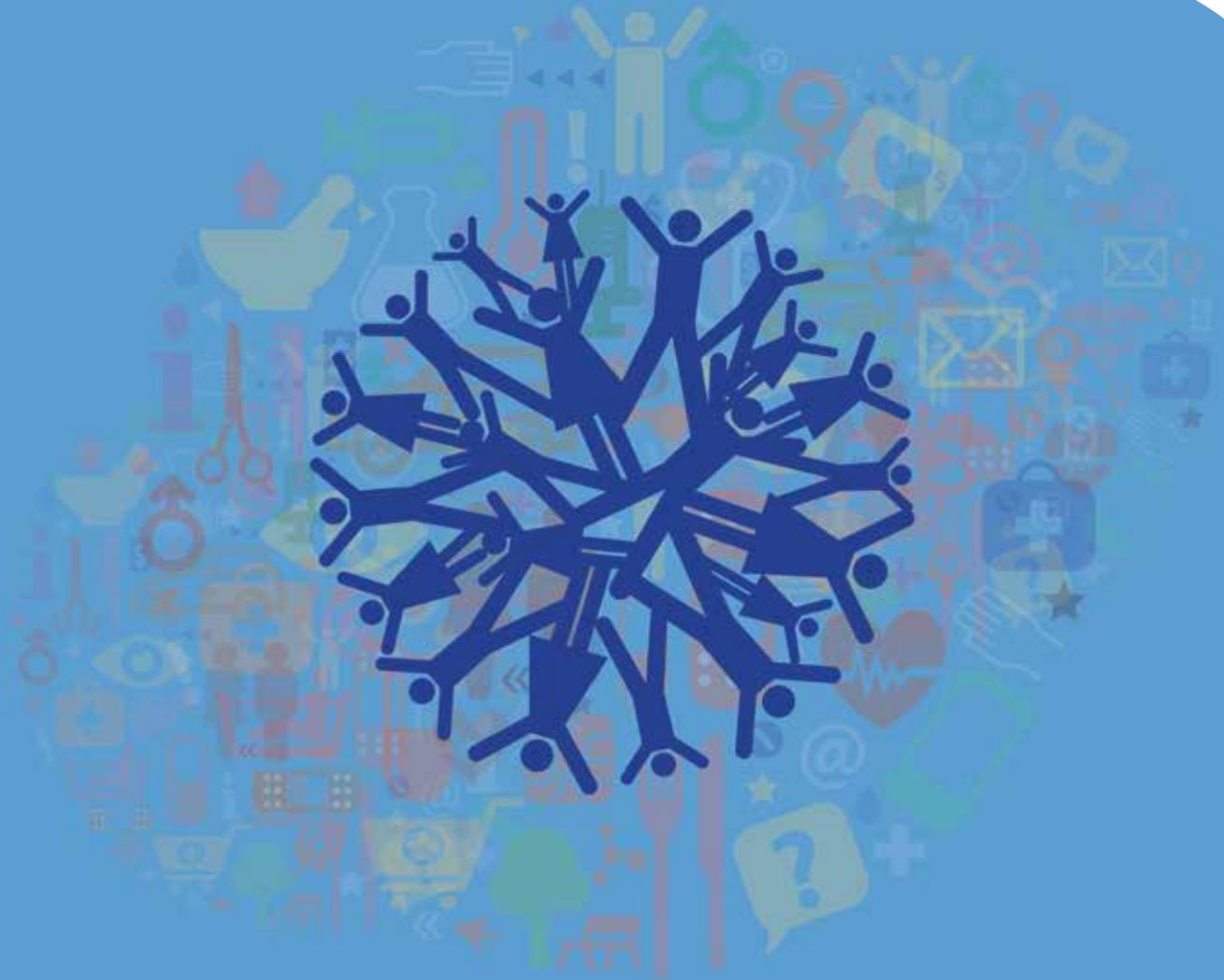


CHCCOM005

Communicate and work in health or community services

Release 2



Learner guide

CHCCOM005

Communicate and work in health or community services

Release 2

Learner guide

Aspire version 1.4



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Version	Release date	Modification
Release 2, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
Release 2, version 1.2	May 2018	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program
Release 2, version 1.3	December 2018	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program
Release 2, version 1.4	November 2019	Updated in line with changes to the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

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CHCCOM005 Communicate and work in health or community services, Release 2

© 2017 Aspire Training & Consulting
Level 1, 464 St Kilda Road
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Phone (03) 9820 1300

First published April 2017

Reprinted (with amendments) May 2018

Reprinted (with amendments) December 2018

Reprinted (with amendments) November 2019

Cover design Rewind Creative

Printer Doculink Australia Pty Ltd, 1d/28 Rogers Street, Port Melbourne VIC 3207

e-ISBN 978-1-76059-826-6 (PDF version)

ISBN 978-1-76059-824-2

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Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCCOM005 Communicate and work in health or community services*, 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 effectively with people	1A Use verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance understanding and demonstrate respect	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B Communicate service information in a manner that is clear and easily understood	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Confirm the person's understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Listen to requests, clarify meaning and respond appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1E Exchange information clearly in a timely manner and within confidentiality procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 2 Collaborate with colleagues	2A Listen to, clarify and agree time frames for carrying out workplace instructions	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Identify lines of communication between organisation and other services	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Use industry terminology correctly in verbal, written and digital communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2D Follow communication protocols that apply to interactions with different people and lines of authority	<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 Address constraints to communication	3A Identify early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations and report according to organisation procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Identify constraints to effective communication and resolve using appropriate communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Use communication skills to avoid, defuse and resolve conflict situations	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 4 Report problems to supervisor	4A Comply with legal and ethical responsibilities and discuss difficulties with supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	4B Refer any breach or non-adherence to standard procedures or adverse event to appropriate people	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	4C Refer issues impacting on achievement of employee, employer and/or client rights and responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	4D Refer unresolved conflict situations to supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 5 Complete workplace correspondence and documentation	5A Complete documentation according to legal requirement and organisation procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	5B Read workplace documents relating to role and clarify understanding with supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	5C Complete written and electronic workplace documents to organisation standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	5D Follow organisation communication policies and procedures for using digital media	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
	5E Use clear, accurate and objective language when documenting events	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 6 Contribute to continuous improvement	6A Contribute to identifying and voicing improvements in work practices	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	6B Promote and model changes to improved work practices and procedures in accordance with organisation requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	6C Seek feedback and advice from appropriate people on areas for skill and knowledge development	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	6D Consult with manager regarding options for accessing skill development opportunities and initiate action	<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 Use verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance understanding and demonstrate respect**
- 1B Communicate service information in a manner that is clear and easily understood**
- 1C Confirm the person's understanding**
- 1D Listen to requests, clarify meaning and respond appropriately**
- 1E Exchange information clearly in a timely manner and within confidentiality procedures**

Communicate effectively with people

Effective communication aims to achieve a shared understanding of thoughts and ideas through the exchange of information. How this information is exchanged and interpreted will vary greatly based on the skills and the knowledge of the participants.

It is important to remember that everyone has a unique communication style and that tailoring the message to the individual's needs will decrease the risk of misunderstanding.

Effective communication is tailored, clear, easily understood and employs active listening and clarification techniques.

In community services, the most important thing to remember when exchanging information is not to assume you understand or have been understood until you have taken the time to confirm the understanding is correct with each participant.

1A Use verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance understanding and demonstrate respect

Effective communication involves the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas from one participant to another, in order to achieve a shared understanding between the participants. The exchange of information takes place through different communication models, modes, types and techniques. The exchange will involve a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication.

It is important that you understand how language, culture, religion, ability and age can influence communication so that you can tailor your approach to your audience's needs.

Each person's communication needs and style is very personal and unique. You will therefore need to approach every exchange observantly and be willing to adapt your style to meet the needs of those you are exchanging information with.



Principles of effective communication

Effective communication employs a range of communication models, modes and types to ensure the information is presented and received in a way that will most effectively achieve a shared understanding of the subject matter.

The information below details the different models, modes and types of communication that should be considered when communicating in the workplace.

Communication models

- ▶ Linear model: describes the process of information being transferred in one direction from the source of the information via the transmitter, through the noise and then onwards through the receiver to the destination.
- ▶ Interactive model: describes the process of information exchange between participants. In this model each participant is both an encoder and decoder of information and the information transfer will be influenced by their field of experience.
- ▶ Transaction model: describes how people are connected through communication exchanges. This model acknowledges that each participant is both sender and receiver, that the message will impact all parties involved and that the receiving and sending of information can be occurring simultaneously.

Modes of communication

- ▶ Interpersonal mode: a two-way process of participants exchanging information, feelings and meaning through a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication.
- ▶ Interpretive mode: a one-way process of the participant deriving the meaning of the message through analysing written, oral and visual communication, within the context of the message and messenger.
- ▶ Presentational mode: the one-way presentation of information, concepts and ideas to an audience who must then interpret the meaning without opportunities to discuss and negotiate the meaning with the presenter.

Types of communication

- ▶ Verbal communication: the exchange of information through the use of sound and words.
- ▶ Nonverbal communication: the exchange of information through nonverbal means, such as gestures, tone, facial expressions and body language.
- ▶ Written communication: the exchange of information through written symbols that hold a common meaning for both the writer and the recipient.

Communication techniques

In order to communicate effectively in the community services environment you will need to use a range of communication techniques. Communication techniques can be used to optimise the exchange of information by meeting the communication needs of each participant and by expressing empathy, respect and cultural awareness.

The following information details some important communication techniques and their applications.

Open-ended questions

- ▶ An open-ended question is one that requires an explanatory answer rather than a 'yes' or 'no' response. It is designed to encourage the responder to give a full, detailed expression of their knowledge and feelings on the subject matter. Example: 'How do you feel about that change?'

Affirmations

- ▶ An affirmation is a genuine and supportive statement that is directed at a specific thought, comment or behaviour. These statements are used to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the subject matter. Example: 'That's a great way of putting it.'

Reflections

- ▶ A reflection is an interpretive statement that the listener will use to confirm that their interpretation of the message is correct. This technique is used to express empathy towards the speaker and allows them to feel that they are understood. Example: Jenny said, 'Everyone seems so slow at showering this morning'. Rob reflected, 'So you feel there is too much work to do and not enough time?'

Summaries

- ▶ A summary is a form of reflective listening where the listener summarises the main points of the communication to ensure that they have not missed any important information. This technique can be used to ensure accurate interpretation of information and also to close off one topic and lead into the next.

How language may influence communication

Effective communication results in a shared understanding of the matter discussed. For this reason the people having the conversation must share the same language, symbols and conventions in order to come to that place of shared understanding.

When communication fails, people will often refer to the other participant as ‘being from another planet’ or ‘speaking a different language’ even if the conversation took place in the same language. These terms express how language can become a barrier to effectively sending and receiving information.

A key role of any community services worker is to ensure that they tailor their message to the knowledge and abilities of the listener.

When tailoring communication it is important to take into account the language considerations below.

Language considerations

- ▶ The use of vocabulary, idioms and sentence structure
- ▶ The role of vision in receiving written information
- ▶ The role of hearing in receiving auditory information
- ▶ The role of education in the ability to comprehend writing and concepts
- ▶ The role of native language and use of a second language
- ▶ The role of health literacy in order to comprehend and respond to health-related information

How culture may influence communication

Australia is a multicultural society and according to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade over 200 languages are represented in Australia and about 15 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English. Workers and agencies must recognise and respond to individual and cultural differences in order to meet the needs of service users, families and staff members from various cultural backgrounds.

Cultural rules, norms and values affect how we communicate. Some cultures, for example, have rules about using eye contact or how you communicate with someone older than yourself. Sometimes, it may be appropriate to ask a language interpreter for advice. Alternatively, you may be able to locate an association for members of a cultural community. And, once rapport and trust is developed, it is often possible to ask the individual directly.

Techniques for culturally-aware communication include:

- ▶ using active listening to pick up on messages and cues people may be subtly communicating
- ▶ allowing time for interactions
- ▶ using empathy to try to understand the experience of the person you are interacting with
- ▶ working towards establishing a rapport and developing a trusting relationship
- ▶ checking if you are unsure what is acceptable
- ▶ not making assumptions
- ▶ treating each person as an individual with individual needs regardless of their culture.

How religion may influence communication

In any multicultural society religion can be a touchy subject that not everyone is comfortable discussing. Religious beliefs will impact communication in much the same way as culture, in that religious rules, norms and values affect how we communicate.

Some religions, for example, have rules about topics of conversation and who may be involved in those discussions. In the Muslim faith it is considered taboo to discuss death directly with a person experiencing a critical health condition.



In other religions it is forbidden to touch members of the opposite gender. For such people the use of nonverbal communication such as a non-sexual touch of a hand on the shoulder would be inappropriate and offensive.

There are no hard and fast rules about how to communicate appropriately with respect to religious beliefs. Each person should be dealt with individually, which will require you to tailor communication strategies, build rapport and ask the person about any taboo topics or special requirements.

How emotions may influence communication

Have you walked down the street and seen someone who was sad and then you experienced sad feelings? Or perhaps you've seen a scary movie and felt scared as you watched the frightened expressions of the faces of the characters? The reason that this happens is because human beings experience interpersonal bonds with each other, and these bonds make emotions transferable from one person to another.



The emotional state of the person communicating a message may change the nature of the message. For example, John was feeling angry about his cat dying. When John spoke to Susan about cleaning up their office, Susan could tell that John was angry. Susan then interpreted that John's anger was due to her making a mess of their shared office.

The emotional state of the recipient may also influence the interpretation of the message if it is received by someone who applies those feelings to the message. For example, Cheryl is feeling anxious. Liam asks Cheryl to attend a meeting in his office. Cheryl interprets Liam's message to mean that she has done something wrong and that she is in trouble. Liam is actually going to promote her, but her anxiety has influenced the way she has received his message.

It is important that when you are communicating that you take into account these interpersonal bonds and the way in which our emotional state may be influencing those around us, and vice versa.

How disability may influence communication

When communicating with a person who has a disability it is important to first of all remember that they are a person, and that they have the same right to dignity and respect as anyone else.

A person's disability can influence communication in many different ways, depending on how their condition impacts upon their vision, hearing, speech, cognition and mobility.

Here are some important factors to consider when communicating with someone who has a disability.

Vision impairment

- ▶ When you greet a person who has a visual impairment make sure you identify yourself.
- ▶ If you are having a group discussion you should identify who you are directing a question towards by using their name as a vocal cue; for example, 'Sarah, what do you think?'
- ▶ Always give verbal warning about any physical movement that is about to take place in the person's immediate surroundings. For example, 'I am just going to bend down and pick up that pen for you'.
- ▶ Always announce when a conversation is over and you are leaving.

Hearing impairment

- ▶ When speaking to someone with a hearing impairment, face them directly and speak clearly and slowly using a natural tone.
- ▶ Ensure that the person is wearing hearing aids and that they are in working order.
- ▶ Use written communication wherever appropriate.
- ▶ Provide actions and visual cues wherever appropriate.
- ▶ Raise your voice when necessary but never shout, as shouting can distort sound.

Speech impairment

- ▶ When speaking to someone with difficulty speaking it is important to take an encouraging and non-corrective approach.
- ▶ Be patient and allow time for reflections and confirmation of their message.
- ▶ Don't ever pretend to understand if you don't. Instead repeat questions and break them down into short questions.
- ▶ Pay careful attention to body language and reactions to help your understanding.

Cognitive impairment

- ▶ Mental health conditions may include depression, anxiety, psychosis, dementia and other conditions that affect a person's ability to understand information and how it applies to them.
- ▶ It is important to remember that sometimes people with cognitive impairments won't be able to tell you what they need or that they don't understand.
- ▶ Make sure you use consistent verbal and nonverbal communication.
- ▶ Watch the person's body language and make sure that they feel safe, comfortable and unhurried in their attempt to communicate with you.

Mobility impairment

- ▶ When communicating with a person who has a mobility impairment, be aware that their mobility aid is a continuation of their personal space.
- ▶ Moving a person's mobility aid away from them can create a sense of disempowerment and distress.
- ▶ Offer the person a seat and sit to match the person's body language and talk to them at eye level.

How health may influence communication

A person's health can influence their ability to communicate information to others, receive information from others and impact upon the relevance and meaning of the messages they are receiving.

Consider the following health-related communication factors:

- ▶ Is the person on any medications that alter cognition (such as opiates) that may make them drowsy and confused?
- ▶ Does the condition impact the person more at a certain time of day?
- ▶ How quickly does the person fatigue from interactions?
- ▶ Does the person have a power of attorney that should be present?
- ▶ Is the information relevant in the context of the person's wishes and prognosis?
- ▶ What is the health literacy of the person and will they be able to understand the message?

How age may influence communication

When communicating with an ageing adult it is important to be aware of age-related issues that can cause a breakdown in communication. This includes but is not limited to:

- ▶ hearing impairments
- ▶ visual impairments
- ▶ memory loss
- ▶ loss of ability to read
- ▶ loss of comprehension.

It is also important to be aware of how age can be a barrier to communication due to misunderstanding and prejudice. Many older adults feel patronised and disrespected by the way younger workers communicate with them. To avoid unnecessary communication breakdown it is important that you talk with people and not to them; avoid pet names such as ‘darling’ and ‘dear’; present information in a clear concise way; and present the available options and allow the person to make choices about their health and personal care.



The importance of grammar, speed and pronunciation for verbal communication

Verbal communication can be useful for quick information transfer and feedback. However, when using verbal communication it is important to understand the influence that grammar, speed and pronunciation will have on the intended message.

Below is an explanation of pronunciation, grammar and speed of speech.

Pronunciation

Word pronunciation is essential for clear communication, especially with an audience that uses English as a second language. Incorrect pronunciation will often drastically change the meaning of a message and lead to misunderstanding, confusion and sometimes even offense.

Pronunciation is the thing that a person will notice the most when using verbal communication. Poor pronunciation in English can lead to prejudice and judgements about education. While these prejudices may be unwarranted, it is important to understand how poor pronunciation can decrease the credibility of a message.

Grammar

Grammar is important for structuring sentences and for placing emphasis on certain words in such a way that it conveys what the key points of the message are. Misuse of grammar can change the meaning of a sentence and communicate an incorrect message.

Speed of speech

The speed of verbal communication can be used to convey feelings of urgency, excitement and anxiety. It is important to be aware of how the speed of your voice may express these emotional states to your audience. It is also important to be aware that for population groups who have difficulty with hearing and comprehension, the faster you speak the less they will understand, and the more confused and distressed they may become.

When and how to use and recognise nonverbal communication

Research into human communication has shown that words alone account for as little as a tenth to one half of the total effect and perception of the message that is received. This means that nonverbal communication plays a significant role in all human interactions.

In order to communicate effectively you will need to become skilled in watching and interpreting other people's nonverbal behaviour. You will also need to be aware of your own nonverbal behaviour and how that can impact on the message you are trying to get across.

The following information details nonverbal communication strategies and shows examples of how they may be used.

Body language and posture

Patrea folded her arms across her chest to reinforce that the answer was still no and that she would not change her mind.

Evasive eye contact

Nadia avoided making eye contact because she was uncomfortable with the confrontation.

Hand gesture

Tony waved his hand as he dismissed the matter to reinforce to Amanda that the mistake didn't matter and that she should stop worrying about it.

Reassuring touch

Jason placed his hand on Donald's shoulder to remind him that he was standing close by and would not let him fall over.

Respect the rights and responsibilities of others

An essential part of a community services worker or coordinator's role is to work in a manner that is respectful of others. This includes people accessing care, workers, people from other agencies, your supervisors and managers. Respect for others can be demonstrated through behaviour, attitude, language and activities.

You may be guided by your own sense of ethics, the policies and procedures of your employer, or the standards of a member organisation.

The Australian Community Workers Association's Code of ethics can be found at <http://aspirelr.link/acwa-code-of-ethics> and includes the obligation of the worker to demonstrate respect for people accessing services.

Here are some ways in which you can demonstrate respect to others.

Ways to demonstrate respect to others

- ▶ Promote dignity, choice and empowerment.
- ▶ Advocate, lobby for and represent the needs and rights of people accessing services.
- ▶ Use inclusive and appropriate language to describe individuals, population groups and others.
- ▶ Involve people accessing services in planning for their development.
- ▶ Listen carefully to others and check for understanding of communication.
- ▶ Ensure the physical environment of the agency provides access to individuals with diverse needs.
- ▶ Ensure the professional and appropriate presentation of workers.
- ▶ Seek consent appropriately.
- ▶ Keep individuals informed and at the centre of services.
- ▶ Seek regular feedback and participation from people accessing services.

Example

Use verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance understanding and respect

Here are some examples of how to use nonverbal and verbal communication to enhance understanding and demonstrate respect.

Verbal communication

Sibella is an eighty-year-old lady with moderate dementia who attends an activity at the local day centre once a week. On good days Sibella enjoys herself and chats with the other ladies at her lunch table. On not so good days she becomes disorientated and distressed. The workers at the day centre find that by talking in a calm, gentle tone and using short reassuring phrases such as 'It's okay, Sibella. You are at the day centre. Lunch will be here soon. Everything is fine' that they are able to reorientate her and calm her down using verbal cues.

Nonverbal communication

Terry is a ninety-year-old man who has Parkinson's disease and lives in a care facility. Terry requires assistance from workers to get in and out of his chair and to walk. Terry cannot follow verbal instructions to help him to stand. Sometimes he becomes distressed when workers try to help him get out of his chair. By putting his walker in front of him and purposely patting it the workers can remind Terry what he is trying to do. Once standing, Terry becomes confused if the workers stand facing him and start talking, so instead one of the workers walks forward for two metres and then turns, smiles and gestures with their hand for Terry to follow. Another worker holds him and the walker, and takes a step in front so that Terry can see the action and follow along.

Practice task 1

1. What are five ways that you can demonstrate respect when communicating with or about someone who is receiving care?

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2. What are some examples of nonverbal communication?

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3. What are some strategies for providing culturally appropriate communication?

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Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Communicate service information in a manner that is clear and easily understood

Those who work in the community services sector interact daily with people who come from a range of backgrounds and have different communication needs. For example, many people do not have high levels of academic qualification and many speak English as a second language; some have additional communication needs, such as those who communicate through signing or have limited cognitive skills. It is therefore important that community services workers are able to communicate important service information in a manner that is clear and easily understood.



Use clear communication

It is very easy for communication to break-down, be misinterpreted or only partly understood. Clear communication is required to ensure that the message that is received is well understood by the recipient.

The following information provides strategies for achieving clear communication in the community services environment.

Clear purpose

Make sure that the idea or main purpose of the message is clear. It may be necessary to limit the amount of information and the number of ideas contained within the message so that the main point does not become diluted.

Keep it brief

Only include essential information and use the minimum amount of words necessary to effectively get the point across.

Solid facts and vision

Make sure your message contains the essential facts and imagery necessary to convey the essence of the main idea.

Correct information

Make sure the information is the most correct and up-to-date version of the information.

It makes sense

Ensure that the information is logical and relevant to the main point of the message and follows a reasonable sequence.

Don't leave things out

Make sure you provide all of the important information that is required to make an informed decision.

Consider the person's needs

Use open, transparent communication that takes into account the individual needs of the listener. Leave out any confusing language such as jargon.

Tailor the communication to meet individual needs

When delivering community services information it is important that you tailor the communication to the needs of the person receiving that service. This includes consideration of the method of delivery, the content, the frequency of the message and the skills of the person receiving the information.

For some people you may need to try a few different approaches in order to get the information across. For example, you may verbally describe a service and also leave a brochure or fact sheet that the person can read over once you are gone.

Regardless of the approach that you choose, it is essential that you carefully observe the verbal and nonverbal communication of the person to ensure that they have correctly understood the information.

The following outlines important factors that should be taken into consideration when communicating service information.

Method

- ▶ Information should be simple and clear and may be delivered by written information, visual demonstrations and audible instructions.

