



National Healthcare  
Communication  
Programme

# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

A leaflet for healthcare staff



*Making conversations easier*

# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Clickable contents

### Self-awareness

Emotional triggers

### Self-management

Core emotional concerns

### Social awareness

Non-verbal behaviour

Active listening

Reflective listening

Empathy

### Relationship management

Initiating the conversation

Sharing information

Closing the conversation



Brings you back to contents



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

What I see



What I do



## PERSONAL

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### 1. Self-awareness

Knowing what you are feeling, and your strengths and areas for improvement

### 2. Self-management

Managing emotions, recovering from upset, being flexible and adaptive

## SOCIAL

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### 3. Social awareness

Empathy for others, sensing others' feelings, needs and concerns.  
Understanding different perspectives

### 4. Relationship management

Building relationships, influencing and motivating others, managing conflict, enabling co-operation and teamwork

“

*Leadership is a performing art –  
a collection of practices and  
behaviours rather than a position*

Kouzes and Posner (2005)



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-awareness

### Emotional triggers

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Prepare yourself

#### Prepare yourself



- Specific practices can allow us to become intentional. Create a ritual to focus your attention before a meeting or conversation.
- Try sitting for a few moments in silence
- Taking 3 deep breaths before walking into the meeting room
- Gentle stretching
- Breathe in and out from your center (an internal balance point approximately two inches below the navel). Do you feel calm? Confident? More present?
- Practice the 3 Rs  
**Relax** your body – **Rest** your mind – **Remain** vigilant to your intentions for the conversation
- Think about the **communication skills** you wish to use.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-awareness

- Consider your **biases** (judgements and interpretations). Be aware of your *judgements* and hold them lightly (allow for the possibility that your judgement might be inaccurate so you remain open to new information). Remember that your *interpretations* are not necessarily 'the truth', they may be one of many possibilities.
- Consider your **triggers** (behaviours in others that tend to irritate you). Why is this important for communication? Because when our negative emotions are aroused, it becomes more difficult to respond constructively. If we respond using destructive behaviours, our conversation partner can become angry, react and this can lead to a cycle of retaliation.
- Even a few minutes of self-awareness can help to **reduce tension and anxiety** from the first few minutes of a conversation and periodically thereafter, at key transitions, for example, immediately before and/or after a conversation or meeting.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-awareness

### TIP

Reflect on any psychological barriers (stereotypes, cultural assumptions, prejudices) that might be present in order to be able to communicate effectively with people of different ages, genders, cultures and socio-economic positions.

### Self-awareness

*The range of what we see and do  
Is limited by what we fail to notice.  
And because we fail to notice  
That we fail to notice,  
There is little we can do  
To change  
Until we notice  
How failing to notice  
Shapes our thoughts and deeds.*

**R. D. Laing**



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-management

### Core emotional concerns

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Appreciation
- ☐ Affiliation
- ☐ Autonomy
- ☐ Role
- ☐ Status

Fisher and Shapiro's Core Emotional Concerns framework identifies 5 key emotional concerns that significantly influence people's behaviour in situations of conflict or stress.

*Thank you for coming in early to take that meeting*

#### 1. Appreciation

- Recognising, valuing and acknowledging what our colleagues say, think, feel, or do.
- Becoming aware of how you want or need to feel **appreciated** and using this knowledge to stimulate positive emotions for yourself.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-management

### 2. Affiliation

- A sense of connectedness with another group or person. A feeling of belonging and trusting those around us.

*I want to understand your perspective so we can work together to come up with a plan.*

- Becoming aware of how you want or need to feel **affiliated** and using this knowledge to stimulate positive emotions for yourself.

### 3. Autonomy

- Respecting the freedom of people and colleagues to decide.

*Your views and preferences are very important. Please tell me what you need from me.*





# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-management

### 3. Autonomy (Condt.)

- Becoming aware of how you want or need to have **autonomy** and using this knowledge to stimulate positive emotions for yourself.

### 4. Role

- Ensuring that one's role is fulfilling and adds value.

*It is important for us to work together, I recognise your role as central in helping us to achieve our objectives.*



- Becoming aware of how you want or need a fulfilling **role** and using this knowledge to stimulate positive emotions for yourself.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Self-management

### 5. Status

- Recognising and valuing the importance of colleagues. We all need to feel that we matter.

*Your ideas are crucial in helping us improve our processes and prevent such errors in the future.*

- Becoming aware of how you want or need to enjoy your **status** and using this knowledge to stimulate positive emotions for yourself.

