

Learning Guide

Communication



28557 Communication to support people's health and wellbeing

Level 3

Credits 5

Name:

Workplace:

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My notes 

Introduction

Good communications can improve the experience a person has in a health and wellbeing setting.

How to use your learning guide

This guide supports your learning and prepares you for the unit standard assessment. The activities should be used as a general guide for learning.

This guide relates to the following unit standard:

- 28557 Communicate to support people's health and wellbeing (level 3, credits 5).

This guide is yours to keep. Make it your own by writing notes that help you remember things, or where you need to find more information.

Follow the tips in the notes column.

You may use highlight pens to show important information and ideas, and think about how this information applies to your work.

You might find it helpful to talk to colleagues or your supervisor.

Finish this learning guide before you start on the assessment.

What you will learn

This topic will help you to:

- identify barriers to communication.
- communicate well.
- access communications supports.
- meet privacy, confidentiality and reporting requirements.

Why communication is important

Good communication is a key factor for people's health and wellbeing. You have a crucial role to play, whether you are interacting with the person you support, with other people such as their family/whānau, or with healthcare professionals. When the right information is communicated to the right people at the right time, the person's wellness is supported.

Communication is not just about words. It is essential that you are able to use a wide range of communication skills to establish a good relationship with people. People feel reassured and confident when they experience communication that is matched to their needs.

You will need to be observant so that you can notice and document relevant and appropriate information about them. Likewise, you will need to be able to follow correctly the instructions that other staff members provide.

To make sure that all this interaction happens effectively, you need to understand your organisation's policies and procedures around communication.



Effective communication helps in providing support and reassuring people.

Barriers to communication

Barriers to effective communication may arise because of the person's health status and functional ability.

Functional ability means functions like seeing, hearing and the speed at which information is processed.

Being aware of potential barriers in communication is important to make sure that communication messages reach the receiver and can be clearly understood.

Potential communication barriers will be different for each person

Individual barriers can arise because of the communication disabilities a person has, the way the person perceives and interprets messages, the person's ability to filter information to make sense of it, and the preferences the person has for communicating.

Language barriers

There are a number of barriers to language that you need to be aware of when communicating with others.

Different accents and use of words, along with sentence construction and vocabulary, are a challenge when people speak another language.

Barriers can arise when the person does not have the vocabulary to understand some words or gain meaning from the communication.

Jargon, especially in the health sector, can make it difficult for a person to understand what is happening. Make sure that you explain technical terms and things that will happen.

Cultural barriers

These barriers exist because of the differences in the cultural make-up of a person. Culture can refer to nationalities but also cultural background, differences in age, gender, ethics, values and religion. These factors all affect how we communicate.

Misunderstandings can occur when there is little understanding or acceptance of people's cultural make-up. For example, some gestures that a person uses may be acceptable to one person, but offensive to another person.

Sensory impairments

Sensory communication impairments are varied and affect a person's ability to communicate. The impairment can affect vision, or hearing, or the person may be deaf-blind.

Hearing aids enable people to hear sounds that they would otherwise be unable to hear. Hearing aids are much smaller now, are unobtrusive and can be almost invisible.

Braille is a system of reading and writing that is used by vision-impaired people. It is a series of six dots that are either embossed or debossed (raised or not raised) on a surface, and each combination of dots represents a letter of the alphabet. People who are vision impaired use their fingers to 'read' the Braille.

There are products called Braille note takers. Braille embossers can produce paper based Braille from computer files.



Using braille to read.

Cognitive communication

A cognitive communication disability means that a person has difficulty in gaining knowledge, and in applying logic and reason.

This disability is caused by damage to parts of the brain which can affect a person's memory and the ability to think, reason and communicate.

Cognitive damage can make it hard for a person to learn and remember new things, affecting the ability to learn speech, language and social communication.

The person may not be able to remember details, words or experiences. It may be difficult to translate thoughts into speech, writing or gestures; or to interpret words, body language and facial expressions to make sense of communication.

The person's speed of processing may be slowed and the person may not be able to concentrate for long. Or the person may struggle to stay interested and become distracted or fatigued.

Dementia

Dementia can slow a person's ability to think and process information so you will need to be patient.

People with dementia may:

- have difficulty in finding a word or give a similar word instead, which has a different meaning to the word they wanted.
- not be able to understand what you are saying, or understand only part of what you are saying.
- repeat questions constantly.
- have trouble expressing their emotions.
- pick up on non-verbal cues much more than what is actually being said.

You can help. Approach the person from the front. Get the person's attention. Use the person's name.

Face the person, be at the same eye level and make eye contact, if culturally appropriate.