Content

- ▶ The amount of information provided should be relevant, engaging and easily understood by the audience.

Frequency

- ▶ Depending on the nature of the content, the information may need to be delivered only once or many times over to achieve the desired result.

Example

Communicate service information clearly

Roger works as a community services worker and is meeting with Mrs Brown to discuss some important service information.

Roger knows that receiving a lot of information all at once can be confusing and overwhelming so he wants to keep it to the necessary information only.

Roger uses clear communication and avoids using jargon when he advises Mrs Brown that the service is free, occurs weekly and provides home assistance with cleaning and shopping.

Roger also leaves a service brochure that goes over the finer details and conditions of the service so that Mrs Brown has all the information required to make an informed decision.



Practice task 2

1. What are five strategies that can be applied to achieve clear communication?

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2. What are four important factors that should be taken into consideration when tailoring service information to an individual?

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Click to complete Practice task 2

1C Confirm the person's understanding

Communication is a two-way process that requires a message to be passed from one participant and received and interpreted by another. Sometimes an interpreted message might not represent the intended message that was being communicated.

There are many factors outside of your control that may influence a person's interpretation of your message, such as competing demands, insufficient knowledge, emotional states and prejudice or bias. Although you cannot control how the person interprets the message, you can provide clarification if their understanding of the message differs from your meaning.



Confirm correct interpretation

Checking that a message was not just received but correctly interpreted is an important part of efficient communication. You can check the other person has understood by asking a series of investigative questions. If the responder can't easily or quickly provide an accurate summary for you, then it is safe to assume you have not been clearly understood and need to provide further communication on the matter.

Some ways to check understanding:

- ▶ Ask the receiver: 'Can you please tell me what you just heard?'
- ▶ Ask the receiver: 'Can you please repeat that back to me in your own words?'
- ▶ Ask the receiver: 'What does that mean to you?'
- ▶ If an action is required then ask the receiver: 'What steps are you going to take next?'
- ▶ If the message needs to be passed on then ask the receiver: 'How will you explain that to the others?'
- ▶ If the message was a process then ask the receiver: 'Can you please tell me the steps of the process?'
- ▶ If the message was detailed then ask the receiver: 'I just want to make sure I covered all of the information, can you please summarise the main points for me?'

Example

Confirm understanding

Justin is the manager of a busy community care service. Last week Justin received an important service update that would significantly impact all of the service areas.

Justin held a meeting with his team supervisors Joanne and Fung to discuss the changes.

Justin told both Fung and Joanne that in two weeks' time the service's online system was going to be down for maintenance and that all departments would need to cease online service for a twenty-four hour period.

Justin wanted to check each of their understanding and followed up the issue with them separately.



Justin asked Fung, 'What are you going to tell the rest of them team?'

Fung replied, 'That tomorrow our online service will be down for two weeks'.

Justin immediately realised that Fung had not correctly understood the message. Justin re-enforced that the service was only going to be interrupted for one day and confirmed the date that the event was taking place. Justin then asked Fung to summarise the main points that needed to be communicated at the next team meeting. This time Fung repeated all of the correct information and Justin knew he had been understood.

Practice task 3

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

Case study

Corrine works as a community services worker and provides care to Mr Simmons.

There have been some recent service changes that will affect all of the people who receive support from Corrine.

Corrine's manager has directed her to individually inform each person of how the changes will impact on them.

On her next visit, Corrine takes her time explaining each change to Mr Simmons. She informs him that his weekly service will change to a fortnightly service at the end of the month.

1. What are four questions that Corrine could ask Mr Simmons to ensure that the service information has been correctly understood?

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2. What are some factors that could influence how Mr Simmons interprets the information?

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Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Listen to requests, clarify meaning and respond appropriately

Effective communication is a dynamic exchange of thoughts and ideas. Each person brings different knowledge, experience and feelings to the exchange that can alter the information being expressed and interpreted. The only way you will ever know if you have been understood by the other person is if they confirm the message back to you. Likewise, you can never really know that you have understood a message until you have sought clarification on your own understanding.

Good communication is a whole body response that tells the speaker that you are listening, that you care about them and that you believe that what they have to say is important.

By actively listening to requests and clarifying meanings you will be able to get the most out of each exchange and respond appropriately every time.



Active listening

Listening is important and achieves a number of functions. Being a good listener demonstrates that you value the other person, which helps to build a rapport and enables the development of a trusting relationship.

The two key features of active listening are paraphrasing and summarising. Paraphrasing is where you reflect back the content and the feelings of what the other person has expressed to check that you have understood their meaning. Summarising involves repeating what the person has said in a few words to let the person know you understand their position. Ask if you have correctly paraphrased or summarised an issue.

Here are some tips to help you listen actively.

How to listen actively

- ▶ Briefly recap the speaker's message in your own words.
- ▶ Soften your summary with phrases like, 'You feel ...', 'It sounds like you ...', 'You think ...', 'It seems to you that ...'
- ▶ Try to use paraphrasing statements more than questions.
- ▶ Allow sufficient time and pauses for the speaker to add to what they are saying.
- ▶ If more than one feeling is expressed, focus on the last or most prominent one.
- ▶ Do not add or ask for any new information.
- ▶ Use neutral words, body language and tone of voice.

Self-awareness and listening

Good listening requires a high level of self-awareness. We often engage in listening, but only really take in and comprehend a small portion of the information. Good listening requires us to give our full attention; to avoid distractions such as mobile phones or a person walking past; and to do all of the following all of the time.

Use body language

- ▶ This indicates to the person speaking that they still have your attention, and that you are actively engaged in listening to what they have to say. Body language, such as smiling, nodding your head or facing the speaker, reinforces the nonverbal message, 'You have my attention, and I am focused on you'.

Do not interrupt

- ▶ People need to have the opportunity to speak without interruptions. However, your skills are needed to determine when the person is repeating themselves or taking up too much time at the expense of other parties; if this happens, you need to find the right moment to stop them.

Defer judgment

- ▶ Hold off on responding until the end of the person's speech, both verbally and mentally. If you make judgments part way through, you may become biased towards only hearing the parts that reinforce the judgment you have already made.

Clarify meaning

Working in a community services environment can lead to many conversations where the information discussed is difficult or hard to understand. Information may be hard to understand because the person speaking to you has memory loss or difficulty with speech, or perhaps they learnt English as a second language and are reverting back to their native tongue as they age. Regardless of the reason for the difficulty, it is important for all workers to acknowledge that they won't always understand the needs and requests of the people who they provide care for and will need clarification.

Clarification is a communication process where the listener repeats the information back to the speaker in order to check that they have correctly understood what was said. Clarification is a useful tool to reduce misunderstanding and also to express empathy and genuine interest in what the speaker is saying.

The following information provides different clarification methods and examples of their use.

Open questions

Open questions should be used to gather more information and give the speaker the opportunity to fill in any missing details.

Examples:

- ▶ 'Can you please tell me how you would like me to do this?'
- ▶ 'Can you please explain what is happening?'
- ▶ 'Can you please tell me more about what is happening?'
- ▶ 'Can you please repeat that for me?'

Closed questions

Sometimes people you care for will have limited ability to communicate beyond single step responses. Asking a series of 'yes' or 'no' questions may help clarify what the person wants and needs.

Examples:

- ▶ 'Do you want me to do this?'
- ▶ 'Would you like to go there?'
- ▶ 'Would you like something to eat?'
- ▶ 'Are you uncomfortable?'

Summary

Once you feel that you have understood the message you should repeat a summary of the key points back to the speaker to confirm the understanding is correct. It is important that you are willing to listen and be corrected if you have misunderstood.

Example:

- ▶ Jamie: 'So what I'm hearing is that your cookie jar is empty and you need me to go to the store to buy you some more cookies immediately?'
- ▶ Emily: 'Yes. That is correct.'

Respond appropriately

As a community services worker it is important that you respond appropriately to the information you are receiving. Your response is a combination of your verbal and nonverbal language and any actions that follow.

You will need to be aware of how you are positioned and what your body language is saying, and that it is consistent with the verbal response you are giving so you don't confuse the message. For example, if you say, 'Yes, I believe you', but smirk and roll your eyes as you end the conversation, then the message the person is actually receiving will be more along the lines of, 'I don't believe you and I'm just agreeing so that you stop talking'.

Sometimes communication will require a follow up action and other times it may not. It is important that the reason for the communication is clear so that you respond appropriately. For example, if Mary tells you that she doesn't like the way her daughter is talking to her, she may want empathy and acknowledgement or she may want you to arrange a family meeting to discuss relationship issues.



If Mary just wants empathy then she is not going to appreciate you breaching her confidence and telling her daughter that they have unresolved issues.

If you are unsure of how to appropriately respond to a message, then it probably means you need further clarification about what is wanted and expected of you as a direct result of the communication.

Example

Listen, clarify and respond

The following demonstrates how to listen to requests, clarify meaning and respond appropriately.

Listen to requests

Rachel is a community services worker for Mrs Rogers. Mrs Rogers said to Rachel, 'It is just so terrible to lose your memory and not know what certain words are or where you left the paper'.

Rachel actively listened by rephrasing what Mrs Roger said. 'Yes, it must be very frustrating to not be able to remember where you have put things.'

Rachel made sure she used neutral words, body language and tone of voice to allow Mrs Rogers to fully express her thoughts and feelings on the matter.

Clarify meaning

Jonathon is recovering from brain surgery. As a result of the surgery Jonathon has limited ability to communicate beyond single step responses. Amelia is a community services worker who provides his care. She understands that Jonathon finds it difficult to communicate his needs, so she takes extra time and asks closed questions to help clarify the messages he is trying to get across.

This morning Jonathon was pointing at his bedside table. Rather than just bringing something from the table to him, Amelia asked:

'Do you want something on the table?'

'No.'

'Are you hungry?'

'Yes.'

'Would you like something to eat?'

'Yes.'

By clarifying the meaning of Jonathon's gesture, Amelia was able to provide exactly what Jonathon wanted.

Respond appropriately

Zoe is a community services worker who provides care to Mr Singh. Mr Singh is very upset that the laundry has misplaced his pyjama pants. Mr Singh tells Zoe he is very upset with the system and doesn't understand how it has happened.

Zoe faces Mr Singh, keeps her body language open and her face neutral and acknowledges his frustration.

Zoe feels unsure if Mr Singh is telling her the story because he expects her to fix the matter.

Zoe politely seeks clarification by asking Mr Singh if there is anything that he would like her to do about the situation. He says no but thanks her for offering.

Practice task 4

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

Case study

Ingrid is a community services worker in a large team. Ingrid’s team attends a weekly team meeting to discuss important service changes and give an area report.

Ingrid was offended by something her supervisor Sandra said as this week’s meeting. She felt like Sandra was saying that all the other service areas were doing well and that Ingrid’s service area was under performing.

When Ingrid was giving her service update she felt like Sandra wasn’t even listening and that when Sandra did respond her responses were not related to the information Ingrid was providing.

At the end of the meeting Ingrid was unsure what follow up actions she should do next and didn’t even know what the point of the meeting was.

1. What are some active listening techniques that Sandra could use to let Ingrid know that her thoughts and ideas are important?

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2. What are two open questions that Ingrid could use to clarify what Sandra said about her service area?

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3. What factors should Ingrid consider in order to respond appropriately to Sandra’s information?

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Click to complete Practice task 4

1E Exchange information clearly in a timely manner and within confidentiality procedures

As a community services worker you will often receive requests, or see the need for, additional services that are outside the scope of your role. This may include arranging more help at a person's home, referring the person on to a health professional or passing information on to someone else at the individual's request.

Regardless of the reason that you need to pass on information, it is important to be aware of the ethical, privacy, confidentiality and legal considerations regarding information disclosure.

The way in which you handle and pass on a person's information will have a direct impact on access and quality of care. It is therefore important that you are able to exchange information in a timely manner that complies with the confidentiality procedures of your workplace.



Share information with other agencies

Often when supporting an individual it is necessary to work with a range of other agencies. An individual (or their representative) must give consent before any information is shared with or accessed from another agency. Most community organisations gather this consent using a specific form. Consent is given for access to particular information for a particular purpose; often the specific workers within the agency receiving the information are also named.

The information that is shared between agencies may include:

- ▶ information to enable referrals
- ▶ incident reports
- ▶ individual plans and goals
- ▶ information about individual needs.

Example

Obtain consent to share information

Consent forms may vary in name and format between agencies. Here is an example consent form that needs to be completed to disclose an individual’s information to another service.

Baymore Disability Services

Consent to disclose information

I Jacqueline Foster (full name of client or representative) of

27 Vasey Court, Wynvale SA, 5098 (address)

consent to Baymore Disability Services disclosing information pertaining to me to

Outer South Respite Service (name of agency) for the purpose of

referral/application for respite funding.

Specific details of information (if required):

Nature of disability

Personal care needs/supports and equipment required

Contact details

Current home situation

Financial details (including current disability packages/funding)

Limitations (if required):

None

Client: Jacqueline Foster (name)

Jacqueline Foster (signature)

20 December 2013 (date)

Witness: Kaye Green (name)

Kaye Green (signature)

20 December 2013 (date)

Ensure communication maintains confidentiality of personal information

Under privacy legislation individuals accessing care and community services staff have the right for their personal information to be kept confidential. Information that must be kept confidential is any information that identifies a person; whether by using names, addresses, date of birth or by description of identifying attributes. Workers must be aware that even if they are being careful to avoid using names in order to maintain confidentiality, a description of the individual or staff member may provide enough information to identify a person.

To protect privacy and maintain confidentiality follow these guidelines:

- ▶ Do not discuss personal details of a person accessing care to staff who are not involved in dealing directly with the person accessing care.
- ▶ Always follow your organisation’s procedures for obtaining written consent to disclose the individual’s information.
- ▶ Do not disclose personal details about a co-worker to others without their consent.
- ▶ Do not provide a co-worker’s personal phone number or email to a person accessing care.

- ▶ Ensure you have a valid reason for collecting, storing or distributing any personal information.
- ▶ Keep personal information in locked filing cabinets and password-protected electronic files.
- ▶ Limit the amount of written records that are removed from the organisation.

Exchange information clearly and in a timely manner

Most workplaces will have a standardised protocol for handing over information so that nothing is left out by chance. It is important to find out what handover forms and verbal information are required in your workplace.

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) recommend that health facilities use the ISOBAR tool for the clinical handover of information.

The following information details the meaning of ISOBAR and adapts how to use this process to exchange information in a clear and timely manner. The version provided below is an adaptation only. If you are required to use ISOBAR in a clinical setting please refer to the original format noted on the ACSQHC website. Your workplace may not use ISOBAR at all; however, the principles can be applied to all kinds of information exchange.

I – Identify

- ▶ Introduce yourself (role/job) and the individual receiving care (name, date of birth, age, gender).

S – Situation

- ▶ Briefly explain the reason for the information exchange, including relevant details about the person's main issues and service needs.

O – Observations

- ▶ Pass on any clinically relevant assessments or objective information that will assist the other person to better meet the needs of the individual.

B – Background

- ▶ Provide details on any relevant background information.

A – Agree on a plan

- ▶ State what you would like to happen as a result of the information exchange.

R – Read back

- ▶ Provide a summary of the main points of the information exchanged.

Example

Exchange information clearly and timely within confidentiality procedures

Po-shun works as a community services worker for a large business that provides many different services. As part of his care role, Po-shun regularly provides written and verbal referrals to workers in other services within his workplace.



This week Po-shun rang the podiatrist (Jenna) to arrange for Mrs Elliot to access the podiatry service. Po-shun handed Mrs Elliot’s information over in the following exchange:

‘Hello Jenna, this is Po-shun from community services calling about an individual who already accesses our service. The person’s name is Mrs Cynthia Elliot.

Mrs Elliot is a diabetic and I noticed this morning that she is developing ulcers on her feet that will require a podiatry review.

I am sending through some photographs of the current state of her feet. I will also send through her current medical history and medication list.

I would like to arrange an appointment for her to see you as soon as possible.’

Once Jenna confirmed Mrs Elliot’s appointment time, Po-shun then summarised the call and clarified that Mrs Elliot had an upcoming podiatry appointment to assess her diabetic foot ulcers.

Practice task 5

1. What are some ways that you can maintain privacy and confidentiality when exchanging information in your workplace?

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2. What important information should you provide to ensure that you exchange information clearly and in a timely manner?

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Click to complete Practice task 5

Summary

1. Effective communication involves the sharing of information, thoughts and ideas from one participant to another, in order to achieve a shared understanding between the participants.
2. Effective communication employs a range of communication models, modes and types to ensure the information is presented and received in a way that will most effectively achieve a shared understanding of the subject matter.
3. A key role of any community services worker is to ensure that they tailor their message to the knowledge and abilities of the listener.
4. Nonverbal communication makes up a large percentage of the overall message in any communication exchange.
5. You need to become skilled in watching and interpreting other people's nonverbal behaviour and your own.
6. It is important that you are able to communicate important service information in a manner that is clear and easily understood.
7. Using clarification to check that a message was not just received, but correctly interpreted, is an important part of efficient communication.
8. By actively listening to requests and clarifying meanings you will be able to get the most out of each exchange and respond appropriately every time.
9. It is important that you are able to exchange information in a timely manner that complies with the confidentiality procedures of their workplace.

Learning checkpoint 1

Communicate effectively with people

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in communicating effectively with people.

Part A

1. Why is word pronunciation important for effective communication?

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2. Why is grammar important for effective communication?

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3. Why is the speed of speech important for effective communication?

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4. How can body language be used to demonstrate respect to the speaker and show that the listener is paying attention?

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5. When and how can closed questions be used to clarify the meaning of a message?

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- 6. What are four examples of closed questions that could be used to clarify the meaning of a message?

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- 7. What important factors should be considered in order for a person to respond appropriately to information?

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Part B

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

Case study

Rhonda works in the community as part of a team that assists people with activities of daily living and personal care tasks. As part of her role Rhonda needs to communicate service information to the people she provides care to and their significant others. Every week Rhonda assists an eighty-year-old man named Jack with his showering and grooming.

Jack and his family are always muddling up his various services and becoming concerned that he is being billed incorrectly. To decrease the confusion Rhonda has arranged a small family meeting to go over the service information and address their concerns.

- 1. How can Rhonda use verbal and nonverbal communication in the meeting to enhance Jack's understanding and demonstrate respect?

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- 2. What are the three possible communication models that Rhonda could apply to her communication?

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3. What are the three possible communication modes that Rhonda could apply to her communication?

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4. What are the three possible communication types that Rhonda could apply to the family meeting?

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5. What are four communication techniques that Rhonda may use at the meeting in order to communicate effectively?

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6. What information should Rhonda be aware of regarding how language may affect communication?

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7. How can Rhonda communicate in a way that shows awareness of Jack's cultural and religious beliefs?

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8. How might Jack and his family’s emotional state affect the communication at the family meeting?

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9. What are some ways that Rhonda can improve her communication with members of Jack’s family who have hearing impairments?

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10. How might Jack’s health influence how and when Rhonda chooses to communicate with him?

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11. What information should Rhonda be aware of regarding how age can affect communication?

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12. How can Rhonda demonstrate respect when communicating with Jack and his family?

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13. What are some examples of nonverbal communication that Rhonda may choose to use?

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14. What strategies can Rhonda apply to achieve clear communication regarding the service information?

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15. What important factors should Rhonda take into consideration when tailoring service information to Jack's family?

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16. What questions could Rhonda ask to check that the service information has been correctly understood?

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17. What are some factors that may influence how Jack interprets Rhonda's message?

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18. What active listening techniques could Rhonda use when listening to requests from Jack's family?

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19. What clarification techniques could Rhonda use to ensure that she has understood what Jack's family is trying to communicate?

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20. What information does Rhonda need to be aware of in order to exchange information clearly and in a timely manner on Jack's behalf?

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21. What type of information will Rhonda need to communicate in order to exchange information clearly and in a timely manner on Jack's behalf?

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Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 2A Listen to, clarify and agree on time frames for carrying out workplace instructions**

- 2B Identify lines of communication between your organisation and other services**

- 2C Use industry terminology correctly in verbal, written and digital communications**

- 2D Follow communication protocols that apply to interactions with different people and lines of authority**

Collaborate with colleagues

Working in the community services environment involves communicating and being part of a team. You will be both part of the team within your own organisation and also part of the greater community services sector.

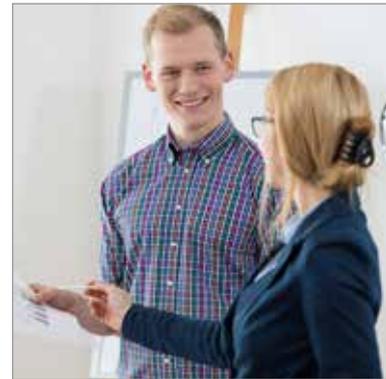
It is important that as you complete your day-to-day tasks that you are aware of how your communication, quality of work and the time frames in which you complete tasks will impact upon the rest of the team and an individual's quality of care.

It is important that you follow the communication protocols in your workplace and apply them to your own work and the other community services that you interact with.

2A Listen to, clarify and agree on time frames for carrying out workplace instructions

Working in the community services environment requires a collaborative team approach where everybody contributes in a timely and efficient manner. Often quality initiatives will involve a series of steps that require different workers to respond within a set time frame. If one of more person fails to complete their tasks within the specified time frame, the whole team suffers as other people cannot complete their own work or finalise the required actions.

At times workers may complete their work within the specified time frame only to find that they have misunderstood the instructions and not delivered the actions that were required of them.



The failure to deliver the correct actions within the set period of time will result in an expensive and inefficient workplace. It is therefore important that whenever you are given a responsibility at work that you clarify the work instructions and agree on set time frames for completing tasks.

Clarify workplace instructions

The first step in understanding workplace instructions is to use an active listening approach towards the speaker giving you instructional information.

Once you have received the instructions it is important to clarify your understanding before you complete any potentially incorrect follow up actions.

Clarification requires the listener to never assume that they understand the speaker until the speaker has confirmed that the listener's understanding is correct.

The information below provides an example of clarifying a workplace conflict. Clarifying conflict ensures you have a full understanding of what has been happening from the perspectives of both parties involved. In many conflict disputes, people's perceptions drive their actions and thoughts. Remember that perceptions may be different for each person, and that neither party may be seeing the reality of the situation.

The following process does not just relate to conflicts, and can be applied to any information in the workplace that requires clarification.

Prompting

Ask questions or provide prompts to encourage each person to clarify the information they are providing you. Remind the person that it is okay to say if they do not remember something, and that saying they do not remember is preferable to making up a response.

Questions

Here are two examples of clarifying questions:

- ▶ 'I'm confused about the sequence of events – can you tell me again what happened first?'
- ▶ 'When you say you put the car in its normal place, do you mean in the staff car park?'

Don't interrupt

It can be useful to save clarifying questions and statements until the person has finished speaking, as it can sometimes be frustrating or confusing if you interrupt someone before they have finished. Jot down reminders for yourself if needed. You may discover that if you finish listening to everything they have to say, you do not need to clarify anything after all.

Reframing

Reframing is a complex communication technique that takes time and practice, as well as a certain degree of calm and level-headed thinking in potentially difficult situations. Reframing is a process where you change the perception of a situation in which a behaviour or communication exchange is occurring.

Agree on time frames for carrying out instructions

Setting and agreeing upon work task time frames can be a demanding and frustrating job. Often different areas will have competing priorities and demands on their workers and resources.

Agreeing upon a time frame should be done with careful consideration regarding what can be realistically achieved within a set period of time. Underestimating the time required to complete a task can create unnecessary stress in the workplace.

The information below details important factors that should be taken into consideration when agreeing on time frames in your workplace.