### TIP

Healthcare leaders can use the core concerns as a **lens** to help diagnose the emotional aspects of a situation or conversation (self and social awareness) and as a **lever** to produce positive emotions (self & relationship management), by expressing appreciation, building affiliation, respecting autonomy, acknowledging status, and choosing a fulfilling role.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Non-verbal behaviour

*In this section we are looking at how to observe and attend to the nonverbal messages our conversation partners are giving us. This awareness of the impact of nonverbal communication can also be used in the fourth domain of emotional intelligence (relationship management) when we become aware of the impact of **our own non-verbal communication** on the conversation.*

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Facial expression
- ☐ Eye contact
- ☐ Open body language
- ☐ Gestures
- ☐ Pace, pitch and tone
- ☐ Touch
- ☐ Space
- ☐ Maintain focus on the person

#### Facial expression



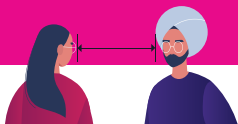
- Facial expressions are a common form of non-verbal communication. Examples include smiling and grimacing.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Eye contact



- Our eyes have been referred to as communication windows. They convey how we feel and what we are thinking. Your level of eye contact should reflect that of the other person.



### Open body language

- How we sit, stand or walk can convey strong messages. Leaning forward can demonstrate interest, while crossing arms and legs may be viewed as a defensive posture. A relaxed posture is important, so the person doesn't feel rushed.

### Gestures

- Hand and head movements are an important part of gesturing. Shaking or nodding your head can communicate disagreement or attentive listening.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Pace, pitch and tone



- It is often through our pace, pitch and tone that we can communicate our feelings and attitudes. When we are depressed, tired or calm our vocal cords relax and the pitch of our voice goes down.
- Using a slow pace may come across as lazy or indifferent but to another listener may come across as calm and thoughtful.
- Tone refers to the richness of the voice. Warm tone communicates self-assurance and strength.

### Touch

- Touch can be used to show support, care and empathy.
- Handshake or a hand on the arm or shoulder if the person becomes upset.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

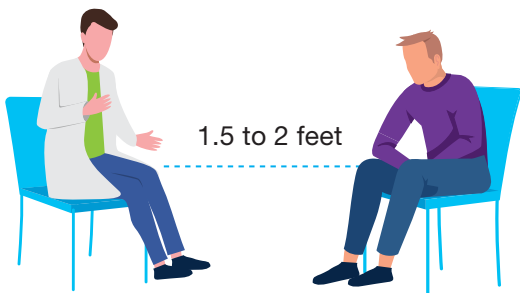
## Social awareness

### Space

- We can use space to convey messages. Personal space is a three-dimensional space surrounding you. This zone has a distance of 1.5 to 2 feet which is a comfortable zone for talking in a social or healthcare situation.

### Maintain focus on the person while writing notes

- Taking notes can be explained as a means of enhancing the conversation by providing an aide memoire of next steps and important points.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### TIP

Healthcare leaders must have the ability to remain calm under emotionally demanding situations. While communicating with people who may be experiencing strong emotions, your vocal tone can display this calmness and can impact on the other person's mood, help reduce the tension of the situation and on how the person perceives and interacts with you.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Active listening

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Non-verbals (face the person, open body posture, leaning, nodding, appropriate eye contact)
- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Effective pauses
- ☐ Read the persons verbal and non-verbal cues

#### Face the person

- To demonstrate active listening, face the person.

#### Open body posture

- A relaxed posture is important so the person doesn't feel rushed.





# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Attentive body language

- Warm facial expression, leaning and nodding demonstrates interest in what the person is saying.

### Appropriate eye contact



- Encourages the person to continue speaking.

### Silence (not interrupting)

- Listen for at least 90 seconds without interrupting. This allows time for the person to collect their thoughts.

### Pick up on any non-verbal cues

- Facial expression, body language and verbal tone can give you clues about how the person is feeling and what they are thinking.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Reflective listening

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Open questions
- ☐ Clarifying questions
- ☐ Minimal encouragers
- ☐ Screening
- ☐ Reflect (repeat, paraphrase, summarise, reframe)
- ☐ Closed questions

**Use open questions and allow the person time to respond**

- Used when you want more than a yes or no answer. Usually begin with:

*Who, Why, How, When, What and Where?*

*How can I help?*

*How are things?*

*What can I do for you today?*

*How are you doing?*

*What's happened?*

*How did you feel when that happened?*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### What are you listening for?

- Notice if the person repeats a word or information - repetition indicates importance. Notice if there is extra energy or emotion around a particular part of their story. Listen below the surface. What might be of concern? What might they value? What are their beliefs?

### Clarifying

- Clarifying means asking questions until you get a clearer picture of what is being said so you understand it, for example...

*So you're saying you're concerned about... What concerns you most?*

### Short verbal encouragers (Uh-huhs/Yes/Ok/Umm-mm/Tell me more)

- Brief supportive statements that signal attention and interest, aim to encourage the person to continue talking.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Screening

- Screen at a natural pause.