Be calm. Avoid talking when there is background noise like TV or radio.

Use short and simple sentences, and make one point at a time.

Use familiar ideas rather than new or complex ideas.

Allow time for the person to understand the information and to respond.

Use simple questions with short answers. Do not ask questions that rely upon the person having a strong memory.

If you repeat a question or any information, try to use the same words.

Avoid arguing or contradicting people with dementia.

Communicating well

You can support the wellness of people by putting a lot of effort into all the ways in which you communicate. If you can build a relationship of trust, people are likely to be more open with you about their health achievements or concerns. Always check the communication preferences of the person you support.

Introducing yourself

Your first contact with the person may be over the telephone to arrange your first visit. Having a positive interaction in advance of the first visit will particularly help people who may be home alone, experience anxiety or are vulnerable in some way. You would introduce yourself by saying:

- who you are.
- the organisation you work for.
- that you will be coming to visit the person at a set time on a set day, or agree on a day and time that suits the person.
- that you are coming to support the person with the required activities.

You may be working in a residential home, a supported living environment or in a specialist facility within a hospital. When you start work, introduce yourself to the person you will be supporting during your shift.

At your first meeting with a person, show your organisation's identification badge. This is a simple way of providing reassurance and gives the person confidence. Speak at an appropriate pace, pitch and volume. Take the time to discuss the tasks and the person's requirements. If you can make it clear that you have read and remembered aspects of the person's plan, your efforts should be appreciated.

Planning the environment

When communicating with a person choose an environment that promotes effective communication. The environment should be:

- quiet. Ask if you can turn the television or radio down.
- free of distractions. Try to find a private space rather than a common room.
- comfortable for the person. Can the person sit comfortably, and see and hear you clearly?
- at a time of day that suits the person's health and activities.
- convenient for family/whānau.

Being respectful

Use their name

When you first meet a person, it may be appropriate to address that person more formally, for example, 'Mrs Smith' – rather than by her first name. This is a simple method of showing respect. You can then ask what that person would prefer to be called, even if this information is on their personal plan. From then on, always use this form of address when you support that person. If you don't know how to pronounce their name, ask the person to help you pronounce it correctly and to tell you if you say it incorrectly.

Body positioning and language

Be conscious about how you position your body and the messages that your body language is sending, so that you display a respectful attitude. Try to avoid standing over people as it's less intimidating if you can sit at their level or slightly lower. There are also practical reasons for doing this. People should be able to easily see you and maintain eye contact, and hear you without having to strain. Don't fold your arms or stand with one hand on your hip, as these positions could imply that you're not open to what people are saying, or are feeling impatient.



Body language

Do not stand over a person when speaking to them. It is domineering.

Attitudes

To communicate respectfully, you will need a non-judgemental attitude. Be accepting of others, and disregard stereotypes. If you make initial judgements about people based on their appearance or manner, you are at risk of delivering support that meets your assumptions, not their needs. Be willing to get to know people for who they are.

Showing respect in your day-to-day attitudes is often as easy as treating people as you would like to be treated:

- show thoughtfulness, kindness, patience and courtesy.
- listen without interrupting.
- check that you have understood by paraphrasing what you think you have heard.
- give people plenty of opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings.

Showing empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. In a health and wellbeing setting, it means looking beyond their health status, current condition and history of the person to appreciate their values, ideas and feelings.

Steps to building an empathetic relationship include the following.

- 1 Acknowledging the feelings that the person may be experiencing, for example, fear or grief.
- 2 Pausing to imagine how they might be feeling.
- 3 Repeating to the person your perception of what they are feeling.
- 4 Acknowledging that feeling.
- 5 Respecting the persons' efforts to help themselves and manage their situation.
- 6 Offering support, for example, "Let's see what we can do together to..."

Try questions and phrases such as:

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What has this been like for you?"
- "How has all of this made you feel?"
- "Let me see if I have got this right..."
- "Sounds like you are..."
- "I imagine that must be..."

Supportive use of questioning

You will often need to ask the person questions to clarify something you are unsure of, gain extra information or find out what they prefer. However it is important that these questions are supportive and asked respectfully so that the person does not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Supportive use of questioning involves:

- keeping the questions simple and not asking too many at once.
- asking the questions in an appropriate way, with a respectful tone.
- being considerate of the person's feelings. Asking in a way that makes the person feel in control and not interrogated.
- giving the person enough time to respond. Some people may need more time to process what they want to say.
- listening fully to the person and acknowledging the answer.