Time frame considerations

- ▶ The number of workers required
- ▶ Competing workplace priorities
- ▶ The current workload already scheduled for the given period of time
- ▶ The cost of completing the work
- ▶ The cost to the workplace if the work is not completed within a given period of time
- ▶ The start date
- ▶ Any midpoints or milestones
- ▶ The finish date
- ▶ How much work can realistically be completed in the given period of time
- ▶ Whether the work is supported by all supervisors and relevant managers

Example

Clarify and agree on time frames for workplace instructions

Andrew and Petalyn are area managers of different sectors within the same community service. Last week they were told by their manager, Aitor, that they must help develop and roll out a new service-wide policy.

Aitor asked the managers to schedule a meeting and designate roles and time frames for carrying out the instructions.

Petalyn actively listened to Aitor while he was speaking and then clarified her duties by summarising back the main points of the conversation.

Once Aitor had confirmed that Petalyn understood the instructions, she then met with Andrew to agree on the work time frames.

Andrew advised that his area currently had three other projects that would all be finishing within the next two months. Given these competing demands he didn't feel that his team could commit to anything else within the same time frame. Petalyn agreed and suggested that they set the start date of the time frame for the period after the existing works were completed. Together they mapped out and agreed upon realistic time frames for the different stages of the policy development and delivery.

Practice task 6

1. Why is it important for workers to clarify instructions and agree on time frames to complete actions?

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2. What are some strategies that you could use when clarifying workplace instructions?

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3. What are important considerations when agreeing on work task time frames?

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Click to complete Practice task 6

2B Identify lines of communication between your organisation and other services

As the community services sector comprises many sub-sectors or areas of community work, it is useful for a worker to have a broad understanding of the different parts that make up the sector. An understanding of the whole sector enables workers to make effective referrals and to work in partnership with different service providers to better meet the needs of individuals and communities.



For example, while many individual health needs can be met within an organisation, some needs are specific to a particular area of service and will require communication with other services.

Identifying lines of communication between your organisation and other services will therefore enable you to provide a more collaborative and effective response to a person's health needs.

Community services sectors

Within community services there are a number of sectors that cater for a diverse range of needs. It is important to have a good general knowledge of other services and the correct communication lines to access those services. Some services will accept self-referrals from individuals, some will require a written request from a health professional and others will be happy with a verbal handover.

It is important that you use the forms and methods required of each sector in order to meet privacy and confidentiality legislation and to enable continuity of care for the person receiving care.

The following information describes some possible community services sectors that you may need to be aware of.

Aged care

Provides support for older people in their own homes, in the community and within specific residential facilities.

Services include residential services, day programs, respite, home-based services, advocacy, case management, leisure and recreation.

Disability services

Provides services to people with physical disabilities, neurological disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities and autism spectrum disorders.

Services include case management, accommodation, employment, day programs, independent living skills programs, recreation, respite, advocacy and early intervention.

Alcohol and other drugs

Provides support for people who are impacted by drugs and alcohol.

Services include counselling, residential rehabilitation, case management, accommodation, harm-reduction supports, information, advocacy, crisis intervention, outreach and youth-specific services.

Family and domestic violence

Provides services and support to families affected by domestic violence. Support may be available to individuals who have been violent.

Services include emergency housing, legal services, counselling and court support services.

Mental health

Provides services to people with mental illness including, but not limited to, schizophrenia, major depression, anorexia and bulimia, bipolar and obsessive-compulsive disorders, and anxiety disorders.

Services include case management, group programs, personal support, accommodation, independent living skills, advocacy, crisis assessment, mobile and residential care, and early intervention.

Housing

Long-term and short-term housing support for people of different circumstances.

Services include emergency and transition housing, bond relief, assistance securing rental housing and rental assistance, advocacy, access to public housing and accessible housing for people with disabilities.

Youth work

Provides information and support to young people. The age limits for what is defined as 'youth' varies between agencies and departments.

Services include accommodation, case management, independent living skills, information and training.

Children's services

Provides care for children in a range of settings from birth until the end of primary school.

Services include long day care, family day care and out-of-school-hours care.

Child protection

Provides intervention to support children (and their families) who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

Services include foster care, adoption, group residential care, supervised access, case management, assessment and therapeutic services.

Employment services

Assists job seekers (in particular individuals with barriers to employment) to be job ready and secure employment.

Services include case management, job readiness and pre-vocational training, support with job seeking, support for parents returning to work, and apprenticeships.

Structure, function and interrelationships in the community services system

The community services system is made up of a combination of publically funded and privatised services. Sometimes the private providers will also offer free or subsidised services depending on public funding arrangements.

The community services system works closely with the health system to provide both health services and community support for people needing assistance.

Health services funding is primarily provided by state, territory, local and federal government. However, health insurers, local charities and corporate grants may also contribute to health services funding.

The community services system functions as a collaborative holistic person-centred approach to health care and support. Service providers are encouraged to work in inter-professional models that ensure each worker views a person in respect to the entirety of their health and community service needs, so they are dealt with according to a person's goals and choices.



My Aged Care

Effective as of 2015 the Australian Government has helped to streamline the collaborative inter-professional management of the ageing Australian.

The My Aged Care website and contact centre is part of the Living Longer Living Better aged care reform and is designed to be a one-stop shop for navigating the aged care system. The service has been designed to give people more choice, more control and easier access to a full range of aged care services.

The information below details some of the different health services that My Aged Care can assist with.

Community support services

- ▶ Help with housework
- ▶ Help with personal care such as bathing and dressing
- ▶ Help with meals and food preparation
- ▶ Help staying physically active
- ▶ Counselling, social support and activities

- ▶ Help with transport
- ▶ Nursing care
- ▶ Allied health support such as physiotherapy and podiatry
- ▶ Home modifications and maintenance
- ▶ Goods and equipment to maintain independence

Example

Lines of communication between community services

Zain is a physiotherapist in a community services environment. Margaret was referred to Zain for assessment and management of her back pain.

Zain discovers that Margaret is a morbidly obese diabetic who has been recently widowed and is not coping at home with the loss of the support services package that her husband received.

Although Margaret is only there to see Zain about her back pain, he also wants to make sure that the health system is taking care of Margaret's greater health needs too.

Zain obtains informed consent from Margaret to refer her to other health services. He refers her to a dietician for diabetic nutritional information, an occupational therapist for a home assessment and modifications, and a social worker for grief counselling and support services planning.

Zain makes sure that he uses the required referral forms and provides each service with all the relevant information to enable them to provide Margaret with the best possible care.



Practice task 7

1. What are the community services sectors that workers should be aware of?

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2. Describe the structure, function and interrelationships in the community services system.

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3. What are the support services that a worker may refer a person to?

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Click to complete Practice task 7

It is important that you are aware of the following different approaches so that you understand the terminology relating to different roles and the service provision that applies to them.

Developmental

- ▶ A developmental approach to community services focuses on providing pathways and safe entry levels for individuals and communities to engage. Developmental approaches have a preventative focus.

Participatory

- ▶ A participatory approach focuses on building on knowledge of communities, and relying on and strengthening community resources. It is a collaborative approach to community services, working with communities as partners.

Community development

- ▶ Good community development helps people to recognise and develop their ability and potential, and organise themselves to respond to problems and needs that they share. Community development focuses on the empowerment and self-determination of communities.

Community education

- ▶ Community education aims to educate individuals and groups through formal and informal methods to provide learning and social development work. Community education also aims to integrate schools and adult education institutions within their communities to help individuals and communities tackle issues through joint action and community-based learning.

Case management

- ▶ A case manager's role is to work with individuals by planning and goal setting; assessing the individual's needs and supporting the individual; coordinating others to implement activities that meet set goals; and monitoring and evaluating the options and services required to meet the individual's needs.

Advocacy

- ▶ Advocacy is about representing a person or community who needs support to uphold their rights and help them to speak out. Often advocacy also involves providing information and resources.

Inter-agency

- ▶ An inter-agency approach to community work involves a group of agencies, often multidisciplinary, working in partnership to provide coordinated, integrated and flexible services to enable a holistic approach to service provision.

Example

Use industry terminology correctly

Lydia has just started working in the community services environment and has noticed that sometimes it seems like the people around her are speaking a different language. Her supervisor Scott has reassured her that it takes time to get used to the industry terminology. Scott advised Lydia that the most important thing is to never pretend to understand something if she is unsure of the meaning and to always clarify her understanding with himself or a fellow worker.

Last week at a staff meeting Scott was reminding his team of the importance of advocacy in the provision of holistic health care. Lydia didn't know what meant and took Scott aside after the meeting to request that he explain the term 'advocacy' to her.

Scott explained that advocacy is about representing a person or community who needs support to uphold their rights and help them to speak out. Lydia clarified her understanding by asking whether her role incorporated advocacy by providing information and resources to people. Scott confirmed that it did and that Lydia now correctly understood what advocacy meant within the context of her new workplace and role.



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Practice task 8

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

Case study

Leroy is a community services worker and is required to complete electronic progress notes regarding the care he provides to people.

Leroy's supervisor Shannon has noticed that Leroy's documentation sometimes includes incorrect terminology that could lead to confusion when read by other workers.

Yesterday Shannon met with Leroy and asked him to explain what he meant when he documented 'Mr Todd independently managed his medications from the pack'. Leroy explained that Mr Todd had a container that divided the medications into individual sections for the morning and afternoon of each day of the week.

Shannon explained to Leroy that what he was describing was a medication or pill organiser and that it was a memory support aid to help people manage their medications. Shannon also explained that incorrectly documenting the medication organiser as a 'pack' may lead to other workers believing that Mr Todd could independently manage his medications straight from the medication boxes. As Mr Todd's form of medication organiser requires staff to manually dispense his tablets into each section this misinformation may have negatively impacted on Mr Todd's care.

Shannon encouraged Leroy to clarify industry terminology in future before logging an entry in the progress notes.

1. What are some sources that Leroy could refer to when he is unsure of the correct industry terminology?

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2. What are some other verbal, written or digital communication methods where Leroy would be required to use correct industry terminology?

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3. What are three examples of service approaches that Leroy might need to be aware of to understand the industry terminology related to different roles and service provision?

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Click to complete Practice task 8

2D Follow communication protocols that apply to interactions with different people and lines of authority

Every community services sector has procedures related to managing workplace communication, and protocols regarding how information is managed. It is important that workers understand information that is being provided and to seek clarity when required. Accurate information management underpins quality service provision.



Most sectors have formally documented protocols and informal expectations regarding how information is managed and the lines of authority which it must pass through. These lines of authority are sometimes known as ‘governance structures’ or ‘operational lines’. The role of these lines is to ensure that information and issues pass through a chain of people in an order that will enable the information to be dealt with at the most appropriate level.

Not every piece of information needs to go straight to the chief executive officer (CEO) and instead will need to be communicated to the correct person. For example, if you run out of pens and need a purchase order approved, then it is highly inappropriate to ask the CEO to sign the form if your supervisor has the authority to manage those kinds of operational issues.

It is therefore important that you are aware of and follow the communication protocols in your workplace.

Authority lines

Authority lines are a systematic approach to quality and decision making within an organisation. Through delegating different levels of authority and responsibilities to certain workplace roles, an organisation can create an authority line through which information can be communicated up and down the line. The aim of the authority line is to allow decision making and issue resolution to take place at the most appropriate and cost effective level of the line.



The authority line may vary between community services environments, but will generally follow the management structure of an organisation unless otherwise specified.

In all circumstances your first point of call should always be the next person up in your organisation’s line of authority. In circumstances where you cannot contact the designated person, or have a grievance with that person, then you should follow the communication and grievance protocols in your workplace which will outline how to appropriately deal with those circumstances.

Documentation obligations

Your workplace communication protocols will address the documentation requirements of your organisation and outline your roles and responsibilities regarding written communication. Below are examples of some of the types of information that require documenting according to organisational protocols and procedures.

Examples of client-related documentation	Examples of staff-related documentation
▶ Client case notes	▶ Staff contact details list
▶ Client plans and goals	▶ Rosters and staffing
▶ Incoming and outgoing referrals	▶ Staff schedules providing location details (team diary/electronic calendars)
▶ Incident reports	▶ Time sheets and payslips
▶ Fact sheets and brochures	▶ Leave applications
▶ Documentation pertaining to medication	▶ Workplace health and safety forms
▶ Programming documentation	▶ Internal information
▶ Consent forms for participation	▶ Staff and team meeting agendas and minutes
▶ Client files	▶ Professional development plans
▶ Correspondence pertaining to clients	▶ Position descriptions
▶ Waiting lists	▶ Work contracts
▶ Documentation from case conferences	

Complaints procedures

Your workplace will have a communication protocol for managing complaints. Complaints processes vary between organisations. Most organisations provide staff and individuals with written information about the complaints procedures, which includes what to do if they receive a complaint.

The basic process for dealing with complaints is outlined below.

How to deal with complaints
Specific forms or templates may be used for complaints and/or suggestions.
Written complaints or suggestions may be directed to a quality or leadership team for review and action.
Outcomes are developed and follow-up actions are recorded.
Information about the outcome is given to those who provided the feedback.

Outgoing information and media

It is important that workers understand that when they are at work their words and actions are representing the organisation that they work for. For this reason most workplaces will have protocols for providing information to others according to the type of information or correspondence; such as fact sheets, individual letters or faxes. Some organisations may require that correspondence is checked before being sent. Organisations may also have protocols about any formal or bulk information that is distributed, such as event promotions or newsletters. Protocols may include authorisation by a team leader. Some organisations also have a form to sign-off prior to publications being distributed. Many organisations have a policy or protocols regarding making comments to the media. Usually authority is required from the communications unit or senior management; often the chief executive officer.



Code of conduct

Your workplace communication protocols will be underpinned by a workplace code of conduct. A code of conduct is a set of principles, standards, values or rules of behaviour that guide the decisions, procedures and systems of work for a workplace. The code of conduct should promote the welfare of people by protecting their rights and ensuring ethical practices are followed.

The code of conduct may vary between community services workplaces; however, most will have a code of conduct that promotes ethical behaviour, accountability, transparent sharing of information, bestowing dignity and respect, and practicing confidentiality.

It is important that you comply with your workplace code of conduct whenever you participate in workplace communication.

Your workplace code of conduct might include:

- ▶ a statement of purpose
- ▶ related legislation
- ▶ disciplinary action for breaches of the code
- ▶ a summary of workplace values
- ▶ roles and responsibilities of accountable persons named in the code
- ▶ workers' rights and treatment under the code
- ▶ general applications of the code
- ▶ application of the code to specific work circumstances.

Example

Communication protocols and lines of authority

Kathryn works with people with disabilities. Her job focuses on working with, and brokering the funding for, people with support needs. Kathryn is visiting the Simmonds family who have a child with a disability. Kathryn books a car and documents that it is for a home visit, but doesn't include the family's details. Kathryn updates the out-of-office function on her computer. She knows that she needs to comply with her workplace's policy regarding giving out information, and therefore takes the approved information fact sheets to give to the family.

Kathryn ensures that she complies with her workplace's code of conduct through presenting herself in a professional manner, using transparent communication and assisting the Simmonds' to make informed decisions. When she arrives home she sends a text to her team leader, who is the next person in her organisation's line of authority.



The next day Kathryn scans the paperwork from the home visit and emails it to her team leader. She then enters her notes about the visit into the work database to ensure they are accurate. Kathryn's team leader reviews and approves Kathryn's paperwork. She prints three copies and sends one to the funding provider, one to the family, and places one in the family's file as per her workplace's documentation requirements.

Practice task 9

1. What is an authority line and how does it impact communication within a community services environment?

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2. What are the general steps involved in a complaints management process?

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Learning checkpoint 2

Collaborate with colleagues

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in collaborating effectively with colleagues.

Part A

1. What is a workplace code of conduct and how does it influence workplace communication?

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2. What important information might be found in a community services code of conduct?

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3. Provide five examples of staff-related documentation that may be used as a form of communication in the workplace.

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4. What is industry terminology?

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5. What is meant by the term 'case management' when working in the community services environment?

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6. What is My Aged Care and how does it function to help ageing Australians?

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Part B

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

Case study

Miah works as part of a large community service team. In any one day Miah might be required to contact and communicate with as many as three other service areas within her own organisation. Miah will also contact other external community services at least once a week on behalf of those she is providing care for.

Timothy recently joined Miah's community service team and her manager has directed her to be Timothy's resource person. As part of her role Miah must inform Timothy about important information regarding communication protocols, related external community service sectors, referral processes and forms, service relationships and funding models, and authority lines for passing on important information and issues.

Miah has reassured Timothy that he will become used to all the industry terminology and the service structure with time. She also advised him that the most important thing to remember is to be willing to admit when he is unsure about something and to actively listen and seek clarification about the instructions and time frames.

1. Why would Miah tell Timothy that it is important for him to actively listen and seek clarification on workplace instructions and time frames?

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2. What are some strategies that Timothy could use to clarify workplace instructional information?

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3. What are some of the important considerations that should be taken into account when Timothy and his new team are agreeing on work time frames?

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4. Why is it important for Timothy to have a good general knowledge of other related community service sectors?

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5. What are five community service sectors that Timothy may need to be aware of?

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6. What important information might Miah tell Timothy about the structure and function of the community services system?

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7. What information might Miah tell Timothy regarding interrelationships in the community services system?

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8. What are five community services which Timothy might refer individuals to for community support?

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9. Why is it important for Timothy to use correct industry terminology when using verbal, written and digital communication in his new workplace?

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10. What are some resources that Timothy could refer to if he is unsure of industry terminology?

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11. What are four examples of verbal, written and digital communication methods that will require Timothy to use correct industry terminology?

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12. What are some examples of industry terminology relating to roles and services that Timothy might use in his workplace?

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13. What important information should Miah tell Timothy regarding authority lines and how they impact on workplace communication?

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14. What are five examples of client-related communication documents that Timothy may be required to use in his workplace?

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15. What important steps might be included in the process for managing complaints in Timothy's workplace?

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16. What important factors should Timothy consider before providing service-related information to others and the media?

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Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Identify early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations and report according to organisation procedures**

- 3B Identify actual constraints to effective communication and resolve using appropriate communication**

- 3C Use communication skills to avoid, defuse and resolve conflict situations**

Address constraints to communication

Effective communication is one of the biggest contributing factors to a successful community service. The ability to efficiently communicate information and identify and resolve constraints to effective communication is essential for the delivery of quality community care.

Conflict occurs in all community service workplaces; however, the ability to detect and report early signs of difficult and complicated situations can prevent situations from escalating.

It is therefore important for community services workers to have a good understanding of the factors that contribute to workplace conflict and to use a range of communication skills to resolve those conflicts in the workplace.

3A Identify early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations and report according to organisation procedures

All workplaces that depend upon a collaborative team approach have the potential for complicated and difficult situations. These situations arise as a result of miscommunications, restricted communication, conflicting values, ideas and emotions, along with competing economic, organisational and environmental priorities.

If difficult and complicated situations are not identified and dealt with in a timely manner then they can evolve to become serious conflicts and disputes.



There are usually early warning signals that can alert you to the possibility of complicated or difficult situations in your workplace. It is important that you are able to identify these signals and report them so that the situations don't escalate.

Identify and report early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations

There are many factors that contribute to complicated and difficult situations in the workplace. Early signs of these situations can be identified by looking at the body language and verbal language of the workers as they communicate and by observing the culture of the workplace. Known competing interpersonal, financial and organisational priorities may also be an early indication of potentially complicated or difficult situations.

If you identify any of these signals it is important that you report them as soon as possible to your supervisor according to your workplace conflict and dispute resolution procedures. This may include completing an incident or hazard report or discussing the matter with the appropriate human resource personnel. The types of signs you may notice are shown here.

Body language

A complicated or difficult situation will usually cause a worker to have a sense of unease. They will likely feel threatened by the potential for conflict and may behave in a defensive and protective way. If you note the following body language occurring while workers are communicating, it may be an indication of a complicated or difficult situation:

- ▶ Failure to make eye contact
- ▶ Turning away from a person as they walk past
- ▶ Folded arms
- ▶ Folded legs
- ▶ Clenched fists
- ▶ Dismissive waving of hands
- ▶ Rude gesturing

Verbal language

When a worker senses a conflicting or difficult situation it will often change the way they speak to other people. They will often use their words to directly challenge a person or situation, outright avoid conversation with a person or use more subtle deviations away from the people and topics that make them uncomfortable.

Workplace culture

There are subtle signs in a workplace that complicated or difficult situations exist and that workers are not coping with those situations. The following workplace cultural traits may be associated with such situations:

- ▶ Under-performing workers
- ▶ Disengagement
- ▶ Staff turnover
- ▶ Increased rates of sick leave
- ▶ Non-compliance with workplace processes
- ▶ Uncooperative and non-collaborative behaviour
- ▶ Disrespectful behaviour and language
- ▶ Workplace bullying and exclusion
- ▶ Breaches in privacy and confidentiality processes
- ▶ A rise in disputes, grievances and complaints

Conflicting differences

The following conflicting differences should be treated as early signals for complicated or difficult situations:

- ▶ People with incompatible values such as their preferences, beliefs and practices
- ▶ People competing for power and influence over decision-making processes
- ▶ Competing demands and priorities for the use of limited resources
- ▶ Privacy and confidentiality laws restricting information access
- ▶ External pressures such as economic instability

Potential constraints to effective communication with people receiving services

Effect communication is a well-recognised component of providing quality community support and care. Unfortunately many people accessing health and community services are faced with a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can act as constraints to effective communication.

Workers should be aware of the following constraints to effective communication with people receiving community services.

Physical barriers

- ▶ People who rely on communication aids such as dentures, hearing aids and glasses can be limited in their ability to communicate when faced with situations in which their usual aid is broken, misplaced or has been left behind.
- ▶ Medical devices such as protective face masks, nebuliser masks, intubation tubes, suction catheters and oral gauze dressings can physically limit a person's ability to communicate.

Language barriers

- ▶ Australia has a diverse multicultural community and many people accessing health and community services speak English as a second language.
- ▶ Sometimes a person may have functional English but will still be unable to understand the complexity of health or community services information.
- ▶ In some circumstances community services may not be able to access an interpreter to aid communication.

Cultural barriers

People from different cultural backgrounds may have different knowledge and understanding regarding health care and community services. A person's cultural background can also influence a person's expectations of the health and community services system.

Research has shown that the following population groups are more likely to have low health literacy and need additional communication strategies to help them make educated health decisions:

- ▶ Social-minorities
- ▶ Migrants
- ▶ Refugees
- ▶ Older people
- ▶ Low socioeconomic groups
- ▶ People with mental health issues
- ▶ People living with chronic diseases

Behavioural barriers

A person's behaviour may be influenced by medications, mental illness, stress and cognitive impairments. Sometimes a person's behaviour will negatively impact upon their ability to comprehend information and make important health-related decisions.

For example:

- ▶ A person living with dementia may forget important health instructions.
- ▶ A person living with autism may not understand the context of the health information provided to them.
- ▶ A person who is very stressed may not be able to focus, process and retain information due to competing demands for their attention.

Example

Early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations

Taryn is taking care of Mrs Byrnes, an elderly lady with end-stage renal failure. This week Mrs Brynes has had many visitors, including her son Bruce and her daughter Jessica, along with their spouses and families.

Taryn has noticed that when Bruce and Jessica are in the same room their body language is very defensive and protective. Bruce tends to stand with his arms crossed and his eyes averted away from Jessica. Jessica is often clenching her fists and also regularly folds her arms.

Both Jessica and Bruce have asked for information updates on Mrs Brynes' health but Taryn has been unable to provide the information as neither of them is Mrs Brynes' legal guardian.



Taryn has also noticed that Jessica often tries to argue with Bruce about what will happen with Mrs Brynes' house. Bruce tends to divert the conversation to other topics or engage Taryn in a conversation to avoid talking to Jessica all together.

Taryn recognises that the verbal language, body language and financial conflict which she is witnessing are early signs of a potentially complicated or difficult situation. She is concerned that if the situation is not addressed that it may escalate.