*That's a good strategy.  
What else?*

*Tell me more...*

### Reflect what you observe or hear

- Learn to listen with both ears – keep one ear out for emotion.

*It sounds like that was  
very upsetting for you*



### Simple reflection (repeat)

- These reflections add nothing at all to what the person has said, but simply **repeat** it using the same words. They acknowledge and validate the person's voice and show that you are listening.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Complex reflection (paraphrase)

- Involves saying back to the person, in your own words what you think they just said. Paraphrasing may also reflect back something that the person has not yet stated directly...

*What I hear you saying is... You've been doing really well these past few weeks, and then this week has been harder.*

### Reflection with a reframe

- By your word choice, you offer to reframe how the person is approaching a situation. The goal is to reflect back what may be important to the person who is making the statement and provide an alternative way to view the situation that captures what matters most to that person.

*She is the most incompetent nurse I have ever seen!*

### Reframe

*You sound upset. What would be help you feel assured that you have the support you need from the team?*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Summarising

- You reflect back a whole paragraph of what you have been hearing. Repeating what the person has said, shows that you have listening. It helps to ensure that your interpretation of the information is correct and gives the person an opportunity to hear what they have said and reflect on it.

*Ok, so far you  
have said that...)*

### Closed questions

- Used when you want specific information. Often result in one-word answers like yes or no. Closed questions are used to dig deeper, finalise options and bring closure to an issue. Usually begin with *Do*, *Can*, *How many?* and so on.

*When will we meet  
again to discuss this?*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### TIP

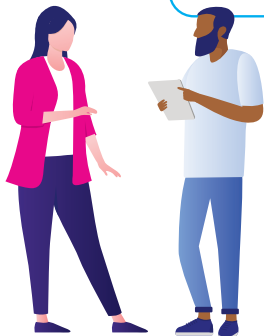
There are two main types of reframing:

- Changing a complaint or criticism to a statement of unmet needs
- Restating toxic language in neutral terms

Notice how your own body is responding to what you are hearing or seeing? How is that impacting what you are hearing? How is that impacting how you interpret what you are hearing?

*I am not sure  
what to do*

*You're not sure and you want  
to make the right decision*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Empathy

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Read the persons verbal and non-verbal emotional cues
- ☐ Emotional labelling
- ☐ Summarising
- ☐ Mirroring
- ☐ Open questions
- ☐ Silence

#### Notice cues

- Notice behaviours that suggest emotion (verbal and non-verbal cues) and name the emotion. When you name an emotion, pose it as a question (phrase or tone) as your assessment of the emotion is based on your perception and you may not be correct. Use language that mirrors or reflects the person's language. Pause and listen. Be present. Be kind.

*You seem upset today*





# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Elicit emotions

- Elicit emotions through questions.

*How are you feeling  
about this?*

### Use non-verbal responses to show you care

- Pause, offer tissues, lean in, a touch on the shoulder or arm, if appropriate.

### Acknowledge and validate how people feel

- Sharing observations and feedback can help to offer another perspective.

*That sounds  
very difficult*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### Explore emotions

- Explore emotions to better understand values and concerns.

### When you notice emotion – G.I.V.E.

**G** **Get** it's emotion. Pause when you notice emotion. Don't answer feelings with facts. We do not need to suppress or resolve emotion. Offer connection, not information or false reassurance.

**I** **Identify** the emotion that you see or hear and name it.

*I can see that you are worried. I hear that you are frustrated.*

**V** **Validate** by acknowledging the emotion.

*This is a lot to hear. That sounds like it was very tough for you Evelyn.*

**E** **Explore** to better understand the emotion or to enquire whether the person wants to share more.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Social awareness

### TIP

Reflective listeners hear and then articulate the emotion or message back to the speaker. If the message is emotional, the reflection is a statement of empathy. If the message is information, then the listener states facts or data. Thus, the skills for picking up on emotional cues (social awareness), can then be used to demonstrate empathy to the people we work with (relationship management).



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Initiating the conversation

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Warm greeting
- ☐ Introduce yourself (name and role)
- ☐ Check the person's name and how the person likes to be addressed
- ☐ Use the person's name, particularly when demonstrating empathy
- ☐ Attend to the person's physical comfort
- ☐ Explain the purpose and structure of the conversation
- ☐ Ask permission
- ☐ Share your thinking
- ☐ Explain your rationale

#### Warm greeting

- Greet the person with a warm hello.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Greetings (*contd.*)

- Introduce self by name and your role. Let the person know who you are.
- Check the person's name. Ask how they prefer to be addressed.
- Use the person's name throughout the conversation. Particularly when demonstrating empathy.

