagree about one of the points that arise in the meeting. Describe how you would use different communication styles and a collaborative approach to facilitate the resolution of this conflict between participants.

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