Taryn reports the behaviours to her supervisor who follows up the situation with Mrs Brynes' legal guardian. The legal guardian agrees to attend a family meeting with Jessica, Bruce and a social worker to help facilitate the conversation and identify strategies for managing the situation.

Practice task 10

1. Why is it important for workers to identify and report early signs of potentially complicated or difficult situations?

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2. What are some early signs of a potentially complicated or difficult situation?

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3. What are some constraints to effective communication with people receiving community services?

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Click to complete Practice task 10

3B Identify actual constraints to effective communication and resolve using appropriate communication

Every time that you communicate effectively with another person you are engaging in a complex exchange of information on a physical, intellectual and emotional level. At any one of these levels various factors can influence the communication and act as a barrier to information being received and exchanged.

These factors may include emotional states, language, culture, personal values, anxiety, trust, organisational structure, distance, the physical environment and much more.



It is important that workers are aware of how these factors cause constraints to effective communication and what strategies can be used to resolve these constraints.

Resolve constraints to effective communication in the workplace

The following information identifies seven broad categories of constraints to effective communication that can exist between colleagues in the workplace, and provides strategies for resolving each constraint.

Physical constraints

Physical constraints may include distance, large work areas, barricaded office cubicles, closed doors and anything that physically restricts people from speaking to one another.

Strategies to resolve physical constraints:

- ▶ Review seating arrangements.
- ▶ Encourage shared facilities and office spaces.
- ▶ Minimise visual and audible distractions.

Perceptual constraints

Perceptual constraints may include any belief that causes a person to think that other people don't care about their thoughts and ideas, or won't be able to understand the information they wish to share.

Strategies to resolve perceptual constraints:

- ▶ Create a culture of trust.
- ▶ Encourage transparent communication.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.

Cultural constraints

Cultural constraints are any beliefs, knowledge or concepts related to a person's cultural background which interfere with a person's ability to come to a shared understanding of an issue.

Strategies to resolve cultural constraints:

- ▶ Avoid stereotypes.
- ▶ Encourage understanding of cultural traditions and customs.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.

Language constraints

Language constraints include any words, symbols or abbreviations that prevent a person from understanding information. This may include people who use English as a second language or those who are unfamiliar with the jargon and industry terminology of a workplace.

Strategies to resolve language constraints:

- ▶ Use simple language.
- ▶ Use a combination of visual and audible material.
- ▶ Use an interpreter where appropriate.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.

Gender constraints

Gender constraints are any gender-related issue that hinders communication in a workplace. This may include gender stereotypes, sexist attitudes or beliefs, or a tendency to approach information from a different perspective based on a person's gender.

Strategies to resolve gender constraints:

- ▶ Avoid stereotypes.
- ▶ Follow the workplace code of conduct.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.

Interpersonal constraints

Interpersonal constraints include any personal factors such as emotions, beliefs, values and perspectives that influence communication and make it more difficult for two people to come to a place of mutual understanding.

Strategies to resolve interpersonal constraints:

- ▶ Create a culture of trust.
- ▶ Encourage transparent communication.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.

Emotional constraints

Some people may find it hard to express certain emotions, and others may find some topics taboo or uncomfortable. An emotional constraint is any feeling that limits the exchange of information.

Strategies to resolve emotional constraints:

- ▶ Promote a supportive workplace culture.
- ▶ Encourage understanding of emotional states.
- ▶ Promote active listening and clarification techniques in the workplace.
- ▶ Use debriefing strategies where appropriate.

The difference between motivational interviewing and a coercive approach

The aim of effective communication is to come to a place of shared understanding. However, there are many intrinsic factors that may make a person resistant or ambivalent towards the information that you are providing.

It is important to remember that your role as a community services worker is to empower the people who are receiving your care, and enable them to come to a place of understanding so that they can make their own informed decisions.

This means that no matter how much you believe a person in your care should change, you cannot force them to. They first need to understand why they need to make a change and secondly be motivated to do so.

A person-centred care approach requires that you empower people in their decision-making abilities through motivational interviewing and not through a coercive approach.

Motivational interviewing is a method that facilitates a person to engage with their own intrinsic motivation in order to change their behaviours. This approach helps people to explore and resolve their own uncertainties and indecision. The coercive approach involves using force or pressure in order to influence someone's decision-making processes. The aim is to force the person to make the choice that the coercer feels is the best course of action. This method differs from motivational interviewing in that it applies external motivation to decision-making.

2. What communication strategies could be used to resolve workplace communication constraints?

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3. What is motivational interviewing?

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Click to complete Practice task 11

3C Use communication skills to avoid, defuse and resolve conflict situations

Interpersonal differences and conflict occur in most workplaces. Effective resolution of conflict and interpersonal differences involves using communication skills such as active listening and assertive communication. When there is tension, stress and anxiety when dealing with colleagues, staff or individuals who are upset, this can make it more difficult to think clearly and respond appropriately. However, if good communication skills have become a habit, you will be much more likely to apply them well in tense and difficult situations.

It is therefore important for workers to use communication skills to avoid, diffuse and resolve conflict in the workplace.



Use 'I' statements

When in a conflict situation, or any other situation, it is important to use assertive rather than aggressive or passive communication. Using 'I' statements to describe your feelings and needs assists assertive communication. Saying 'I feel' or 'I need' puts the emphasis on your experience rather than blaming someone else by saying, 'You make me feel ...' Using a succinct and direct 'I' statement can help you to clarify exactly what it is you are feeling and needing in the situation. Saying 'I' also means that the other party can't easily dispute what you are saying.

Consider the following model of assertive communication.

When ...

Begin the sentence with 'When' to describe the situation or issue neutrally and objectively.

Example:

'When I am not given adequate handover ...'

I feel ...

Start with 'I feel' to succinctly and specifically describe your feelings. Try to avoid overly general terms such as, 'I feel bad'.

Example:

'I feel anxious and under pressure.'

What I would like is ...

A statement beginning with 'What I would like is' describes the desired outcome.

Example:

'What I would like is to have an extra 15 minutes handover time at the beginning of each shift.'

Apply active listening techniques

Always talk directly to the person you are in conflict with. Avoid being preoccupied by what other people think about the situation and try to find a location that ensures confidentiality and is free from distractions. As well as assertively stating your perspective it is important that you use reflective and paraphrasing statements to show that you are listening to and understand the other person's perspective.

Stay focused on the issue

Sometimes conflict situations are seen as an opportunity to air all the issues that two or more parties have with one another. This is never a good idea as it will only escalate and confuse the situation.

How to stay focused during conflict:

- ▶ Concentrate on the issue and encourage the other person to stay focused too.
- ▶ Bring the focus back to the specific issue if they bring up irrelevant information or avoid the issue.
- ▶ Use phrases such as, 'I understand that you are concerned about x but what we are talking about at the moment is y'.
- ▶ Write down other issues that are raised to remind you to follow them up at a later stage.

The broken record technique

The broken record technique can be used when progress to resolve the conflict during conversation is slow. The technique involves identifying one or two relevant phrases and repeating them, like a broken record, until the other party recognises what you are saying or understands that you are not offering other options. The broken record technique should never be used to stop someone expressing their opinion or to reach a conclusion more quickly. If you are unable to resolve the conflict directly, ask the other party if they would consent to using a facilitator or mediator.



What to avoid

Here are some things to avoid when trying to resolve conflict and interpersonal differences.

Things to avoid when dealing with conflict

- ▶ Avoid generalising phrases such as accusations that start with, 'You always ...' or 'You never ...'
- ▶ Avoid exaggerating the facts; the aim is to be specific about the situation and your needs, not to make the other person look bad.
- ▶ Avoid dealing with too many issues at once, as a person may feel as though they are being attacked and become defensive.

Collaboration and confrontation

When working in a community services team it is important that you understand the difference between collaboration and confrontation and also understand how to apply these strategies appropriately.

Collaboration is an important strategy for consultation, communication and problem solving in an organisation. Collaboration involves working together with others on a joint intellectual task. This often involves the swapping, sharing and discussion of ideas.



Confrontation involves the process of opposing a person's thoughts, beliefs, ideas, or behaviour. In the community services environment it differs from an argument in that it is a structured and systematic approach to resolving differences.

Confrontation should only be used under the guidance of your workplace dispute resolution processes and with the support of management or through appropriate facilitation.

Example

Use communication skills to assist conflict situations



Saxon is a child protection worker in a team that has a backlog of referrals. Saxon sits next to Janet, who has been having loud conversations, complaining about her work and answering Saxon's greetings with aggressive retorts. Saxon identifies that Janet's behaviour is probably due to stress but might also involve some kind of unresolved conflict. Saxon wants to support Janet, while also letting her know how her behaviour is affecting him. Saxon decides to approach Janet and asks her if they can have lunch.

At lunch Saxon tells Janet that he's noticed she hasn't been herself, and wants to know if there is anything he can do to help. At first Janet says, 'It's just this place'. Saxon maintains eye contact. Janet continues, 'it seems worse now'. Saxon nods and Janet says, 'We have more referrals and I don't feel like I make a difference'. Saxon paraphrases what Janet has said. 'So you're feeling overwhelmed by your workload and powerless to make a difference.' Janet looks surprised and says, 'Yes, that's it!'

As Janet and Saxon talk, Janet decides to ask her team leader for some time off. Saxon feels the conversation went well, but needs to tell Janet how her behaviour has affected him. Saxon says, 'I find it stressful to work with colleagues who snap at me and I've started to avoid you'. Janet apologises, and both agree that if either is behaving in a way that is causing stress to the other that they will remind one another of this conversation.



Practice task 12

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

Case study

Francesca shares an office with Edward and has been feeling very frustrated by the way Edward spends large amounts of time having loud hallway or phone conversations.

Last week Francesca noticed that she was avoiding their office and becoming very behind in her work. She knew that she needed to do something about the situation but does not like confrontation and doesn't know how to raise the issue with Edward.

Finally Francesca went and asked her supervisor Carolyn how she thought she should go about addressing the matter.

1. What advice might Carolyn give Francesca about using 'I' statements to resolve conflict?

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2. What are some active listening strategies that Carolyn might recommend for resolving conflict?

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3. What are some things that Carolyn may recommend that Francesca avoids while trying to resolve conflict?

[Click to complete Practice task 12](#)

Summary

1. All workplaces that depend upon a collaborative team approach have the potential for complicated or difficult situations.
2. Potentially complicated or difficult situations arise as a result of miscommunications, restricted communication, and conflicting values, ideas and emotions, along with competing interpersonal, economic, and organisational priorities.
3. It is important that you are able to identify early signs of complicated or difficult situations and report them so that the situations don't escalate.
4. Many people accessing health and community services are faced with a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can act as constraints to effective communication.
5. It is important that you are aware of how certain factors cause constraints to effective communication and what strategies can be used to resolve those constraints.
6. A person-centred care approach requires that you empower people in their decision-making abilities through motivational interviewing and not through a coercive approach.
7. Effective resolution of conflict and interpersonal differences involves using communication skills such as active listening and assertive communication.
8. It is important to use communication skills to avoid, diffuse and resolve conflict in the workplace.

Learning checkpoint 3

Address constraints to communication

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in addressing constraints to communication.

Part A

1. Give five examples of body language that might be early signs of a complicated or difficult situation.

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2. Give five examples of workplace cultural traits that might be early signs of a complicated or difficult situation.

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3. What are some competing priorities or differences that can lead to a complicated or difficult situation?

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4. How can language act as a constraint to effective communication in a community services context?

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5. What factors can influence a person's behaviour and cause it to be a constraint to effective communication?

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6. What population groups are known to have poor health literacy and need extra communication to help make educated health decisions?

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7. What is a perceptual constraint to effective communication in the workplace?

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8. What is a cultural constraint to effective communication in the workplace?

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9. What is an interpersonal constraint to effective communication in the workplace?

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10. What is a language constraint to effective communication in the workplace?

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11. What is an emotional constraint to effective communication in the workplace?

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12. What are some ways that a worker can stay focused on the main issue during conflict resolution?

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13. What is the broken record technique and how can it be used to resolve conflict?

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14. What is collaboration and how should it be used in the workplace?

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Part B

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

Case study

Tina is a community services worker and has recently noticed a big change in the culture of her workplace. Previously Tina enjoyed coming to work and felt like she was a valuable part of a collaborative team. These days Tina finds herself avoiding eye contact with people in the work corridors, closing her office door and not contributing to workplace discussions. She has also noticed that her fellow workers tend to be off sick from work a lot of the time.

Tina feels that her supervisor Anthony often takes a coercive approach to change and that as a result people are far more likely to be confrontational than collaborative these days.

Yesterday Tina had a confrontation with Anthony over her attitude in the workplace. Tina felt like the conversation was one-sided and that Anthony didn't care about what she had to say.

Tina has decided that if something doesn't change for the better soon that she will start looking for a new job.

1. What are some early signs of complicated or difficult situations that Tina should be aware of and report?

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2. Why is it important for Tina to be able to identify and report early signs of complicated or difficult situations?

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3. What are some constraints to effective communication that people needing support may experience when trying to access the service Tina works for?

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4. What are some examples of physical constraints that may be stopping effective communication in Tina's workplace?

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5. What are three possible constraints to effective communication between colleagues in Tina's workplace?

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6. What are some communication strategies that Tina could use to resolve the constraints to effective communication in her workplace?

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7. What does Tina mean when she says that Anthony uses a coercive approach to change?

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8. What is motivational interviewing and why should Anthony use it instead of coercion?

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9. Why is it important for Tina to learn to use communication skills to avoid, diffuse and resolve workplace conflict?

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10. Why is it important for Tina to use 'I' statements during conflict resolution processes?

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11. What should Tina avoid when trying to resolve a conflict situation with Anthony?

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12. What are some active listening strategies that Tina could apply to help resolve conflict in her workplace?

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13. What important information should Anthony know about confrontation?

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Topic 4

In this topic you will learn how to:

4A Comply with legal and ethical responsibilities and discuss difficulties with supervisor

4B Refer any breach or non-adherence to standard procedures or adverse event to appropriate people

4C Refer issues impacting on achievement of employee, employer and/or client rights and responsibilities

4D Refer unresolved conflict situations to supervisor

Report problems to supervisor

As a community services worker you will often be faced with challenging ethical and legal situations. Your workplace will have policies and procedures to help direct you to the best course of action in these scenarios. However, it is not a one-size-fits-all process and often situations will have to be addressed with careful consideration regarding the individual factors and circumstances.

At times you may not be able to determine what course of action is required. These situations will often place a worker at risk of breaching their responsibilities or being unable to achieve their workplace rights. It is therefore important that whenever in doubt you should refer the situation to your supervisor for support and guidance.

4A Comply with legal and ethical responsibilities and discuss difficulties with supervisor

Working in the community services sector involves important ethical and legal requirements. These requirements enable workers to respond fairly and professionally to the needs of the individuals who access community services.

The legal and ethical framework that governs the community services environment is there to protect you and the individuals receiving your care.

It is therefore important that workers follow ethical guidelines, comply with duty-of-care and legal responsibilities, and are able to identify and report a breach in procedures.



Follow ethical guidelines

As a community services worker, you must follow ethical guidelines in decision-making in all work undertaken. Underpinning ethical practice is the principle of 'do no harm', and community service organisations have developed codes of ethics, codes of conduct and policies and procedures to guide workers in making decisions that affect the safety and wellbeing of people accessing services.

Ethics and values

The term 'ethics' refers to standards of right and wrong designed to protect rights. Being ethical involves judging what is right or wrong, asking, 'What is the right thing to do?' or 'What should I do?' While your work can't always be guided by moral (correct) behaviour, morality does form a part of ethical behaviour, which is displayed through fair and honest conduct.

Values can influence ethics. Values are the principles that are important to an individual, a group of individuals or a community. Most people have a strong attachment to their values and it is important for a worker to recognise their own personal values and the impact they may have on their approach to work. Remember, individual values are not always universally shared.

We all hold values about issues that are important to the way we live and work, as outlined below.

Areas that values may relate to:

- ▶ Families and parenting
- ▶ Human rights and responsibilities
- ▶ Religious or spiritual beliefs
- ▶ Human life and freedom
- ▶ Right and wrong/good and bad
- ▶ Money, possessions and ownership
- ▶ Fairness and justice
- ▶ Gender and equality

Ethical frameworks

At times it may be difficult to determine the ethical way to proceed in a situation that confronts you. Fortunately, as a community services worker, you have a number of frameworks to assist you with ethical decision-making, as outlined below.

Visit the Australian Community Workers Association at <http://aspirelr.link/acwa-code-of-ethics> to view their code of ethics.

Ethical frameworks include:

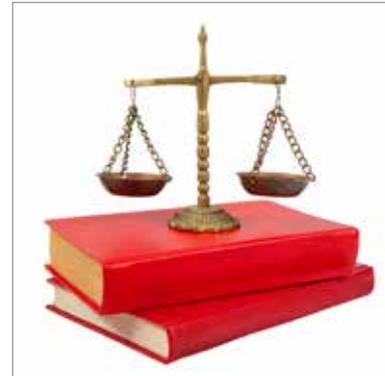
- ▶ Legislation and regulations
- ▶ Codes of ethics
- ▶ Accreditation or service standards (national/state)
- ▶ Organisational policy and procedures
- ▶ Organisational codes of conduct, guidelines and practice manuals
- ▶ Job specification/position descriptions (role boundaries, levels of responsibility)
- ▶ Formal and informal feedback from co-workers and team leaders

Ethical conduct

Although there are agreed ethical principles in community services work and in the broader community, what constitutes ethical conduct in certain situations is not always clear cut.

Determining what constitutes ethical conduct may be affected by the need to consider different legislation, community work principles, the rights and needs of the person who is accessing the service, and the rights of the worker. These factors may also be the cause of an ethical dilemma. As well as having ethical responsibilities to people accessing services, a supervisor also has obligations to other staff members in their team.

If you ever experience difficulty or are in doubt about what action to take, then you should discuss the situation with your supervisor.



Legal responsibilities

Legal responsibilities underpin much of the work in the community services sector. Some legislation is relevant to all services; other legislation may be specific to particular settings; and some may vary between states and territories. Organisational policies are developed to ensure workers and supervisors provide services according to legislative and regulatory obligations. These obligations exist to protect the rights of people accessing services, and are a minimum standard of operating.

Legislation, policies, guidelines and responsibilities

Policies determine the way in which daily activities (procedures) within an organisation are delivered. Guidelines and practice manuals are developed by organisations to support their services. A supervisor must ensure that workers are appropriately informed of the organisation's policies, and that guidelines and practice manuals are accessible to staff as well as people accessing services.

Here is a guide identifying the relationship between legislation and organisational policy.

Legislation, organisational policies, guidelines and roles include:

- ▶ legislation, regulations and service standards
- ▶ organisational policies and procedures
- ▶ organisational guidelines and practice manuals
- ▶ worker roles and responsibilities.



Privacy and confidentiality

'Privacy' refers to a person's ability to control access to themselves, their space and their possessions, including information about them. Privacy also means taking steps to avoid embarrassment and humiliation.

'Confidentiality' is about data or information, and refers to managing access to private information. Confidentiality provisions restrict an individual or organisation from using, storing and disclosing information about a person that is outside of the scope for which the information was collected.

Legislation protecting privacy and confidentiality

Each state has different laws that govern privacy and confidentiality, though the guiding principles are similar. You should be familiar with the main points in the legislation that governs the state or territory you work in. There are also Commonwealth Acts that apply to the whole of Australia; for example, the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth), which protects all personal information handled by businesses.

Most states and territories have laws designed to regulate how information is managed in both the private and public community service systems. Some states have also incorporated information privacy principles and human rights principles into law.

To access the law relevant to your state or territory, search the Australasian Legal Information Institute database at <http://aspirelr.link/austlii>.

Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure

When discussing a person's situation, always be aware of maintaining their privacy. You must protect confidential details. You always need the person's consent if you wish to talk about their situation. Often people are happy to give their consent because they know you want to help.

Maintaining confidentiality is part of respecting a person's privacy and individual rights. In practice, confidentiality means not discussing an individual's personal information unless they have given their consent for this to happen.

There are exceptional circumstances that enable you to disclose private information, but this is generally only when you become aware that someone may be harmed.

You can read more about privacy, confidentiality and disclosure at the following sites:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/aacqa-privacy-policy>
- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/law-handbook-privacy-confidentiality>



Protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are critical to work in the community services sector. Workers will often have access to privileged and sensitive information about the people they work with. The way workers manage confidential information can have a significant impact on a person's dignity, rights, choices and opportunities, as well as their concept of self-worth, self-esteem and wellbeing.

Workers are allowed to, and should, share confidential information about a person receiving their care with their supervisor when necessary. Confidentiality means that workers must have a reasonable purpose for collecting, storing, accessing and distributing information about any person accessing services. Organisations and workers must also not collect generalised information without an implicit reason.



Sources of information

Working in the community services environment will require you to use many sources to gain important information about, and on behalf of, the people accessing your care.

It is important that you always obtain information in a way that complies with the ethical and legal requirements of your workplace. Sometimes this may mean declining or refusing information that has been obtained through illegal or unethical practices.

At times you may face a dilemma where information you have received from a source will have a direct impact on a person's care, but cannot be disclosed due to privacy and confidentiality laws.

If you ever experience a situation like this or are in doubt about what action to take, then you should discuss the situation with your supervisor.

Here are some potential sources of information.

Information sources:

- ▶ Files
- ▶ Case notes
- ▶ Care plans
- ▶ Medical tests and reports
- ▶ Family members of the person accessing care
- ▶ Friends of the person accessing care
- ▶ Conversations with work colleagues
- ▶ The media via online, television and newspaper sources
- ▶ Workplace meetings, emails and memos
- ▶ Social media

Maintain confidentiality of information

Information relating to people accessing services must be securely stored, with access limited to those working directly on the case, according to organisational policies and procedures.

Confidentiality refers to both written and verbal information. Here are some examples of both.

Written

Examples of written information

- ▶ Case notes
- ▶ Medical information
- ▶ Contact details of people accessing services
- ▶ Incident reports
- ▶ Relevant letters, emails and faxes
- ▶ Individual plans/goals and reviews for people accessing services
- ▶ Referrals
- ▶ Papers, case studies and practice manuals

Verbal

Examples of verbal information

- ▶ Telephone calls
- ▶ Meetings
- ▶ Consultations with people accessing services
- ▶ Case conferences
- ▶ Discussions with colleagues and people accessing services
- ▶ Community meetings
- ▶ Group discussions
- ▶ Presentations and speeches

Collection, use and storage of information

On 12 March 2014, the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) replaced the National Privacy Principles and Information Privacy Principles that apply to organisations and Australian Government (and Norfolk Island Government) agencies.

There are now 13 national privacy principles that apply to the collection, use and storage of information. Below is further information about APPs.

Collection, use and storage of personal information

- 1** **Open and transparent management of personal information**

This ensures that organisations manage personal information in an open and transparent way.
- 2** **Anonymity and pseudonymity**

This requires organisations to give individuals the option of not identifying themselves, or of using a pseudonym. Some exceptions apply.
- 3** **Collection of solicited personal information**

This outlines when an organisation can collect personal information that is solicited. It applies higher standards to the collection of 'sensitive' information.

- 4

Dealing with unsolicited personal information

This outlines how organisations must deal with unsolicited personal information.
- 5

Notification of the collection of personal information

This outlines when and in what circumstances an organisation that collects personal information must notify an individual of certain matters.
- 6

Use or disclosure of personal information

This outlines the circumstances in which an organisation may use or disclose the personal information that it holds.
- 7

Direct marketing

An organisation may only use or disclose personal information for direct marketing purposes if certain conditions are met.
- 8

Cross-border disclosure of personal information

This outlines the steps an organisation must take to protect personal information before it is disclosed overseas.
- 9

Adoption, use or disclosure of government-related identifiers

This outlines the limited circumstances when an organisation may adopt a government-related identifier of an individual as its own identifier, or use or disclose a government-related identifier of an individual.
- 10

Quality of personal information

An organisation must take reasonable steps to ensure the personal information it collects is accurate, up-to-date and complete.
- 11

Security of personal information

An organisation must take reasonable steps to protect personal information it holds from misuse, interference and loss, and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure. An entity has obligations to destroy or de-identify personal information in certain circumstances.
- 12

Access to personal information

This outlines an organisation's obligations when an individual requests to be given access to personal information held about them by the organisation.
- 13

Correction of personal information

This outlines an organisation's obligations in relation to correcting the personal information it holds about individuals.