*That sounds like it was very challenging for you... Peter*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Involving the person

- Attend to their physical comfort.
- Explain the purpose and structure of the conversation.
- Ask permission.

*Are you comfortable?  
Would you like some tea  
or coffee?*

*I wanted to get your  
perspective on...*

*Can I share some feedback with you?*

- Share your thinking.

*I wanted to talk to you  
about something that's  
been on my mind.*

- Little things but they make a big difference.

### TIP

Using skills carefully at the start of the conversation quickly builds trust and enables the rest of the conversation to flow more smoothly.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Sharing information

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Assess starting point
- ☐ Chunk and check
- ☐ Ask what other information would help the person
- ☐ Use easy to understand language and avoid jargon
- ☐ Slow down
- ☐ Organise the explanation
- ☐ Provide structure (signpost)
- ☐ Repeat and summarise
- ☐ Check understanding
- ☐ Watch out for and respond to non-verbal cues
- ☐ Allow time and opportunity for people to contribute
- ☐ Share your thinking
- ☐ Explore options
- ☐ Check with the person



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### ASK-TELL-ASK

#### ASK

- Ask a question before sharing information and listen to response (check starting point). This helps to focus your information.
  - What they want to discuss (agenda)
  - What they understand
  - Their expectations
  - What they are most concerned about
- Understand values and goals before discussing specific next steps.

*Just so I know where to begin,  
can you tell me what you have  
heard about...*





# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### TELL

- Tell the most important message first.
- Use small chunks (**chunk and check**).
- Provide information in manageable chunks, check for understanding and use the person's response as a guide to how to proceed. The person should respond to your chunks with questions or may indicate that they are happy for you to continue.
- Use easy to understand language.
- Organise and signpost.
- Be honest and direct.
- Pause frequently (allow time for the person to process the information).

*There are 3 areas that we might discuss... First...*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### TELL (*Condt.*)

- Relate information to their concerns.
- Check in/respond to non-verbal cues.  
Find out more by asking:

*tell me more about that?*

- Repeat as necessary
- Negotiate the plan. Signpost your own preference regarding options and determine the person's preference...

### ASK (after telling)

*how do you feel about...?*

- Check understanding and/or reaction after sharing information.
- Check that the person understands any key points of advice or information.
- Ask them to restate it in their own words, not just repeat it, to ensure the message is understood.
- Explain to the person that you are happy for them to make notes, if they would find that helpful.



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### ASK (Condt.)

- Check their ideas, concerns and expectations been addressed...

*Which options do you prefer?*

*What have you decided to do?*

*Can I check what you are thinking about the plan?  
What questions do you have?*

- Validate the complexity or difficulty of the conversation

*I have shared a lot of information with you — let's pause — I'd like to hear what questions you have for me...*

### TIP

Provide structure for the person throughout the conversation. Summarise throughout to check understanding. Signpost and use transitional statements to progress from one part of the conversation to the next, e.g. “So now let's talk about...”



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Closing the conversation

#### Communication skills

- ☐ Outline next steps
- ☐ Safety netting
- ☐ Summarise the conversation (briefly)
- ☐ Check with the person
- ☐ Ask for any additional questions
- ☐ Support self-efficacy

#### Forward planning

##### Next steps

- Explain what will happen next.
- Agree on a time for a follow-up meeting.
- Emphasise support.

*You can always reach me if you want to talk.*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### Ensuring appropriate point-of-closure

#### Final check

- Briefly summarise what was discussed.

*So, just to review, we talked about...*

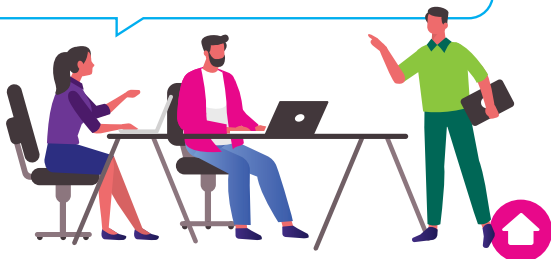
- Pause to allow the person to correct or add information.
- Moving towards the end of the conversation with 'Screening'...

#### Screening

*Are there things you would like to ask, that I have not said, or explained enough?*

#### Self-efficacy

*I'm happy to help you with that. I believe in your potential and I am confident that if you decide to make a change, you'll find a way to do it!*



# Communication Skills for Healthcare Leaders

## Relationship management

### TIP

Document your meetings – record the date and time of the meeting, the details of the conversation and the advice or information you have given to the person in the appropriate information system.



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This Skills Card is the work of Paul Kinnersley (EACH & Cardiff University), Peter Gillen & Eva Doherty (RCSI) & Winifred Ryan (HSE) with the help and support of Jonathan Silverman and many others in EACH.