Duty of care

Duty of care describes the legal obligation that people and organisations have to anticipate and act on possible causes of injury and illness that may exist in their workplace or as a result of their actions. A person or organisation must do everything they can to remove or minimise the possible cause of harm.

While aspects of WHS legislation may vary between states and territories, there are common legislative requirements and obligations under the duty-of-care principle.



Everyone in the community services environment has the responsibility of duty of care to themselves, colleagues, visitors and people accessing services.

Duty-of-care requirements

Duty of care exists when someone's actions could reasonably be expected to affect another person. The law has established a duty of care to the person. This principle is based on the worker taking reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that may cause foreseeable harm to any person. You must think ahead about possible risks or dangers to people accessing services, co-workers and others while making sure you follow the organisation's policies and procedures.



Duty of care, negligence and dignity of risk

Community service organisations and workers have a responsibility to provide a duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people accessing their services. Legislative and regulatory obligations underpin an organisation's policies. These determine the procedures to guide service delivery that promote and enhance the safety and wellbeing of people.

Below is information about duty of care, negligence and dignity of risk.

Duty of care

- ▶ Duty of care is the obligation a person has to act in a way that would not cause harm.

Negligence

- ▶ Negligence occurs when duty of care has been breached and harm to either person or property ensues. It is the legal and ethical obligation of any worker, supervisor or organisation to ensure that people accessing services are not exposed to unnecessary or unreasonable risk.

Dignity of risk

- ▶ The rights of people to dignity and choice, upheld in legislation and service standards, also require that duty of care or safety is not used as a reason to limit a person's freedom or personal choice. A worker's adherence to duty of care and safety must be coupled with the concept of dignity of risk, which means that a person has the right to make their own choices and take risks.

Informed consent

Informed consent is the act of obtaining permission from a person, whereby the permission is given with full knowledge of the possible consequences, outcomes and alternate options related to that decision.

In the community services environment informed consent is strongly associated with decisions which are made regarding the provision of care, where the person receiving care knows the risks and benefits associated with that care.

When obtaining informed consent it is important for the worker to consider whether or not the person has: (a) received the information, (b) understood the information, and (c) is capable of making decisions based on that information. If the worker cannot answer yes to these then the provision of that care may breach their workplace legal and ethical requirements.

The following considerations should be made regarding informed consent.

Informed consent considerations:

- ▶ What information is required?
- ▶ Should consent be obtained in writing?
- ▶ What is the difference between implied and explicit consent?
- ▶ What is the use of decision-making processes?
- ▶ Is the adult able to make their own healthcare decisions?
- ▶ Who is responsible for obtaining consent?
- ▶ How long does consent last for, and when should it be renewed?
- ▶ What should you do when consent capabilities of the person are in doubt?
- ▶ How can you recognise and enable someone to withdraw consent?

Legal and ethical considerations: translation

Workers need to understand the legal and ethical considerations regarding translation in their workplace. In the community services environment translation often encompasses both the interpretation and conversion of one language to another via a translator.

Not just anyone can ethically and legally be used as a translator. Often people requiring care will place workers in compromising positions by asking them to allow family members to act as translators. Family members are often inappropriate as translators as they have a conflict of interest in a person's care and cannot remain impartial. Family members may also summarise and make additions to the content being translated in such a way that it no longer reflects the thoughts and requests of the person accessing care.

The following information details the ethical and legal requirements concerning translation.

Translation considerations:

- ▶ Respect a person's right to privacy and confidentiality.
- ▶ Identify and disclose actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- ▶ Don't work outside the scope of competency.
- ▶ Make sure information is retold accurately and impartially without making amendments.
- ▶ Don't exploit information for personal gain.
- ▶ Remain detached and refrain from personal opinions and comments.

Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when an individual is treated less favourably than others because they belong to or identify with a particular group, or are perceived to have certain traits or attitudes. It can also occur through associating with others who have attributes that may be discriminated against.

People may be discriminated against because of their:

- ▶ disability
- ▶ gender
- ▶ pregnancy
- ▶ politics
- ▶ sexual preference
- ▶ age
- ▶ ethnic origin
- ▶ religion
- ▶ marital, parental or carer status
- ▶ physical features.

Discrimination legislation

Discrimination is illegal throughout Australia. The Acts that set out the relevant federal (Commonwealth) legislation regarding the various forms of discrimination include the:

- ▶ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- ▶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)
- ▶ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)
- ▶ *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth)
- ▶ *Racial Hatred Act 1995* (Cth).

Additional legislation exists in each state and territory.

To research anti-discrimination legislation you can use the Australasian Legal Information Institute database: <http://aspirelr.link/austlii>.



For additional information on equity and discrimination in Australia, visit the Australian Human Rights Commission website: <http://aspirelr.link/human-rights-commission>.

Identify and report issues requiring mandatory notification

Mandatory reporting is the requirement by law to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect. People often equate mandatory reporting with child abuse; however, mandatory notification requirements extend beyond child abuse and apply across community services fields.

Workers must be alert to and aware of their reporting obligations regarding abuse and neglect, including (but not limited to) issues such as bullying, family violence, and sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children and adults.



Mandatory notifiers regarding children

The people mandated to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect varies between states and territories. For example, workers are mandated to report suspected harm (which may be physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and/or exposure to family violence) in some states and territories, but not in others.

All suspicions must have reasonable grounds that a child is at risk of harm or has been harmed, and the reporting mechanisms vary between states and territories. This includes reporting incidents of suspected abuse of children who are associated with people accessing services, even if they themselves are not accessing that particular service.

Community service organisations are required to have policies and procedures to guide workers to identify, assess and report harm to children to meet legislative regulations.

The following summarises the Commonwealth, state and territory requirements.

Commonwealth

Under the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) the following Family Court of Australia personnel are mandated reporters of suspected harm:

- ▶ Registrars
- ▶ Family counsellors
- ▶ Family dispute resolution practitioners
- ▶ Lawyers independently representing children's interests

ACT

Mandated notifiers of physical and sexual abuse include:

- ▶ doctors, nurses and midwives
- ▶ dentists
- ▶ school teachers and aides
- ▶ home education inspectors
- ▶ police officers
- ▶ people employed to counsel children or young people at school
- ▶ childcare centre employees
- ▶ people coordinating or monitoring home-based family day care
- ▶ public servants who work with or provide services to children, young people or families
- ▶ public advocates
- ▶ official visitors
- ▶ employees who have contact with or provide services to children, young people and their families.

For more information visit the ACT Community Services website at:
<http://aspirelr.link/community-services-actgov>

NSW

Mandated notifiers of harm (abuse, neglect and exposure to violence) include:

- ▶ doctors, nurses, dentists and other health workers
- ▶ psychologists, social workers and youth workers
- ▶ teachers
- ▶ childcare workers, family day care workers and home based carers
- ▶ refuge workers and community housing providers
- ▶ police officers.

For more information visit the Family and Community Services website at:
<http://aspirelr.link/community-services-nswgov>

Queensland

Mandated notifiers required to report suspected sexual and physiological abuse and neglect include:

- ▶ an authorised officer/employee of the department, or an employee of a departmental care service or licensed care service
- ▶ a doctor or registered nurse
- ▶ staff at the Commission for Children and Young People and the Office of the Public Guardian
- ▶ family court personnel and counsellors.

For more information visit the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services website at: <http://aspirelr.link/community-services-qld.gov>

Northern Territory

Any person within the Northern Territory is a mandated notifier of harm, including harm from exposure to family violence.

For more information visit the Department of Children and Families website at: <http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-nt>

South Australia

Mandated notifiers of abuse and neglect include:

- ▶ medical practitioners, dentists or other healthcare workers
- ▶ pharmacists
- ▶ psychologists
- ▶ police officers and community corrections officers
- ▶ social workers
- ▶ ministers of religion
- ▶ employees or volunteers in a religious or spiritual organisation
- ▶ teachers or childcare workers
- ▶ approved family day care providers
- ▶ any other person who is an employee of, or volunteer in, a government department, body or agency that provides home care, out-of-home care and community services.

For more information visit the Department for Education and Child Development website at: <http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-sagov>

Western Australia

Mandated notifiers of sexual abuse include:

- ▶ doctors, nurses and midwives
- ▶ kindergarten, school and vocational education teachers
- ▶ police officers.

Other forms of abuse do not come under the mandatory reporting legislation.

For more information visit the Department for Child Protection website at: <http://aspirelr.link/dcp-wa>

Tasmania

Mandated notifiers of abuse, neglect and exposure to family violence include:

- ▶ medical practitioners and nurses
- ▶ dentists, dental therapists or hygienists
- ▶ psychologists
- ▶ police officers
- ▶ probation officers
- ▶ teachers in any educational institution
- ▶ paid child carers and childcare services
- ▶ people concerned in the management of a licensed childcare service
- ▶ government or government funded agencies. employees or volunteers that provide services for children
- ▶ any other person determined by the Minister by notice in the Gazette to be prescribed persons.

For more information visit the Department of Health and Human Services website and read the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and/or Neglect fact sheet at: <http://aspirelr.link/mandatory-reporting-fact-sheet-tas>

Victoria

Mandated notifiers of child abuse include:

- ▶ doctors, nurses and midwives
- ▶ teachers and principals
- ▶ police officers.

Any person within Victoria with a reasonable belief a child is being sexually abused is legally obligated to disclose that information to the police.

For more information visit the Department of Health and Human Services website at: <http://aspirelr.link/dhhs-vic>

Indications of risk and adult disclosure

As part of your role as a community services worker you will need to be able to identify signs of abuse and neglect, and situations where a child is at risk of abuse and neglect. You may also be required to report incidents where an adult has disclosed an occasion of neglect of abuse. In such circumstances your duty to report overrides any legal obligations that you have to maintain confidentiality.

If you are ever in doubt as to whether or not you should make a report, seek immediate assistance and advice from your supervisor. Many community organisations' policies determine that community workers within an organisation are required to report all reasonable suspicions of abuse and neglect beyond the minimum requirements of legislated mandatory reporting.

The following information describes signs and indicators of child abuse and neglect.

Physical signs

Physical signs of neglect and abuse include:

- ▶ bruises
- ▶ burns
- ▶ fractures
- ▶ frequent hunger
- ▶ sexually transmitted infections
- ▶ poor hygiene.

Behavioural signs

Behavioural signs of neglect and abuse include:

- ▶ lack of emotion when hurt
- ▶ wariness of adults or family members
- ▶ alcohol and drug misuse
- ▶ sexually inappropriate behaviour
- ▶ non-seasonal clothing to cover bruises
- ▶ stealing food
- ▶ overly friendly behaviour towards strangers.

Disclosure

Disclosure includes the following:

- ▶ A child may report behaviours or actions that appear strange or potentially harmful.
- ▶ An adult may disclose behaviours or actions around a child that appear strange or potentially harmful.

Report suspicions of abuse and neglect

Workplace policy and protocol and discussion with your supervisor will assist you to determine the appropriate process for reporting your suspicions of neglect or abuse. This includes who to inform, and how to record your observations. Consider the following when dealing with your suspicions.

When to report

- ▶ You have reasonable grounds to suspect a person is being abused or neglected
- ▶ Your observation of a person's behaviour or injuries leads you to suspect abuse is occurring
- ▶ Someone tells you directly they have been abused
- ▶ A third party tells you they have observed abuse

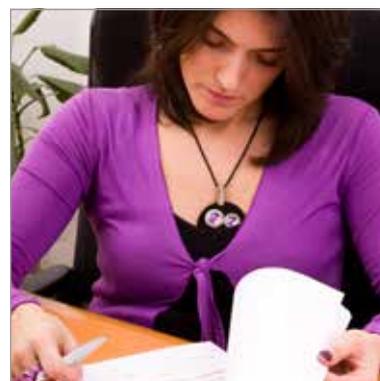
What not to do

- ▶ Make a report without discussing concerns with your supervisor
- ▶ Conduct your own investigation
- ▶ Express disbelief when someone discloses
- ▶ Promise someone you won't report what you have heard

Recognise and avoid conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a worker has a personal interest in an outcome or situation at work (arising from their work) beyond their professional role. It is possible for conflicts of interest to occur without being unethical or wrong. However, it is essential to be able to recognise and, wherever possible, avoid any potential or actual conflicts of interest, and to inform your supervisor if they occur.

Conflicts of interest may arise if there is potential for a worker (or someone known to the worker such as a friend, partner or family member) to benefit from or be impacted by events arising from professional duties. Likewise, a conflict of interest can arise when a worker experiences competing interests.



Potential conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest can arise from various situations.

Examples of potential conflicts of interest:

- ▶ A team leader is interviewing potential staff and her niece is one of the applicants.
- ▶ A coordinator involved in rostering starts dating one of the staff members on the roster.
- ▶ A person makes a complaint about a worker's direct supervisor to the worker and asks for support with the complaints procedure.
- ▶ A person asks a worker to be his advocate against an organisation that provides grants to the organisation that employs the worker.
- ▶ A recreation worker is helping a person choose activities for his program, and the person requires the worker to attend activities to enable him to participate.
- ▶ A person asks her support worker to attend a function that challenges the worker's religious beliefs.

Work role boundaries, responsibilities and limitations

Most community services workers and community organisations have a particular focus or area of expertise. Every worker is responsible for understanding the requirements and scope of their own work and to clarify any uncertainties with appropriate management staff when required. It is also important to be aware of the limitations of the organisation. Workers may need to request assistance or make referrals to other services when issues arise that are outside of the scope of their service or expertise.

It is important for workers to have clearly defined work boundaries and to understand the responsibilities and limitations of their role so that they don't place themselves and others at unnecessary risk of harm.

Information about roles can be obtained from:

- ▶ position descriptions
- ▶ workplace policies and procedures
- ▶ practice manuals and guides
- ▶ codes of ethics
- ▶ service standards (if relevant to a particular field)
- ▶ legislation and regulations.

Example

Comply with responsibilities and discuss difficulties

Madeleine is a house-parent working with young people in transition housing. She goes grocery shopping for the house with 17-year-old Sharnie. Sharnie grabs a few items for herself that don't fall within the household budget. At the check-out Madeleine pays for the household shopping, then looks at the items Sharnie is holding and says, 'Don't forget to pay for those'. Sharnie shakes her head and walks toward the doors, clearly not intending to pay for her items.



Madeleine realises that Sharnie has the right to make her own choices, regardless of her personal values or opinions. Madeleine is also aware that if Sharnie were alone, she could choose to shoplift. Madeleine doesn't want to infringe on Sharnie's independence, and considers the principle of choosing the least restrictive option of intervention, as well as the legal implications of the situation. Madeleine also realises that since she is aware of what Sharnie intends to do, if she doesn't intervene she will be enabling an illegal act. She decides that her own obligation to uphold the law and her legal responsibilities to Sharnie as a person under 18 are most important in resolving this dilemma.

Madeleine calmly says, 'You need to pay for those items'. When Sharnie shakes her head again, Madeleine looks at her and repeats the statement. Sharnie swears at Madeleine, throws the items on the check-out and storms out of the shop. They return to the group house, where Madeleine writes clear case notes about what happened. Sharnie is angry for the rest of the evening. Madeleine discusses the difficult situation with her supervisor Jye, who confirms that she made the right decision.

Practice task 13

1. What is meant by the term 'ethics' and how do values impact on ethical behaviour?

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2. What legal and ethical considerations should workers be aware of with regards to a person's privacy and confidentiality?

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3. What important information should workers be aware of regarding the mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse?

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4. What does the term 'conflict of interest' mean and how does it apply to community services workers?

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5. What information should workers be aware of regarding the boundaries, responsibilities and limitations of their role?

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Click to complete Practice task 13

4B Refer any breach or non-adherence to standard procedures or adverse event to appropriate people

Community services environments have standard procedures in place to protect the rights and safety of their workers and the people accessing their service. These procedures help workers to meet the ethical and legal requirements of their role.

A breach or non-adherence to a standard procedure places workers and others at unnecessary risk of harm. Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. It is therefore important that workers not only comply with the standard procedures in their workplace but also report any breach, non-adherences or adverse events to the appropriate person.

Identify and report a breach in procedures

To maintain standards and prevent harm, it is critical for workers to be able to identify and report breaches in procedures. A breach in procedures is any action or non-action that does not adhere to standard policies or procedures within a specific organisation, or that violates broader established principles of community services work. A breach may be accidental or deliberate, and injury or harm does not have to result for a breach to have occurred.



An adverse event may be caused by a breach in procedure, and is an unintended consequence of inappropriate care management or intervention. An adverse event is distinguished by the fact that the intervention has caused the resulting injury or concern; not the condition or disability that a person was receiving services for.

Breaches in the community work environment

Some of the main breaches you are likely to encounter in a community services work environment are explained here.

Breach of duty of care

- ▶ Duty of care is the obligation of a person to act in a way that does not cause harm. A breach of duty of care is to act in any way that a reasonable person (based on their experience and training) considers may cause harm. It is still a breach of duty of care if harm does not actually occur.

Breach of confidentiality

- ▶ A breach of confidentiality is intentionally or unintentionally collecting, storing or using confidential information in a way that does not adhere to privacy legislation or an organisation's confidentiality and privacy policy. A breach of confidentiality is sharing private information about a person without their consent.

Breach of professional ethics

- ▶ A breach of professional ethics is behaviour that is contrary to a professional code of conduct, code of ethics, expressed values of an organisation or commonly upheld professional standards within the community services sector. A worker pursuing a relationship of a personal nature with a person accessing services is a breach of professional ethics.

Breach of organisational procedure

- ▶ A breach of organisational procedure is any action or non-action that is not aligned with organisational procedures. Two examples are not following guidelines for petty cash and expenditure, and using a work car for private use.

The impact of breaches

Most people accessing community services are vulnerable in some way. Duty of care, confidentiality, ethics and organisational procedures seek to protect and empower these people. As noted earlier, organisations, workers and supervisors all have a legal and ethical obligation to promote and uphold the rights and interests of the people with whom they work. Here are some ways that breaches can impact on the workplace.

Breaches may:

- ▶ put the person accessing services at risk
- ▶ interfere with or compromise a person's rights
- ▶ undermine the dignity of the person accessing services
- ▶ disempower a person from making choices
- ▶ discredit the organisation
- ▶ contravene funding agreements and jeopardise the organisation.

Recognise a breach

If you are unsure of whether a breach has occurred, double check the procedure and seek the support and advice of a supervisor. If you are concerned that a supervisor is contributing to a breach you must follow the guidelines of your organisation and seek support and advice from management as directed by policy. Some questions to ask are outlined below.

Questions to ask in order to identify a breach:

- ▶ Would a reasonable person (with the same level of knowledge and training) behave in this way?
- ▶ Is this action aligned with the organisation of knowledge and professional code of ethics?
- ▶ Is there legislation that governs the specific situation?
- ▶ Is the behaviour consistent with organisational policy and procedure?
- ▶ Is my behaviour (or that of others) in accordance with the job description and role boundaries?

Respond to and report a breach

When a community services worker or supervisor observes or becomes aware of a breach, there is an obligation to respond. Here are examples of responses to breaches.

Intervene

Intervene immediately if you observe a breach taking place, the breach is critical and it is safe to intervene. For example, a child is outside with another worker without a hat or sunscreen in summer. Approach the worker or the child and remind them about the sun safe policy.

Report

Report observations or information about a breach to the relevant person. For example, a worker arrives at work to find the filing cabinet that contains confidential information about a person accessing services is unlocked. He writes an incident report and gives it to his team leader.

Seek advice

Seek advice from senior staff members when unsure of how to respond to a breach. For example, a worker tells a colleague that she intends to visit a person accessing services in her own time on the weekend. The colleague is not sure what to do or if she should make a report, so she asks her supervisor for advice.

Take action

Take action when aware that a staff member under your own supervision contributes to a breach. For example, a supervisor walks into the staffroom where workers are talking about a person's confidential information inappropriately and unnecessarily. She reminds them of their confidentiality obligations and the disciplinary consequences if breaches continue.

Example

Refer any breach or non-adherence to standard procedures

Helene is an aged care worker at a low-care hostel. She arrives at Mrs Watson's unit and assists her with her morning medication. While helping administer the medication Helene notices that the blister pack from the previous evening still has tablets in it. Supporting Mrs Watson to take her evening medication is one of the responsibilities of the worker on afternoon shift. Helene talks to Mrs Watson about the tablets and calls her supervisor to let her know about the missed medication. Helene's supervisor advises her to finish assisting with the morning tasks and to prepare a report identifying the tablets that remain in the evening blister.

Upon returning to the office Helene completes an incident report and submits the report directly to her supervisor. Noting that one of the medications is to control Mrs Watson's seizures, and that skipping this medication may make Mrs Watson more susceptible to a seizure over the next few hours, the supervisor organises for a support worker to spend the morning with Mrs Watson.

Helene has met her duty of care to Mrs Watson by reporting the missed medication. Her supervisor will investigate why the breach in procedures occurred and follow it up with the relevant worker.



2. What are some possible impacts of Miranda’s breach of workplace procedures?

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3. What are some questions that Emily could ask to help her to identify whether or not Miranda has breached workplace procedures?

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4. What are some of the steps that Emily should take in order to meet her obligation to respond to and report workplace breaches?

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Click to complete Practice task 14

4C Refer issues impacting on achievement of employee, employer and/or client rights and responsibilities

Every community services environment should have policies and procedures that outline the rights and responsibilities of all workers in that workplace. These policies help workers to comply with their legislative duties.

Employers and employees will share some common rights and responsibilities in the workplace. However there will also be role-specific rights and responsibilities that will apply individually to employers and others that will apply to employees.

It is important that workers have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace, and also understand what issues can impact upon them achieving those rights and responsibilities.



Understand employee and employer rights and responsibilities

Community services work is immensely varied and conditions differ from position to position. You need to know about and understand your rights in the workplace, and those of your employer. This will help you safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of yourself and your co-workers and the people who are accessing the service that you provide.

Community services work conditions

Sometimes the conditions that form part of a community services worker's role may be uncommon, and can include significant duty-of-care obligations, working to strict standards, and shift work. Each of these conditions must be clearly described in a position description and award or agreement that governs the position.

Ensure you are aware of which award or agreement covers your work role and that you are familiar with your position description. If you are a supervisor or coordinator, you must also be familiar with the position descriptions of the staff in your team to ensure that they work within the capacity of their positions. Examples of conditions that may be included in community services work are outlined below.

Examples of a community worker's conditions include:

- ▶ shift work
- ▶ a highly casualised industry with a significant part-time element
- ▶ travel requirements, including driving to and from remote locations
- ▶ working as a sole worker
- ▶ working in people's homes
- ▶ on-call functions within a position

- ▶ minimum qualifications linked to some positions and awards
- ▶ preferred qualifications that may impact on wage rates.

Employee rights and responsibilities

Knowing your rights and responsibilities will help you to manage the conditions unique to your setting and role. Below is an overview of employee rights and responsibilities in the community services sector. You can find out more about your rights and responsibilities, including the National Employment Standards (NES), pay structure and awards, at the Fair Work Ombudsman website: <http://aspirelr.link/fair-work-employee-entitlements>

Here are some aspects of employee rights and responsibilities that you need to know about.

Employee rights

- ▶ All employees have the right to work in an environment that is free from any forms of discrimination, harassment or abuse.
- ▶ All employees have the right to dress and act in a way that adheres to their religion and beliefs.
- ▶ All employees have the right to be paid correctly and fairly.
- ▶ All employees have equal opportunity for employment and promotion within a company.
- ▶ Employees should have access to the correct types of annual, family, personal and public holiday leave.
- ▶ All employees have the right to work in a safe environment, complete with occupational health and safety.

Employee responsibilities

- ▶ Employees should arrive on time and ready to work.
- ▶ Employees should wear the appropriate uniform or style of dress for the workplace.
- ▶ Employees should respect their employer, co-workers and people accessing their organisation's service.
- ▶ Employees must carry out their jobs to the best of their abilities.
- ▶ Employees should play an active role in keeping themselves, their work environment, co-workers and people accessing services healthy and safe.
- ▶ Employees have a responsibility to work within the boundaries of relevant legislation and work within organisational policies, procedures and guidelines.

Employer rights and responsibilities

Knowing the rights and responsibilities of community services employers will help you to understand what you should expect from your employer, and help you in your supervision of staff members. Below is an overview of employer rights and responsibilities in the community services sector.

Employer rights

- ▶ All employers have the right to expect that the organisation's information is kept confidential.
- ▶ All employers have the right to expect employees to meet all reasonable and legal requests of the organisation.
- ▶ All employers have the right to expect employees to carry out their job function.
- ▶ Any person within an organisation, including managers and board members, has a right to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment.

Employer responsibilities

- ▶ Employers have the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace.
- ▶ Employers should not discriminate against employees, and promote freedom from discrimination and harassment.
- ▶ Employers have a responsibility to conduct operations and manage staff in accordance with legislation.
- ▶ Employers have a responsibility to provide clear and accessible policies and procedures to employees so all staff understand their obligations.
- ▶ Employers must provide clear information about employment conditions and regular payment advice to staff.

Issues preventing the achievement of workplace rights and responsibilities

There are many issues that may prevent employers and employees from achieving their workplace rights and responsibilities. These issues can be the result of deliberate actions or lack of action that knowingly breach workplace procedures. At other times they may occur due to workplace time, resource, equipment, and skill and knowledge constraints.

The following information provides examples of issues that may prevent the achievement of workplace rights and responsibilities.

Barriers to rights and responsibilities:

- ▶ Budgetary constraints
- ▶ A lack of safety equipment
- ▶ Poor facility design and systems
- ▶ Poor communication lines
- ▶ Lack of knowledge and compliance with workplace procedures
- ▶ A culture of not reporting issues
- ▶ Lack of training, skills and knowledge required for workers to appropriately complete work tasks

Example

Refer issues impacting on the achievement of rights and responsibilities

Jenny works for a community health organisation. Jenny assists Anthea to get in and out of bed, shower and dress on a daily basis with the help of another worker. Anthea is just one of many people that Jenny provides physical support to throughout her work day.



Anthea has a manual handling plan that tells Jenny and her other workers the safety requirements for assisting her to get in and out of bed, including alternative methods in case of faulty equipment.

Last week a worker named Cindy was working with Jenny on the evening shift when she noticed that the hoist was broken and could not be used to transfer Anthea. Cindy told Jenny that she knew a better way to help Anthea into bed than what was specified in the manual handling plan.

Jenny politely refused to help Cindy with her proposed transfer method, advising that the workplace manual handling policy and the hazardous manual task code of practice required all workers to follow the alternative methods in the manual handling plan.

Jenny discussed the issue with her supervisor Tom who supported her decision. Tom told Jenny that by not following the manual handling policies and procedures that Cindy was breaching her duty of care under the Work Health and Safety Act, and thereby placing herself, fellow workers and Anthea at risk.

Tom also acknowledged that the faulty equipment was a contributing factor to the failure to achieve worker rights and responsibilities.

Practice task 15

1. What are three rights of workers in the community services sector?

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2. What are three responsibilities of a worker in the community services environment?

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3. What are some possible barriers to achieving worker rights and responsibilities in a community services workplace?

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Click to complete Practice task 15

4D Refer unresolved conflict situations to supervisor

Although good communication skills can resolve many conflict situations it may not necessarily resolve them all. It is important for community services workers to recognise when their attempts to resolve conflict are not working and to refer the situation to their supervisor.

Sometimes a third party is required to help facilitate conflict resolution meetings. This can occur in situations where emotional states or conflicting values result in the people involved repeatedly reviewing the issues and not coming up with any constructive solutions.

All workplaces should have dispute resolution processes for dealing with unresolved conflict in the workplace.



Unresolved conflict

Your workplace will have processes for how to refer unresolved conflict to your supervisor. Conflicts don't go away on their own accord so it is better that you involve your supervisor sooner rather than later if you feel the conflict cannot be resolved without help from a third party.

Make sure that you refer the situation to your supervisor in a private location where you are not likely to be overheard.

Your supervisor may ask for a written account of the issues and events that have contributed to the conflict. It is important that you keep your report objective and remember that the process is not about being right or wrong but about finding the solution that is best for everyone.

If the conflict involves some form of workplace bullying, harassment or breach then you will be required to complete additional incident report forms.

Dispute resolution

Most dispute resolution processes will include an assessment of the issues and circumstances surrounding the conflict before involving a professional mediator to help resolve the conflict.

The following information details steps that are commonly involved in dispute resolution processes.

Referral to supervisor

- ▶ The first step in the dispute resolution process is recognising that conflict may not be resolved without help from a third party. The worker should then refer the situation to their supervisor.

Individual view points

- ▶ The supervisor will meet with each person involved in the conflict individually to understand their point of view and how the situation is impacting upon them.

Combined meeting

- ▶ The supervisor will then summarise all of the key issues and all of the potential solutions. The supervisor will then present this information to all parties for reflection and collaboration.

Mediation

- ▶ If the conflict cannot be resolved by a meeting facilitated by the supervisor, then the dispute will be referred onto a professional mediator.

Individual mediation

- ▶ The mediator will then repeat the process of individually meeting with each person to discuss their perspective.

Combined mediation

- ▶ The mediator will then summarise the issues and solutions and attempt to facilitate negotiation and agreement of a solution.

Arbiter

- ▶ Sometimes when individuals cannot agree upon a resolution the mediator and supervisor will enforce a solution that is best for the workplace and remind the workers that compliance with the decision is part of their workplace responsibilities. This is a last resort and should only be used when all other forms of mediation and negotiation have failed.

Example

Refer unresolved conflict situations

Simon is a memory support worker and a hard-working and supportive member of his team. Lately there have been a lot of people on Simon's team who have been off sick. Some days Simon finds himself feeling like he is the only one still working and as though he is doing the job of three people all at once.

Yesterday Simon had so much work to do that he didn't know how he could possibly get it all done. By lunch time he was so far behind that he felt completely overwhelmed. Unfortunately right about the same time a fellow memory support worker named Carla asked Simon if he could show her how to do something. This was the last straw for Simon and he yelled, 'Am I the only person on this team with a brain? Can't anyone else do anything for themselves around here?'

Carla was visibly hurt and told Simon not to worry about it and that she would work it out herself.

Since then Carla has refused to work with or speak to Simon. Simon has apologised for his behaviour but Carla still refuses to discuss the conflict with him.

Simon identifies that he cannot resolve this issue on his own and refers the situation to his supervisor.



Practice task 16

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

Case study

Maddox and Gilbert work in a team that provides domestic and personal care to people with long-term health issues.

Last week the team experienced an incident involving Mr Wong, a frail aged man with terminal cancer, over a miscommunication regarding a new shower sling.

Gilbert thought that the new sling that arrived was the one he had ordered for Mr Wong. Unfortunately it was actually the sling for Mrs Hughes, even though her order was placed after the order for Mr Wong's sling.

Gilbert informed Maddox of the new sling and Maddox went to trial it with Mr Wong. The sling was far too small and ended up causing a small skin tear on the inside of Mr Wong's thigh.

Everyone was very upset about the situation and Gilbert and Maddox had a loud argument about who was at fault. Since then neither of them can be in the same room without using passive aggressive and defensive behaviour.

1. What important information should Gilbert and Maddox know regarding how to deal with unresolved conflict in the workplace?

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2. What are some possible steps involved in the dispute resolution process that apply to Maddox and Gilbert's workplace?

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Click to complete Practice task 16

Summary

1. Working in the community services sector has important ethical and legal obligations which enable workers to respond fairly and professionally to the needs of the people accessing services.
2. Each state and territory has different laws that govern privacy and confidentiality, and workers should be familiar with the legislation that applies to them.
3. It is important for workers to always obtain information in a way that complies with the ethical and legal requirements of their workplace.
4. Workers should adhere to the 13 national privacy principles that apply to the collection, use and storage of people's information.
5. Community service organisations and workers have a responsibility to provide a duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people accessing their service.
6. Informed consent is the act of obtaining permission from a person, whereby the permission is given with full knowledge of the possible consequences, outcomes and alternate options related to that decision.
7. In the community services environment translation often encompasses both the interpretation and conversion of one language to another, and not just anyone can ethically and legally be used as a translator.
8. Discrimination occurs when an individual is treated less favourably than others because they belong to or identify with a particular group, or are perceived to have certain traits or attitudes.
9. Workers have a legal obligation to report suspected or actual child abuse even when the child is not accessing a service.
10. Workers need to be able to identify signs of abuse and neglect, and incidents where an adult has disclosed an occasion of abuse or neglect.
11. It is important for workers to have clearly defined work boundaries and to understand the responsibilities and limitations of their role so that they don't place themselves and others at unnecessary risk of harm.
12. It is important that workers not only comply with the standard procedures in their workplace but also report any breach, non-adherences or adverse events to the appropriate person.
13. Workers need to have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace and also understand what issues can impact upon them achieving those rights and responsibilities.
14. It is important for workers to recognise when their attempts to resolve conflict are not working and to refer the situation to their supervisor.

Learning checkpoint 4

Report problems to supervisor

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in reporting problems to a supervisor.

Part A

1. What is meant by the term 'privacy'?

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2. What is meant by the term 'confidentiality'?

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3. What is meant by the term 'duty of care'?

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4. What is meant by the term 'informed consent'?

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5. What are three questions that a community services worker should consider when obtaining informed consent?

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6. What is meant by the term 'discrimination'?

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7. What factors may cause a person to experience discrimination?

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8. What physical signs may be indicators that a child is at risk of, or experiencing, neglect or abuse?

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9. What are some disclosure signs that may be indicators that a child is at risk of, or experiencing, neglect or abuse?

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10. What are some examples of when a worker needs to report neglect or abuse?

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11. Give three examples of situations that involve a possible conflict of interest.

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12. What are some possible workplace breaches that a worker might report to their supervisor?

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13. What are some questions that a worker could ask to help identify whether or not a breach of workplace procedure has taken place?

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14. What are some possible impacts of a workplace breach?

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15. What are the possible steps involved in a workplace's dispute resolution process?

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Part B

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

Case study

Jason works for a community services organisation within a team responsible for developing and updating workplace procedures. Jason is currently updating several procedures that are in place to help workers meet their ethical and legal workplace responsibilities.

Jason develops a draft of the new workplace procedures and sends it out to all of the workers that will be affected by the changes, requesting their feedback.

Jason understands that these procedures provide good general advice to workers but can't always resolve complex work situations and conflict.

Jason speaks to the Human Resource manager Justine and asks for her advice on what situations should be referred to a supervisor. Together they update the workplace procedures to reflect best practice as well as support workers to meet their workplace rights and responsibilities.

1. What information should Jason include in the procedures regarding ethics and how values impact on ethical behaviour?

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2. When Jason’s procedures refer to the ‘ethical framework’, what information does that term include?

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3. What information should Jason know about privacy and confidentiality legislation when updating the procedures?

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4. What legal and ethical considerations should Jason’s procedure outline in regards to privacy and confidentiality?

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5. What possible sources of information might Jason refer to in the workplace procedures?

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9. Which laws may Jason refer to in the anti-discrimination procedure?

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10. What important information should Jason reference regarding a worker's mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse?

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11. What information might Justine tell Jason to include in the procedures regarding conflict of interest?

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12. What information might Justine tell Jason regarding worker boundaries, responsibilities and limitations?

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13. What information may Justine tell Jason regarding the difference between workplace breaches and adverse events?

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14. What steps might Justine recommend the procedures include in order for workers to meet their obligations to respond to and report workplace breaches?

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15. What are some possible barriers to achieving employee rights and responsibilities which Jason should try to address in the workplace procedures?

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16. What employee responsibilities might Justine tell Jason to include in the workplace procedures?

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17. What employee rights might Justine tell Jason to include in the workplace procedures?

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18. What employer responsibilities might Justine tell Jason to include in the workplace procedures?

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19. What employer rights might Justine tell Jason to include in the workplace procedures?

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20. What information regarding unresolved conflict might Justine tell Jason to include in the workplace procedures?

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Topic 5

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 5A Complete documentation according to legal requirement and organisation procedures**
- 5B Read workplace documents relating to role and clarify understanding with supervisor**
- 5C Complete written and electronic workplace documents to organisation standards**
- 5D Follow organisation communication policies and procedures for using digital media**
- 5E Use clear, accurate and objective language when documenting events**

Complete workplace correspondence and documentation

Accurate and up-to-date documentation underpins quality service provision that meets the individual needs of people accessing community services. Documentation and correspondence need to be carried out in a way that increases accountability and duty of care, and adheres to legislative requirements, policy requirements and any organisational protocols.

Documentation may be in a written or electronic format. Completing documentation and workplace correspondence is an essential role of community services workers and enables the sharing of work instructions and people's care information.

5A Complete documentation according to legal requirement and organisation procedures

As a community services worker you will be required to complete many different kinds of documentation on a day-to-day basis. This documentation is frequently used for data auditing and for checking compliance with legislation and workplace procedures.

It is important that you are aware of and follow the documentation procedures in your workplace to ensure that you are meeting the legal requirements of your role.

Most professions and workplaces will have a documentation format that workers must adhere to. These formats are usually set up in such a way that they will prompt the writer about what information to include, so that they do not accidentally miss out any required information.



Comply with ethical and legal documentation requirements

The documentation procedures and requirements in the community services sector are extensive. When completing documentation it is important that the information is factual, unbiased and adheres to workplace documentation procedures. This may include specific requirements regarding documentation format, content and submission time frames.

Maintaining accurate information enables workers to respond to people's needs and to provide effective and quality services. Information lacking accuracy or currency about a person's status or the issues affecting them may mean incorrect care or disjointed service provision.



Documentation provides evidence of compliance with industry standards and ethical and legal requirements. Another compelling reason for complying with documentation requirements is to demonstrate accountability and compliance with the requirements of service users, funding bodies, governments and other stakeholders.

Example

Complete documentation according to required procedures

Niles works for a community service organisation that provides domestic assistance and personal care to people in their own homes. There are many documentation requirements that Niles must complete every time he goes to work.

This morning Niles completed a home visit to shower and dress Maisy, an 81-year-old lady with Alzheimer’s disease and mild dementia. As this was his first visit to Maisy’s house, Niles had to call Maisy beforehand and go through a home safety checklist to ensure that he would not be put at unnecessary risk by visiting her.

Niles also had to document any hazards that were present in the environment, including looking out for hazards from inadequate space to complete care tasks, hazards that might cause slips, trips and falls, potential fire danger and any concerning behaviours from Maisy and any of her visitors.

As Maisy is new to the service Niles also had to complete a registration form with her, as well as a care plan and case notes regarding his visit.

These procedures are put in place to protect people like Maisy, who are accessing services, and to help community services workers like Niles comply with the legal and ethical requirements of their roles.

Practice task 17

1. What are some important reasons why you would need to comply with the documentation requirements of your workplace?

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2. What are some types of information that you may be required to document as a worker in a community service organisation?

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Click to complete Practice task 17

5B Read workplace documents relating to role and clarify understanding with supervisor

In the community services environment there are many workplace documents that relate to the rights and responsibilities of community services workers. These documents are designed to help workers fulfil the requirements of their roles to best practice standards, and in compliance with workplace legislation.

It is important that workers understand the information contained within these documents and also understand how it applies to them in their day-to-day work practices. If a worker is unsure of how a document applies to them and their role they should clarify their understanding with their supervisor as soon as possible.



Read workplace documents relating to your role

There are many workplace documents that may relate to the rights and responsibilities of your role as a community services worker. These documents may include policies, procedures, your statement of duties and many others. It is important that you are aware of how to access these documents and ensure that you have read them and understand how to apply them to meet your workplace role and responsibilities.

Here are some examples of documents that you will need to read and understand in order to fulfil the responsibilities of your role.

Documents may include:

- ▶ infection control policies and procedures
- ▶ manual handling policies and procedures
- ▶ safety data sheets
- ▶ statement of duties
- ▶ workplace emails
- ▶ workplace memos
- ▶ meeting minutes
- ▶ equipment manuals and instructions
- ▶ work health and safety legislation
- ▶ privacy, confidentiality and anti-discrimination legislation.

Clarify understanding with your supervisor

At times workplace documents can be confusing or hard to read. They will often refer to important legislation and may contain legal terminology that you may not understand.

It is important that you seek clarification from your supervisor if you do not understand information you have read in documents that relate to your role.

Clarification involves seeking additional information on the subject, repeating your understanding of the matter back to your supervisor, and then checking that what you understand is correct.

It is important that you clarify any information that you are unsure about so that you do not accidentally breach your workplace procedures and legislative duties.

Example

Clarify your role

Ming has recently started a new job in a community services environment. Ming attended the workplace induction training on his first day and felt overwhelmed by the amount of legislation, policies, procedures and other documents that relate to his new role.

There were many terms such as ‘conflict of interest’ and ‘autonomy’ that Ming didn’t fully understand.

Ming is worried that if he asks about the information his supervisor James will think he is stupid and regret giving him the job.

Ming mentions these feelings to a fellow worker named Lily. Lily reassures Ming that it is completely normal to need clarification on workplace documents and that everyone does from time to time.

Lily tells Ming that it is important for him to never pretend to understand workplace documents if he doesn’t. Lily encourages Ming to clarify his understanding with James so that he does not accidentally breach his workplace duty of care.

Ming follows Lily’s advice and discusses the matter with James, who is more than happy to help Ming to better understand workplace terminology and how the documents apply to his role.



Practice task 18

1. Why is it important for workers to read and understand documents that relate to their role?

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2. What are five examples of documents that relate to a community services role?

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3. Why should workers clarify their understanding of workplace documents with their supervisor?

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Click to complete Practice task 18

5C Complete written and electronic workplace documents to organisation standards

The organisation that you work for will have standards regarding written and electronic documentation. Regardless of the method used for documenting, it is important that you comply with the standards set out in the documentation procedures. These standards help maintain the quality of the documentation content and make the communicated messages more effective.

Quality documentation is important for workplace auditing and for meeting legislative requirements. It is therefore important that workers follow these standards to ensure the consistent provision of high quality documentation every time.

If you are producing informational material on behalf of your workplace then it is also important that you remember to follow the organisational style guide.



Documentation standards

Documentation standards play an important role in safe guarding the accuracy, integrity and quality of a document's content. These standards provide the writer with guidelines that aim to make their document more concise, legible, credible and effective at communicating key messages to an audience.

The following information provides examples of organisational documentation standards for written and electronic documents.

Written documentation standards

- ▶ Letters should be clear, non-cursive and legible.
- ▶ Use correct spelling and grammar.
- ▶ Only use accepted industry abbreviations.
- ▶ Use correct industry terminology.
- ▶ Use objective language.
- ▶ Avoid use of jargon and explicit language.
- ▶ Follow the required format.
- ▶ Use clear, concise and sequential sentences and paragraphs to express information and ideas.
- ▶ Document who the entry is by, including role and contact details/department.
- ▶ Rule off any blank spaces in case notes.
- ▶ Note the time and date in case notes and care plans.

Electronic documentation standards

- ▶ Follow the corporate style guide.
- ▶ Use clear and aesthetically pleasing formatting.
- ▶ Leave ample white space for promotional material.
- ▶ Use approved fonts and appropriate font sizes.
- ▶ Note file pathways.
- ▶ Note version number.
- ▶ Note approval line and dates of consultation if required.
- ▶ Use watermarks where appropriate.
- ▶ Ensure image and video content do not violate copyright laws.

Complete documentation

There are many different types of documentation that you may be required to complete as part of your role in the community services environment. It is important that you understand the documentation standards, including the format, style guide, content, language, submission timeframe and security requirements regarding each document.

Here are some examples of different workplace documentation that you may be required to complete or contribute to as part of your role.

Examples of common workplace documentation



WHS reports

All community services workers have workplace health and safety responsibilities. Communicating with others about risks is part of these responsibilities. If you witness a workplace accident involving a person, you may be required to fill out an accident report form. Recording near misses or incidents also assists in making improvements to workplace safety to minimise hazards or risks.



Service data

Service data includes hours spent on each activity, with each person, in each program area, and usually entered directly into an electronic database as required by the funding body/government department/organisation's board. The data is often collected daily and submitted quarterly.



Organisational reports

Organisational reports include annual reports, strategic plans and business plans. These are generally produced on an annual basis.

Projects and programs require regular progress reports at intervals throughout delivery. Evaluation reports are provided following the completion of a project or program.

2. What are five possible written documentation standards that Vineet may include in his audit?

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3. What are five possible electronic documentation standards that Vineet may include in his audit?

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Click to complete Practice task 19

5D Follow organisation communication policies and procedures for using digital media

Information technology is advancing in leaps and bounds. There are new programs coming out on a daily basis that aim to improve communication and the sharing of images, videos and text. These programs and the way they change and transfer content can be highly effective tools for enhancing the provision of care in the community services sector.



Your workplace will have communication policies and procedures in place regarding the use of digital media. The aim of these policies and procedures is to protect the image, integrity and credibility of the organisation by ensuring that digital media is only used in an effective and appropriate way.

Digital media in the community services sector

Digital media is an effective and useful means of information sharing in the community services sector. The term 'digital media' refers to any audio, image, text or video that has been digitally compressed into a file format. Digital media includes social media networks, applications and websites, emails, short informational video logs, and audio information sessions known as podcasts.

In a society of highly digitalised content and technology, it is important that community service organisations are able to use this widely used media as a communication tool. For many people, digital programs are quickly replacing written and verbal information as their preferred method for receiving information.

Digital media can also be used by community services workers to enhance professional development, profession related networking and service promotion.

The following information details some forms of digital media that may be used in the community services sector.

Examples of digital media:

- ▶ Organisational web pages
- ▶ Online data storage systems, sometimes referred to as cloud-based software
- ▶ Emails
- ▶ Video informational logs
- ▶ Audio information recordings known as podcasts
- ▶ Social media on social network platforms
- ▶ Internet browsing for professional development and research
- ▶ Online learning platforms for mandatory training modules
- ▶ Online advertisement of services and jobs
- ▶ Newsletters and broadcasts

Internet use

The internet is a large network which spans the globe. It is comprised of many millions of computers that are linked to each other. The internet is a rich source of information and news, as well as a way for people to communicate with each other.



Within the community services sector, you will be able to use the internet to research what services are available in your locality, your state/territory and nationwide. You will also be able to join online meetings and forums where information is exchanged with others who also work in your sector.

It is important to remember that not all the information on the internet is reliable. When accessing information, look at the sources to ensure that the author is credible and/or the owner of the website has provided contact details. Government websites are good examples of pages with reliable information, and they always provide a way for you to contact the department if you require further details or assistance.

Much of the information on the internet is copyrighted, so if you are going to use material, be sure to acknowledge your sources appropriately.

Intranet use

Your workplace will have a strict set of policies and procedures that need to be followed at all times regarding maintaining documentation. In general, all your interactions and activities need to be documented to ensure that appropriate care is being followed, that actions can be tracked and that other stakeholders are informed.

Intranet is similar to the internet, except that it is privately managed and run by organisations, and contains information that is only relevant to that organisation. Access is limited to people who work within the organisation.

Intranet use provides a way to keep everyone in the organisation informed. As such, this is where you will find forms, templates, policies and procedures that you need to use and implement. Here are some details about these documents and why they are important.

Forms and templates

Many of your workplace activities and processes will involve filling out specific forms and templates such as referral forms, hazard and injury reports, funding/resource request templates and service applications. These will be provided at your induction into the workplace and will be located with your workplace's policies and procedures.

Knowing which form/template to use in any given circumstance and how to fill it out correctly are vital aspects of everyday work practices.

Always be sure to ask your supervisor if you need more information.

Policies and procedures

Your workplace's policies and procedures are your primary guide to your workplace and its activities. While you will be provided with these documents at your induction into the workplace, you need to be responsible for familiarising yourself with them and for keeping up-to-date with any changes. Make sure that you know where these documents are located (both electronically and hard copies) to ensure that you can access them quickly and efficiently.

Email

Electronic mail (or email) has quickly become the preferred way to send and receive many types of workplace correspondence. Email offers organisations advantages such as:

- ▶ low-cost communication
- ▶ the sender does not need to know the geographic location of the receiver
- ▶ email is almost instantaneous
- ▶ files produced using a range of software can be attached to the email
- ▶ email can be retrieved 24/7 depending on the receiver's situation
- ▶ communication can be sent to a large number of parties simultaneously
- ▶ hyperlinks can be included in the email guiding the receiver to internet sites.

The computer programs and hardware used and an organisation's policies and procedures will determine how an individual employee sends, saves, records and retrieves emails.

Social media

'Social media' is a term used for a collection of computer-based tools that are used to communicate and share ideas and content. Users are able to create and add content to websites as well as modify and comment on the content uploaded by others.

Businesses and individuals can use social media to create forum groups, network with others and exchange information that is relevant to the particular organisation or sector.

Social media websites are used throughout the world and are increasing in popularity as their applications and potential uses are expanded.



Podcasts and videos

Podcasts are a series of digital programs that can be made up of radio, audio, video or text files. The series is usually composed of episodes that are presented on a regular basis.

Podcasts are generally distributed over the internet to subscribers who download and listen/watch/read the content. Often specialised applications (or apps) are developed to make it easier for subscribers to get their podcasts without needing to search for or find each episode as it is released. Podcasts are saved onto the subscriber's device (unlike internet streaming, where the subscriber accesses content directly from the internet and it is not saved to any personal device).



Videos are digital movies that can be accessed on digital storage media (e.g. DVDs), streamed from the internet, or downloaded from the internet and watched on a personal device. Many smartphones and cameras are capable of capturing video footage, which has made video production much more widely available to everyone than it used to be.

With this surge in availability, it is now easy to share videos using the internet or by saving the files on digital storage media (such as DVDs, memory cards, portable storage devices or hard drives).

Both podcasts and videos are an excellent way to share information. Teaching people to master skills is facilitated when they can see and hear what is being taught as opposed to reading text and having to interpret the meaning. Once a podcast or video has been created, it can be easily shared, replayed, updated and copied, so becomes a very efficient and effective way of presenting information.

Tablets and applications

Tablets (and smart phones) are a relatively new way to use and access digital information. Like computers, tablets use applications to interpret and present information.

Tablets have been designed to be more portable and faster to turn on/off than computers. They are lighter and designed to be used in a wider range of places, although modern laptop computers can compete with tablets in many of these aspects.

It is possible to develop specialised applications for tablets and smartphones. For example, applications to access the servers at hospitals or healthcare centres enable users to make appointments to see care providers. Applications can be purchased and installed on tablets, which can be customised to the needs and functions of organisations and the people who access services.

The range and specialisation of applications on tablets continues to grow very rapidly, making tablets and smartphones increasingly useful digital devices.



Newsletters and broadcasts

Newsletters are generally short documents consisting of a few pages that are published at regular intervals. They have been a popular way of sharing information and keeping people up-to-date with events and information for many years. Advances in digital media applications mean that newsletters can be produced with interactive media as well as colour photos, diagrams and text. These media enhance the presentation of the document and make it more visually appealing to the reader. Within the community services sector, newsletters can be used to share information with people accessing services and those with whom they live, as well as promoting information within organisations.

Broadcasts are a way of presenting information to a mass audience by way of radio or television. Information is captured digitally and transmitted by airwaves or, in some cases, through wires. Anyone with a device capable of receiving and interpreting the signals is able to watch and/or listen to the information.

In the community services environment, broadcasts can be very useful for sharing information in different languages and with specific sectors of society.



Digital media communication policies and procedures

Although digital media is a highly effective communication tool it also has the potential to breach privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property related laws. There is also the risk of reducing the credibility of information through poorly produced digital media. Such occurrences can result in damage to the overall brand, image and reputation of the organisation. Furthermore, while social media pages can be a great form of advertisement they can also compromise professional boundaries if not policed and used in compliance with workplace human resource procedures and the code of conduct. For these reasons most community service organisations will have digital media communication policies and procedures to detail the appropriate and acceptable use of digital media.

The following information provides examples of how policies and procedures aim to govern the use of digital media in the community services sector.

Web pages and browsing

- ▶ Organisational web pages need to adhere to the style guide and contain clear, concise and accurate information.
- ▶ Workers may only visit work-related websites.
- ▶ Access to explicit or high risk sites may be blocked.
- ▶ Workers should only direct others to websites for information if the site is credible and complies with the procedures for the distribution of information.

Email

- ▶ Workers should only use their work email to communicate regarding work-related content.
- ▶ Work emails should contain clear, concise and appropriate objective language that is free of jargon.
- ▶ Work emails may need to contain an electronic signature.
- ▶ Work emails may require an information disclosure statement.

Social media

- ▶ Workers must not display any work-related images, text or other content on their personal social media pages.
- ▶ Only designated personnel can respond to public enquires posted on the workplace social media page.
- ▶ Workers must not access social media sites for personal use in business hours.

Podcasts and videos

- ▶ Podcasts and videos must adhere to the organisational style guide.
- ▶ They must use high quality, clear, concise and accurate content which has been approved for distribution by the organisation.
- ▶ The distribution or use of podcasts and videos must not violate intellectual property law.

Tablets and applications

- ▶ Tablet use may be restricted to workplace tablets only.
- ▶ Applications must be work-related.
- ▶ Workers must not play games in work hours.
- ▶ Workers must not take, distribute or use photos of people without written consent.
- ▶ Content that is used and shared must not breach copyright laws.

Newsletters and broadcasts

- ▶ Newsletters and broadcasts must adhere to the organisational style guide.
- ▶ They must use high quality, clear, concise and accurate content which has been approved for distribution by the organisation.
- ▶ The distribution or use of newsletters and broadcasts must not violate privacy and confidentiality law.
- ▶ Newsletters and broadcasts may require media release forms for use of photographs.

Internet policy

- ▶ Internet policy may allocate set timeframes for internet usage.
- ▶ It may involve downloading and installation restrictions.
- ▶ It may include web monitoring software to report breaches in accessing banned content.

Example

Follow policies and procedures for using digital media

Corey works for a community service organisation that uses digital media as an informational tool to enhance care provision. Corey's workplace has communication policies and procedures that regulate the use of digital media within the organisation.

Corey uses a social media platform and is connected to a few work colleagues through the network. The network shares information and pictures that people upload for others to see.

This morning Corey noticed that a colleague named Jezebel had uploaded an inappropriate photo of herself in the workplace with a comment that read, 'Is this what hell looks like? Because it sure feels like it'.

Corey knows that his workplace strictly forbids workplace images and references on personal social media networks. Corey reported the incident to his supervisor who immediately contacted Jezebel, requested that she remove the inappropriate content from her account and issued her with a warning for breaching the workplace communication policy regarding digital media.



Practice task 20

1. What is digital media?

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2. What are five examples of digital media that may be used in the community services environment?

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3. What are some instructions relating to the use of web pages that may be found in your workplace communication policies and procedures?

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4. What are some instructions relating to the use of emails that may be found in your workplace communication policies and procedures?

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5. What are some instructions relating to the use of social media that may be found in your workplace communication policies and procedures?

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Click to complete Practice task 20

5E Use clear, accurate and objective language when documenting events

In the community services environment written accounts of events are important legal documents. These accounts may be called upon as evidence in court proceedings if an adverse event has taken place and a worker needs to prove that they have followed reasonable care and not breached their legislative duties.

The language of these documents must capture the important details of the event in a way that is factual and free from emotions. It is therefore important that the records of the observations or events are clear, accurate and describe the event in objective language that is free from bias, exaggeration or understatement.



Professional standards of language

Professional standards require that reports and documents use objective language based on fact and observation. Objective language describes what has been observed or heard, while subjective language may be based on feelings, emotions or opinions. Objectivity is important for accuracy and accountability and ensures individuals are described in ways unaffected by judgments, stereotypes, assumptions or opinion.

When writing documents you need to ensure the language suits the audience. Each part of the community services sector often has its own language and jargon. To ensure clarity and accuracy, use complete words rather than abbreviations or acronyms and plain English instead of jargon. Here are some examples of objective or factual information compared with subjective information.

Objective versus subjective language

Objective: Mrs Smith stated, 'I am feeling depressed'.

Subjective: Mrs Smith seemed depressed.

Objective: Alex rose quickly, slammed the door and raised his voice.

Subjective: Alex acted aggressively.

Objective: When Tam was asked about her parents, she avoided the question.

Subjective: Tam didn't want to answer when I asked about her parents.

Objective: Mark uses heroin regularly.

Subjective: Mark is a drug addict.

Objective: Mr Thompson requires full physical assistance with meal preparation.

Subjective: Mr Thompson is unable to cook for himself at home.

Use objective language

Community service organisations must keep client or resident records about the people they provide services for. As a community services worker it may be your responsibility to collect, write down and store information about people accessing services.

The information you collect must contain only true and accurate information. You must not guess about what you write down; you must stick to the facts and only write down what you know and what you saw.

Organisations will have specific policies and procedures that you need to know when you complete documents. Documents and forms will vary between workplaces. Make sure you're familiar with the documents used in your workplace.



Document events

You will be required to document events when working in the community services sector. The types of observations you will document may include the behaviour and actions of the person accessing care and any conversations and circumstances that influence your delivery of care.

Documented events can be used to show that you have been compliant with your legislative requirements and have followed the policies, procedures and care plans in your workplace.

Documented events are a useful source of information when reviewing policies, procedures and care plans and for identifying the need to make changes to them. You may be required to report these observations in care plans, progress notes, and formal assessments or as your workplace practices require. Here are some examples of what to document when reporting events.

When reporting events you should document the following information:

- ▶ When the event took place (time/date)
- ▶ What you observed (include specific details)
- ▶ Where the event took place (include details of the location and the environment)
- ▶ Who was present (include details of what they were doing at the time)
- ▶ Why the observed event took place (include any relevant behavioural triggers)
- ▶ Any outcomes or consequences that occurred as a result of the observed event

Example

Use clear, accurate and objective language for workplace documentation

Donna is an aged care provider for a community service organisation. This morning Donna was providing care to Irene, a 70-year-old lady with a mild intellectual disability.

Irene’s daughter was present at the time and Donna noticed that Irene seemed frightened and that there were notable changes in her behaviour.

No incident took place during the care but Donna felt that she should document Irene’s behaviour. She was feeling nervous as she didn’t want to make any false accusations or assumptions.

Donna spoke to her supervisor about the situation. Together they looked through the workplace policies and procedures and found that Donna had a duty of care to document what she had observed and to do so objectively within a 24-hour period.

Donna’s supervisor told her that she didn’t need to worry about making accusations if she kept the information objective and accurately documented when the observation took place, what she observed, where she was, who was present and any other relevant circumstances and outcomes.



Practice task 21

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

Case study

Kathryn is an aged care provider and as part of her care role she assists Mr Smith with showering and dressing three mornings per week. Mr Smith has severe dementia and does not ever recognise or remember Kathryn.

Each time Kathryn provides care to Mr Smith she objectively documents the care he has received. Kathryn also documents his behaviour and any events that have taken place while he was receiving her care.

Some days Mr Smith becomes very distressed and is combative towards Kathryn. On those days she cannot safely assist him to shower. Some days Kathryn will be able to use the strategies in Mr Smith’s behaviour management plan to calm him enough that he will allow her to administer care. However, on other days she cannot safely administer care and must document that care was not provided and the reasons why.

1. What is objective language and why should Kathryn use it in her care of Mr Smith?

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2. Why is it important for Kathryn to document observed events that take place while she is providing care to Mr Smith?

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3. What type of information should Kathryn document when reporting observations regarding events that have taken place during Mr Smith’s care?

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Click to complete Practice task 21

Summary

1. It is important that you are aware of, and follow, the documentation procedures in your workplace to ensure that you are meeting the legal requirements of your role.
2. Documentation provides evidence of compliance with industry standards and ethical and legal requirements.
3. In the community services environment there are many workplace documents that relate to the rights and responsibilities of workers.
4. It is important to understand the information contained within documents and also how it applies to you in your day-to-day work practices.
5. If you are unsure of how a document applies to you and your role then you should clarify your understanding with a supervisor as soon as possible.
6. It is important to follow written and electronic documentation standards to ensure the consistent provision of high quality documentation every time.
7. Although digital media is a highly effective communication tool it also has the potential to breach privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property related laws.
8. You should follow the communication policies and procedures that detail the appropriate and acceptable use of digital media in your workplace.
9. You will be required to document events when working in the community services sector.
10. Objectivity is important for accuracy and accountability and ensures individuals are described in ways unaffected by judgments, stereotypes, assumptions or opinion.

Learning checkpoint 5

Complete workplace correspondence and documentation

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in completing workplace correspondence and documentation.

Part A

1. What is meant by the term 'digital media'?

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2. What is digitalised content and how is it used?

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3. What are five examples of digital media that may be used in the community services sector?

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4. What are some instructions relating to the use of web pages that may be found in workplace communication policies and procedures?

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5. What are some of the instructions relating to the use of the internet that may be found in workplace communication policies and procedures?

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6. What are some of the instructions relating to the use of tablets and applications that may be found in workplace communication policies and procedures?

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7. What are some instructions relating to the use of podcasts and videos that may be found in workplace communication policies and procedures?

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8. What are some instructions relating to the use of newsletters and broadcasts that may be found in workplace communication policies and procedures?

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Part B

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

Case study

Sonia has just received an email from her colleague Ben. Ben often sends group emails of images or jokes that he finds humorous to the people he works with. Sonia does not understand Ben's sense of humour and thinks his jokes lack intelligent thought and cultural sensitivity. Sonia also thinks that when Ben uses his work email account in this manner that he is likely breaching multiple workplace policies and procedures. Sonia is also concerned by the subjective way Ben describes people and events in his case notes. Sonia is not friends with Ben outside of work on any social media networks, but she has heard from other workers that he frequently comments about work on there too.

1. What are some important reasons why Ben should comply with the documentation requirements of his workplace?

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2. What are some types of information that Sonia may be required to document as a worker in a community services environment?

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3. Why is it important for Sonia and Ben to read and understand documents that relate to their work roles?

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4. What types of documents may relate to Sonia's work role?

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5. Why should Ben clarify his understanding of the workplace documents that relate to his role with his supervisor?

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6. Why is it important for Ben and Sonia to comply with their organisation's documentation standards?

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7. What written documentation standards should Ben be aware of and comply with?

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8. What electronic documentation standards should Ben be aware of and comply with?

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9. What are some instructions relating to the use of emails that may apply to Ben's workplace communication policies and procedures?

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10. What are some instructions relating to the use of social media that may apply to Ben's workplace communication policies and procedures?

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11. What is 'objective language' and why should Ben use it in his documentation?

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12. Why is it important for Ben and Sonia to document observed events that take place while they are providing services to someone?

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13. What type of information should Ben document when reporting observed events that have taken place in his workplace?

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Topic 6

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 6A** Contribute to identifying and voicing improvements in work practices
- 6B** Promote and model changes to improved work practices and procedures in accordance with organisation requirements
- 6C** Seek feedback and advice from appropriate people on areas for skill and knowledge development
- 6D** Consult with manager regarding options for accessing skill development opportunities and initiate action

Contribute to continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is an essential component of evidence based and best practice care. There are many ways in which you can contribute to the continuous improvement processes in your workplace. This may include working in cross-sector teams, identifying and voicing improvements to practice based on consumer feedback, participating in performance based workplace feedback processes, and by actively pursuing ways to identify and update your own knowledge and skills in line with organisational needs.

6A Contribute to identifying and voicing improvements in work practices

Workers play an important role in identifying and voicing improvements in the community services sector. It is therefore important for workers to understand how the roles of workers, their organisations and other community services should interact in order to optimise service delivery. This may involve working within different service models and understanding roles and responsibilities within a team.

Continuous improvement is important because all community services work in a rights-based and person-centred approach to care, which aims to deliver the best practice care that is tailored to the needs of the person who is accessing that care.



Principles of rights-based service delivery

A rights-based service delivery approach aims to provide equitable and accessible service that provides care with respect to a person's right to autonomy.

Access and equity are two very important principles in community services work. Together, access and equity seek to remove barriers and provide opportunities for people with various needs and abilities. It is vital workers understand and can demonstrate their commitment to these access and equity principals when undertaking their work.

Treat people fairly in community services work

It may seem like a lot to remember but if you follow your organisation's policies and procedures, ask your supervisor when you are not sure about what to do, and treat everyone safely, fairly and with respect, then you can be sure that you are doing your job well.

And knowing how to do your job well will mean you're confident, professional and can have a fulfilling career in community services work.



Autonomy, access and equity

It is important that community services workers understand the concepts of autonomy, access and equity and how they apply to their work.

'Autonomy' refers to a person's right to make their own educated decisions regarding their behaviour and the way they live, even if those decisions are detrimental to their health.

'Access' means that services are planned, managed and delivered in a way that gives everyone the same opportunity to find and use services.

‘Equity’ means that resources are made available to everyone, not just certain groups of people. Equity shouldn’t necessarily be equated with equal opportunity, which focuses on overcoming discrimination to give everyone an equal start; rather equity focuses on participation and achievement to the same level.

Principles underpinning person-centred service delivery

A person-centred approach is one that focuses on responding to the whole of the person, including their needs, fears, dreams, social networks and relationships, and thereby addressing the holistic needs of that person. It is a tailored approach to the delivery of care.

A person-centred approach:

- ▶ focuses on the whole of the person or the community, not just the service being accessed
- ▶ uses empowering language that promotes dignity
- ▶ includes people in decision-making relating to the services they are receiving
- ▶ involves people in discussions about service delivery options and issues
- ▶ obtains the person’s consent to work with them
- ▶ listens to and addresses complaints.



Characteristics of multidisciplinary teams and how they are used

A multidisciplinary approach involves combining the knowledge and skills of many different workers from different disciplines to devise a care plan that meets the holistic needs of a person accessing a service. This team approach identifies that each person has diverse service needs and that no one singular carer can meet all the service needs of that person. By involving many different workers with different skills and knowledge each individual care need can be addressed, even those the person may not have sought care for originally.



This approach acknowledges that addressing the needs of the whole person will also benefit every discipline-specific care need.

Roles and responsibilities

The community services environment requires a strong collaborative team approach to care. It is important that people are aware of how their role and responsibilities directly impact the provision of care and how they contribute to the overall effect of the team.

The following information provides examples of some common roles and responsibilities in a community services team.

Supervisor

A supervisor should support the individual members of their team through delegation of tasks, feedback, supervision, communicating changes in the workplace and enforcing compliance with workplace procedures.

Health professional

Health professionals include specialists, doctors, physiotherapists, podiatrists, nurses and many others who have a qualification in health care. These health professionals should guide the team in the medical and health related needs of the person accessing care, so that the whole team can carry out these instructions to optimise the person's health benefits.

Carers

Carers may include people who are employed to provide care, or family members, friends and volunteers who play a role in the provision of care to a person in need of assistance. Carers should follow the instructions of health professionals and ensure that they are communicating back important information regarding their firsthand knowledge of a person's care needs.

Support workers

Support workers are any person providing assistance to a person to enable them to be more independent and to achieve a higher quality of life. Support workers should follow the instructions of health professionals and ensure that they are communicating back important information regarding their firsthand knowledge of a person's support needs.

Administration officer

Administration officers play an important role in coordinating service access, inputting service data and often providing first point contact with people who need to access a service. Administration officers should communicate with other members of the team to ensure that the information they are inputting and providing is consistent with the care plan and service information.

Support services

Support services play an important role in the community services sector in enabling people to be more independent and to achieve a higher quality of life. Support services have many different roles depending on the work environment and the needs of the individual. Support services provide valuable emotional and practical support to people accessing care.

The role of a support services worker may include:

- ▶ identifying individual support needs
- ▶ breaking down tasks to enable independence and participation
- ▶ making appointments and providing transport
- ▶ providing emotional support to people and their families
- ▶ providing memory support to people with dementia or memory loss
- ▶ providing physical assistance with personal care and activities of daily living.

Funding environment

The community services sector is funded by many different funding bodies. These bodies allocate money to community services based on identified need. Community service organisations are then accountable to the funding body with regards to how they spend that money and the quality of the service they provide using those funds.

The following information provides examples of possible sources of funding in the community services sector.

Funding sources:

- ▶ Federal government
- ▶ State government
- ▶ Local government
- ▶ Voluntary organisations
- ▶ Non-profit organisations
- ▶ Commercial organisations
- ▶ Fundraising and charity organisations

Understand links and interrelationships with other services

Often when supporting a person it is necessary to work with a range of different community services. A service user (or their representative) must give consent before any information is shared with or accessed from another community service. Most organisations gather this consent using a specific form. Consent is given for access to particular information for a particular purpose; often the specific workers within the organisation receiving the information are also named.

Although different organisations may provide specific service needs, it is important to understand that they are linked through the shared values and philosophies that govern the community services sector. These values emphasise the need for workers to understand the interrelationships between services so that the holistic care needs of the individual are met.

Here is a summary of the broad values and philosophies that apply across community service organisations.

Least restrictive option

The least restrictive option or alternative refers to maximising the independence and autonomy of the people who access community services. It requires workers and agencies to intervene and provide service in a way that has the least impact and is least restrictive to the individual. This philosophy embraces supporting a person to live in their own homes, as opposed to residential settings.

A least restrictive alternative may be to provide taxi vouchers to a person accessing care as opposed to a community services worker driving the person to their appointment or activity if the person only requires assistance with transport. Another example might be to provide personal care twice a day to a person in their home rather than the person living in a residential facility.

Valued roles

Valued roles emphasises the importance of people who access community services being supported to participate in the community in ways that are valued. This philosophy supports people to engage in meaningful activities and live in accommodation that is considered normal and valued for another person in the community who is not disadvantaged or accessing community services.

This philosophy requires a community services worker to always ask the question, 'What would a valued person be offered in this situation?' An example is supporting a person with a mental illness to access employment or to vote rather than to participate in day-program activities.

Empowerment

Empowerment focuses on enabling people to act and speak for themselves, and for workers not to unnecessarily act on behalf of a person accessing care. Empowerment also involves teaching people how to do things so that they are not dependent on services.

Empowerment includes teaching children the skills to say, 'No, I don't like it', 'Stop' and 'That's not OK' when another person is doing something that makes them feel uncomfortable rather than intervening on the child's behalf as the first response.

Empowerment also involves modifying the environment and providing equipment aids to a person who is physically unable to complete tasks in their home so they can maintain their independence.

Proactive and preventative

The community services sector seeks to offer programs and services that reduce the need for crisis access to services.

Health promotion and community development are two areas of the community services sector that focus on proactive and preventative community services. For example, an over 60s exercise class, which aims to keep older people active as a proactive health measure and assist potential prevention of falls and other issues.

Wellbeing

The community services sector upholds the wellbeing of staff, people accessing services and the broader community. Being proactive and preventative is linked to wellbeing.

Many community service organisations provide an employee assistance program (EAP), which provides free, confidential counselling to staff about work or non-work-related matters. Most organisations also provide debriefing after critical incidents and when staff require support.

Rights

Services are delivered in a way that promotes the rights of people accessing services, community services workers, and the community.

Most organisations provide people with written information, sometimes in the form of a care charter, about their rights and responsibilities when they are first accepted to a service.

Individual needs

Community services respond to the individual needs of a person needing a service rather than offering programs and services that a person must fit into.

Each person has an individual plan that outlines their goals; the activities and supports required to achieve these goals; and the services being provided.

Accountability and duty of care

Duty of care is more than meeting legal requirements to prevent unreasonable risk and harm. Workers and organisations in the community services sector also have an ethical and philosophical responsibility not to expose people accessing services, other community services workers and the community to unreasonable risk, and to be accountable for the way this is managed.

Many organisations have a policy about relevant staff holding first-aid certificates. Most services require a national police check and/or a working with children check.

Person-centred and holistic approach

A person-centred approach to providing community services focuses on responding to the whole of the person and their needs, fears, dreams, social networks and relationships, not just the service they are accessing.

The people accessing services are encouraged to invite people who are significant to them (not just staff) to a meeting to write a care plan, which focuses on the whole of their life, including dreams, relationships and community connectedness, not just meeting service provision.

Organisation structure: optimum service delivery

Your organisation will be made up of individual units or teams that aim to achieve specific needs or functions. These units work together to form the organisation structure.

The structure of an organisation impacts upon how information is processed and transferred both within that organisation and on to external departments.

In these ways the organisation's structure is designed to meet individual care needs and optimise service delivery by providing an efficient service, and also identify when a person requires a service that is outside of the scope of the organisation.



Sector roles and quality care delivery

Relationships exist between different members of the community services sector to facilitate a more holistic person-centred approach to care. By dividing the roles of community services between different organisations, each organisation is able to contribute to quality care delivery by completing the functions of their role.

The following explains the various organisations that make up the sector and their roles.

Councils of social service

Social service councils (national and state) focus on research in the community services sector, influencing policy development and lobbying the government.

An example is the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

Government departments

Government departments often have statutory obligations under the relevant acts, fund and assess community agencies, and are also directly involved in service provision.

Examples include the Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria) and the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (South Australia).

Peak bodies

Peak bodies seek to be a state-wide or national voice on a particular community issue. They offer information and research, membership, advocacy and education for the sector.

An example is the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA).

Unions

Unions seek to promote and protect the rights and working conditions of employees in the community services sector. Unions may also undertake research regarding the sector and lobby the government.

Examples include the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and The Australian Services Union (ASU).

Associations

Associations provide information and education to its members and the broader community. Often associations provide networks to connect people affected by or interested in the same issue.

Examples include the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Muscular Dystrophy Australia and the National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC).

Government organisations

A government organisation provides community services and is managed and funded by local, state or federal government.

Examples include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit (ACT) and the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP).

Non-Government organisations

A non-government organisation provides community services and is usually predominantly funded by the government but is run by an agency independent of the government. A board or committee of management oversees non-government organisations.

Examples include the Red Cross, Mission Australia and Anglicare.

Charities

The primary function of most charities is fundraising and philanthropic work. Many charities are also involved in research and direct service provision.

Examples include the Fred Hollows Foundation and CanTeen Australia.

Different models to support optimum service delivery

A model of care describes the way a community service provides and delivers care. There are many different models of care within the community services sector because different groups of people have different care needs and one model cannot cater to every group's needs.

By using a range of models the community services sector can optimise service delivery to all groups within the community.

Examples of models of care include:

- ▶ transitional care
- ▶ shared care
- ▶ family-based care
- ▶ pre-admission clinics and planning
- ▶ multidisciplinary care
- ▶ integrated mental health service.



Identify and voice improvements to work practices

Obtaining and responding to regular and meaningful feedback is a vital part of the role of a community services worker. To support a person-centred approach to service delivery, the opinions and feedback of people accessing services must remain central to an organisation's decision-making process. Responding to people's feedback is one way that workers can actively identify and voice improvements to work practices.

Here are some ways to obtain meaningful service feedback.

Ways to obtain meaningful service feedback include:

- ▶ providing access to any communication aids, assistance, written translations or interpreters as required
- ▶ ensuring confidentiality and privacy
- ▶ providing an appropriate feedback mechanism to meet the needs of individuals
- ▶ ensuring any documents or questionnaires are user friendly and in plain English
- ▶ allowing sufficient time for people to provide feedback
- ▶ following up on feedback and informing contributors of any outcomes.

Seek ongoing work practice review and evaluation

Ongoing review and evaluation is an integral step in providing quality programs and services. When delivering a program or service, a community services worker should factor in regular, formal and informal monitoring.

Ongoing review allows for responsive actions from workers and organisations to consistently improve services to better meet people's service needs. Evaluation should be undertaken to measure the effectiveness of a program or service against identified goals and outcomes.

Many organisations have a program management methodology, so seek advice from your organisation's quality coordinator about monitoring and reviewing programs and services.

Example

Identify and make improvements

Lesley is a community services worker working with children at a deaf facility. Lesley identifies that there are many children with full hearing who are interested in learning Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Some of the teachers are trying to facilitate a lunchtime group to facilitate this, but are finding it difficult. Lesley and the teachers identify and voice that it would be best to have a hearing-impaired Auslan teacher run the group.



Lesley investigates grant options and learns about a community development grant for which a lunchtime group would meet the requirements. Lesley writes the grant application, and submits it to the council. Lesley and the teachers write an advertisement and position description for the role. Lesley seeks assistance with the recruitment processes from the human resources officer in her organisation before advertising the role. A suitable teacher is appointed. Lesley meets regularly with the teacher to provide ongoing support, and takes responsibility for the reporting and evaluation requirements of the grant.

Practice task 22

1. What is a person-centred approach to care?

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2. What are the possible roles of a support service?

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3. What are four possible sources of funding in the community services sector?

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Click to complete Practice task 22

6B Promote and model changes to improved work practices and procedures in accordance with organisation requirements

Improving workplace practices and procedures should be an iterative process. An iterative process is a continuous improvement process of repetitive cycles of analysis and updates. At each new review cycle, analysis of performance measure data will indicate whether or not the action is successfully achieving the workplace objectives, and indicate the need for corrective changes.



As the community services environment is constantly changing it is important that workers are able to promote and model changes to improve work practices and procedures. Often this change process will involve identifying and overcoming workplace barriers to change. This change management style ensures that workers meet individual needs and the organisational requirements at the same time.

Respond positively to changes to work practices and procedures

Continuous improvement ensures that services and programs are responsive to the needs of the people and communities who access services. In order to promote and implement positive change, community workers and coordinators should demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to respond positively and effectively to changes in work practices and procedures.



Effective communication and working in a team are essential elements when negotiating and then implementing new work practices and procedures.

Often changes may cause stress, anxiety and, for some, resistance to change. Remember that change may create anxiety and confusion for a person accessing care. Therefore, it is vital that community services workers and supervisors manage change in a manner that is both supportive of co-workers and protects people's welfare and needs.

Identify barriers to improvement

To develop a successful strategy for workplace improvement, you will first need to identify and understand the potential barriers to change. It is important to understand that change will only occur as a function of dissatisfaction or danger from the current state of things; motivation from the vision of a better future; and by having an achievable and worthwhile sequence of practical steps.

Barriers to change will inevitably relate to one or all of these factors. The more factors involved, the more likely it is that the intended improvement will either be unsustainable or never come to pass.

It is important to identify barriers to improvement early on in any planned change, in order to devise strategies that will successfully overcome those barriers in a consultative and supportive way.

The following outlines methods that you can use to identify potential barriers to improvement in your workplace.

Methods to identify barriers to improvement

Talk to key people

Talking to key people that will be affected by a change is a quick and inexpensive way to gain understanding of particular benefits and problems that may arise as a direct result of the change.

Observe current practice

Observing the issue you wish to improve provides insight into the current workplace behaviours and factors involved, this can be done informally or as a workplace audit.

Interview people involved

Conducting face-to-face interviews or using a questionnaire is a good way of capturing information about the beliefs, behaviours and knowledge of a work group.

Mind mapping

Presenting an issue and allowing the people affected to map potential solutions to the problem is a powerful way to identify current beliefs, behaviours and knowledge, and often discover the best motivation to use when building a case for change.

Focus groups

Conducting a facilitated group conversation comprised of open questions can provide a solid evaluation of the range of beliefs, behaviours and knowledge within a work group.

Contributing factors to barriers to improvement

Change in any workplace is an inconvenient and disruptive process even when implementing an improved way of operating. When dealing with barriers to change it is important to understand that you are dealing with personal beliefs and behaviours that may not always be rational or even understood by those who hold them.

Barriers to change can be categorised into five groups based on the factor causing the resistance to the change process.

The following information outlines contributing factors to barriers to improvement.

Awareness and knowledge

Awareness and understanding are an essential first step in any change process. Being unaware of what needs to change and not understanding why it should change will be a barrier to improvement.

A drive to change behaviours

An individual will not be motivated to change unless their current circumstances are more uncomfortable than the proposed change, or unless they fear the current circumstances more than the proposed change. Alternatively, a person will be motivated to change if the incentive is large enough to cause them to desire the change.

An individual's beliefs and attitudes

An individual's beliefs will impact on the way that they behave. If they believe that the proposed change is not worth the effort or financial cost required to achieve the change, then they will resist the change process.

The ability to implement change

If an individual does not have the skills or coping strategies required to implement a proposed change, then they may resist any and all changes.

Practical, financial and political challenges

Lack of time, money, resources, equipment, infrastructure, scope and priority can also be barriers to improvement.

Model changes

Workers should be able to actively model and promote the changes they wish to see in their workplace practices and procedures. Often this will include the worker using and demonstrating behaviours that enhance a workplace culture of continuous improvement.

The following are examples of ways in which workers may model and promote change in their workplace.

Implementing change:

- ▶ All information about processes is clear, accessible and transparent.
- ▶ The process is carefully planned and not haphazard.
- ▶ Appropriate time is allowed for transition and reflection.
- ▶ Individual needs of workers and people accessing services are acknowledged and responded to.
- ▶ Updates are given regularly and ongoing review and evaluation is planned.
- ▶ Continuous feedback and consultation is actively sought from all people affected by the change.
- ▶ Milestones and team contributions are celebrated in a meaningful way.
- ▶ Adequate training and time to practise any new functions is provided.

Example

Promote and model changes to improved work practices and procedures

Lana is the supervisor at a warehouse responsible for the distribution, collection and maintenance of loan medical equipment, such as raised chairs and shower stools.

Ralph, a worker at the warehouse, approached Lana last week with a great idea for improving workflow and decreasing manual handling risk. Ralph suggested that they relocated all the heavier items to the large storage area located closer to the equipment pickup entrance.



Lana talks to some of the key people that would be affected by the change and realises there are some barriers to the improvement that will need to be addressed and overcome.

In her discussions with the workers Lana identifies that the two main barriers to change are the lack of awareness for the need to change and concern for the way implementing the change will interrupt the service.

Lana arranges a focus group discussion at the next staff meeting and through a range of directed questions allows the team to discuss the current manual handling risk and inconvenience of collecting the larger equipment from the back of the warehouse. The team members quickly engage with the need to address the risk to themselves and other workers.

Everyone agrees that the equipment needs to be relocated and are happy to assist when Lana suggests closing the service for a morning and having extra staff rostered to help rearrange the warehouse.

By promoting and modelling improvement to work practices, Lana successfully implemented and sustained an improvement in her workplace.

Practice task 23

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

Case study

Kaveh works as a practice manager at a general medical practice. Kaveh has noticed that in the past six months the reception workers at the practice have been reporting a significant increase in calls relating to clarifying appointment times or rescheduling missed appointments.

Kaveh discusses the issue with Zoey and Alfred, the owners of the practice, who suggest that the practice switches to a new appointment management system that can generate appointment letters and send automated appointment reminder text messages to mobile phones.

Zoey and Alfred put Kaveh in charge of consulting with the reception workers and implementing the new system.

1. What factors need to be present in Kaveh’s workplace in order for the workers to accept the proposed improvement?

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2. What are some methods that Kaveh can use to identify barriers to the new appointment management system?

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3. What are the ways that Kaveh could promote and model the improved work practices and procedures?

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Click to complete Practice task 23

6C Seek feedback and advice from appropriate people on areas for skill and knowledge development

Your workplace will have processes in place to provide feedback regarding the quality of the service provision, ease of access of the service, areas of achievement, areas for improvement and feedback on the worker's and supervisor's performance.

Feedback is an important continuous development tool that allows workers to reflect on their performance in a constructive way that enables further improvement and achievement.

It is therefore important that workers seek feedback and advice from appropriate people on areas for skill and knowledge development.



Seek feedback and advice

Feedback is a process of giving and receiving information regarding the outputs, consequences or results of a worker's performance. Giving and receiving appropriate feedback is vital to effective communication. For example, it is difficult for a person to determine if they are doing a good job or if there are areas of their performance that are not up to standard if they don't receive feedback. Without the right type of feedback, people don't know if their role and work is valued by their supervisor and others.



Feedback is a two-way process, as workers should also have the opportunity to share their experiences with their supervisors. Some organisations use feedback processes, such as 360 Degree Feedback, which involves a worker receiving feedback from their supervisor and from several peers as well. This enables the worker to see how their performance is viewed from a range of perspectives.

Seek advice about skill and knowledge development

Personal improvement and job-skill development contributes to good personal practice and also to organisational success in service delivery. Skill and knowledge development is particularly effective if it responds to identified gaps or opportunities in a worker's or supervisor's learning.

Strategies for identifying gaps and opportunities include:

- ▶ audits and self-assessment processes
- ▶ formal performance appraisals
- ▶ ongoing supervision by managers
- ▶ feedback from people who use the service
- ▶ feedback from other workers
- ▶ informal self-reflection.

Feedback for improvement

Many workers struggle to give feedback when improvement is required, or feedback may be viewed as negative. Some tips for providing feedback in a situation where improvement is required are discussed below.

Tips for providing feedback where improvement is required:

- ▶ Provide positive comments about areas the person is performing well in.
- ▶ Describe the situation or issue that you want to provide feedback about.
- ▶ Ask the person for their view of the situation.
- ▶ Agree on a summary of the situation or issues.
- ▶ Develop an action plan to resolve the situation.
- ▶ Agree to follow up dates to ensure the situation has been followed up appropriately.

Example

Seek feedback and advice for skill and knowledge development

Aaron learnt the importance of reflective practice and seeking feedback at college and is new to community services work. One month ago Aaron met with his supervisor Cindy to review his performance as part of the normal probation period processes. During the meeting Cindy identified that Aaron could improve his performance by collaborating more with his team members and by asking them for feedback on ways that he could add value to their team projects.



Since that meeting Aaron has dedicated the last ten minutes of each work day to collaborating with other workers and seeking their feedback. If something of consequence occurred during the day, Aaron also makes a note of it to discuss with his supervisor. Aaron has a setting on his email calendar that reminds him to check his performance plan for incorporating feedback every fortnight. Aaron doesn't spend much time on this task but wants to avoid arriving at his next performance review not having made any progress on the areas of improvement from his last feedback session. Aaron has also joined a peer supervision program that meets monthly to discuss and share issues that emerge from responding to the particular care needs of people accessing their service.

Practice task 24

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

Case study

Kayla has worked as a community services worker for 20 years. The organisation she works for has recently been taken over by a bigger company. As part of the takeover, the new company has implemented its supervision and feedback policies.

Kayla has not received much feedback during the latter part of her career and feels very nervous and uncomfortable about the change. She speaks to her supervisor Douglas about the new procedures and voices her concerns. Douglas assures Kayla that the supervision and feedback processes are actually there to support her and ensure that she is given the learning opportunities that she needs to improve within her current role, and maybe even pursue more experienced positions in the future.

1. What is feedback and why is it important for Kayla to seek advice and feedback in areas of skill and knowledge development?

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2. What are some strategies that Kayla could use to seek feedback and advice on knowledge and skill development?

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3. What are some ways that Douglas could provide feedback to Kayla on areas of her work that require improvement?

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Click to complete Practice task 24

6D Consult with manager regarding options for accessing skill development opportunities and initiate action

Having systems that enable workers to consult management and access skill development opportunities are an important part of a continuously improving workplace. Workers need to understand that their own skill development adds tremendous value to the overall efficiency and quality of their workplace. Skill development in the community services sector will depend upon a collaborative action plan between a worker and their supervisor.

It is important that workers take an active role in their own skill development and frequently consult with management regarding desired and required skill development opportunities.

Options for accessing skill development opportunities

Skill development may take place formally and informally, in groups and independently, in classrooms and in workplaces. Workers need to identify the learning option that is most appropriate to the skills and knowledge that they want to develop, with consideration to their individual learning style and the time they have available to undertake the learning.

To investigate learning options you may talk to colleagues and peers, ask your supervisor for feedback, approach the human resources officer in your organisation, attend information sessions at training organisations and universities, join professional networks in-person and electronically, and gain information about relevant learning opportunities in the community services sector. Here are further details about skill development opportunities.

Formal learning

- ▶ Formal learning is effective for when there is an industry standard or qualification that is required or recognised by the community services sector or your organisation.

Informal learning

- ▶ Informal learning may be necessary when you need to develop skills or knowledge that is unique to your particular workplace, or when the skill is a small component of a larger skill set and you don't require the entire skill set.

Coaching

- ▶ Coaching is a good option if you are interested in progressing to a higher role within your agency and require further skills and knowledge for the role, or if you are acting in a higher position. Coaching may also be useful if you have devised personal goals for developing your skills and knowledge and you need assistance to implement them.

Conferences

- ▶ Conferences and workshops for skill and knowledge development are vital in the community services sector. Regular participation in conferences enables workers to keep abreast of current issues and developments in the sector, and may also provide ideas for areas that may be relevant and appropriate for ongoing formal learning.

Consult with a manager and initiate skill development

Your organisation will have support systems in place to help you to initiate skill development in areas of need and those in which you wish to improve. It is important that you are aware of these support systems and actively consult with your supervisor on desired and required skill development options. The most common workplace tool used to initiate skill development is a performance development appraisal (PDA). A PDA is a strategic meeting that takes place annually between a worker and their supervisor. The meeting aims to discuss work-related achievements, challenges, changes and developments in the worker's role and skills, and then agree on development strategies to achieve new skills.



Often the initiation of skill development will require some kind of support or action from your supervisor. This may include funding for skill development courses, allocated work hours for study, work shadowing opportunities or skill development opportunities by acting in a position or completing duties other than your usual ones. However, it is important that workers don't just wait for their supervisor to arrange everything for them; they need to be willing to dedicate time and effort to the identified development strategies which will assist in their skill development.

Initiate action

The following information provides examples of actions that a worker may take to aid their own skill development process.

Skill development actions:

- ▶ Request a performance delivery appraisal.
- ▶ Identify skill areas of interest that align with organisational needs.
- ▶ Set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific goals.
- ▶ Identify internal learning opportunities within the current workplace.
- ▶ Identify external learning opportunities outside the current workplace.
- ▶ Seek regular feedback.
- ▶ Request a workplace mentor.
- ▶ Be accountable to the skill development plan.
- ▶ Document learning.

Document learning

Participating in ongoing skill and knowledge development is an asset to workers. For professional recognition, you must keep accurate and up-to-date records of learning plans and any learning you undertake.

When documenting learning:

- ▶ develop an annual learning plan or skill development plan to encourage your commitment to learning and also the commitment of the organisation to follow through with any support required
- ▶ link your learning goals to the goals of the organisation and be clear about how the learning relates to your responsibilities
- ▶ keep records of formal and informal learning by preparing a folio to store and present.

Example

Consult and initiate action

Emma is a motivated and hard-working aged care worker. Emma has noticed that a lot of the people that she provides care to are living with some stage of dementia. Emma identifies that there is a need for dementia friendly changes to her care provision.

Emma actively seeks out a meeting with her supervisor Shawn. She details the identified organisational needs, her own need for new skills and a list of potential options and opportunities for skill development within her workplace. She also presents Shawn with a list of professional development courses and identifies how the acquired skills will meet the goals and values of the organisation.

Shawn is very impressed with Emma's initiative and together they write a plan that will enable Emma to develop skills related to working with people who have dementia.



Practice task 25

1. What are some important reasons why a worker should consult with their supervisor over skill development options?

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2. What are five actions that a worker could take to initiate skill development?

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3. What information should a worker document regarding their skill development and learning?

[Click to complete Practice task 25](#)

Summary

1. Workers play an important role in identifying and voicing improvements in the community services sector.
2. It is important for workers to understand how the roles of workers, their organisations and other community services should interact in order to optimise service delivery.
3. In the community services sector workers may be required to work within different service models and understand roles and responsibilities within a team.
4. Community services work is a rights-based and person-centred approach to care, which aims to deliver the best practice care, and access to care, that is tailored to the needs of the individual.
5. As the community service environment is constantly changing it is important that workers are able to promote and model changes to improve work practices and procedures.
6. Improving workplace practices will involve identifying and overcoming workplace barriers to change.
7. Your workplace will have processes in place to provide feedback regarding the quality of the service provision, ease of access of the service, areas of achievement, areas for improvement, and feedback on worker performance.
8. It is important that workers seek feedback and advice from appropriate people on areas for skill and knowledge development.
9. It is important that workers take an active role in their own skill development and frequently consult with management regarding desired and required skill development opportunities.

Learning checkpoint 6

Contribute to continuous improvement

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in contributing to continuous improvement.

Part A

1. What is meant by the term ‘autonomy’ as a principle of rights-based care delivery?

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2. What is meant by the term ‘access’ as a principle of rights-based care delivery?

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3. What is meant by the term ‘equity’ as a principle of rights-based care delivery?

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4. When is formal learning an effective skill development opportunity?

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5. When might a worker participate in informal learning as a skill development opportunity?

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6. When might a worker participate in coaching as a skill development opportunity?

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- 7. Why might a worker participate in a conference or workshop as a skill development opportunity?

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- 8. What is a model of care and why are there different models of care in the community services sector?

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Part B

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

Case study

Aarav is developing a training session for community services workers that will explain ways in which they can contribute to improvements in their workplace. Aarav wants to make sure that he doesn't exclude any important information that relates to the community services sector, so he asks Vivaan to review his training content. Vivaan has been working across the community services sector for over 30 years and is a wealth of information on links between services, service models, feedback processes and opportunities for skill and knowledge development.

- 1. What principles of rights-based service delivery might Aarav include in the training session?

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- 2. What are the principles that Aarav might teach in regards to providing person-centred care?

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3. What information should Aarav include regarding the characteristics and use of multidisciplinary teams?

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4. What information might Aarav include on team roles and responsibilities?

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5. What information might Vivaan provide to Aarav regarding the important role of support services?

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6. What are four sources of community services funding that Aarav might mention in his session?

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7. What information regarding links and interrelationships between services might Vivaan share with Aarav?

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8. What information might Vivaan share regarding the role of an organisation's structure in optimising care?

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9. What different models of care could Aarav include in his training session?

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10. What considerations might Aarav give regarding how to collect service feedback in order to identify and voice improvement to work practices?

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11. How can the workers who attend Aarav's training promote and model improvements in workplace practices?

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12. What methods might Aarav use in order to identify resistance to workplace improvements?

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13. What might Aarav suggest in order to promote and model workplace improvements?

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14. What is feedback and why would Aarav recommend that workers seek advice and feedback in areas of skill and knowledge development?

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15. What are some strategies that Vivaan could recommend for workers to use to seek feedback and advice on knowledge and skill development?

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16. What strategies could Aarav recommend regarding providing feedback to workers on areas of their work that require improvement?

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17. What are some important reasons why Aarav might recommend that a worker should consult with their supervisor about skill development options?

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18. What are five actions that Aarav could recommend that the workers take in order to initiate skill development?

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19. What information might Vivaan recommend that a worker documents regarding their skill development and learning?

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20. What information might Vivaan share with Aarav regarding the relationships that exist between different members of the community services workforce?

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