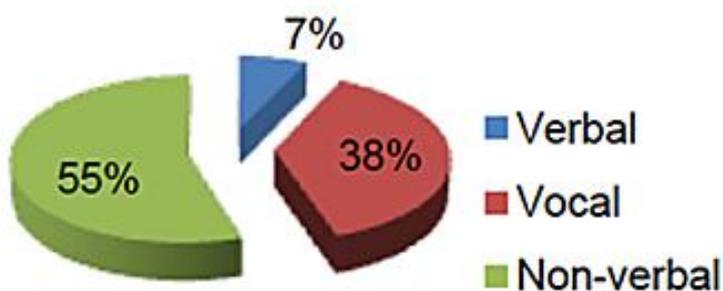
Always show patience, be attentive and watch for any non-verbal signals that may indicate the person is tired or becoming uncomfortable, embarrassed or distressed.

Non-verbal responses

Be conscious of your non-verbal responses. Research has shown that up to 55% of communication is non-verbal, expressed by facial expressions, gestures, nods or shakes of the head and use of eye contact. The messages that your non-verbal responses are giving need to be consistent with your words.

Likewise, pay attention to people's non-verbal signals. For example, if people appear to have 'switched off' this may be a sign that they are tired, have lost concentration, may be unwell or ready to fall asleep. Some people may feel reluctant to say that an arrangement is inconvenient or that an action makes them uncomfortable, so you may need to monitor their facial expressions to gauge their true feelings.

Communication



Plain language

Using plain language does not mean speaking or writing in a condescending or childlike way. It means using simple, everyday words that most people would understand. Using this language makes it easy for listeners and readers to understand what you are saying without having to struggle or make an effort. Keeping your sentences short also helps people process and understand your words.

On the other hand, using words that are specialised, technical or complex, can create the following unintended effects:

- confusion for the person and/or their family/whānau.
- people feel intimidated, embarrassed or upset because they don't understand what you are talking about.
- people misunderstand the information you give, which could result in not getting the support they need.
- a power imbalance between the person and you, which will make it more difficult to build a positive relationship.

Providing and/or recording information

There are likely to be many times when you need to provide people with information, for example, about changes in the roster, or record information that they have been given, ie, noting down what a health professional has advised. It's important that you take these tasks seriously and communicate as clearly as possible.

If you are providing information verbally, plan in advance what you will say. Introduce the topic clearly at the beginning and make sure that the person has grasped what you are talking about before providing any detail. Offer to provide written notes as well.

If you are recording information in writing, use clear handwriting or else type out the information. Use headings or other layout techniques such as use of **bold** text or *italic* to draw attention to important points.

Whatever method you use, keep the information as short as possible. Check with the person both at the time and on your next visit whether they have any questions about it.



Communicate clearly

Use written text and photographs to assist in the communication process.


Write

My notes 

Think about a person you support. **Look** at the communication skills in the table, and under Notes explain how you would use them. There is a sample answer, in red.

Communication skill	Notes
Introducing yourself	<i>I said my name and my organisation's name quite slowly, and she understood fine. I think she felt more relaxed then. But I forgot to ask what she wanted to be called, and she had to correct me. Now we have a laugh about it.</i>
Addressing the person in a respectful manner	
Showing empathy	
Supportive use of questioning	
Non-verbal responses	
Using plain language	
Providing and/or recording information	
Identifying barriers and overcoming them	

Communication supports

As you know, each person you support is unique. People's health condition and ability to function will influence their communication support needs.

Types of communication supports can include the following.

Interpreter services: signers, language interpreters, computer to speech technologies (electronic voice).

Visual aids and devices: communication boards and books, eye pointing, Braille, large print, use of glasses, magnified computer screens.

Auditory support: computer to speech technologies, signing, auditory prompts technologies, a microphone with amplifier.

Disability support services: speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, family/whānau support services for hearing and vision impaired.

Physical supports: a speaking valve (for tracheostomy), hearing aids, glasses and cochlear implants.

For some of these communication supports you may need training in how to use and implement them. You should be confident in using them. Make sure you check that the equipment is working correctly.



Using a communication support.

A person's communication needs and preferences will be set out in their personal plan. For example:

- a person with cerebral palsy may need assistive communication aids such as a voice activated computer and a communication board. If English is not the person's preferred language, the aids may need to be provided in the appropriate language.
- a person with hearing impairment may need communication supports such as a cell phone and a computer with internet access. However, that person may prefer to communicate through sign language, so a sign language interpreter should be provided whenever possible.
- a young person who needs to use computer technology to communicate may feel quite comfortable with this approach, whereas an older person may find it daunting and prefer more tangible, non-technological methods of communication.

How people can access the required supports will vary from organisation to organisation.

If it is in your role to access a communication support on behalf of a person, follow your organisation's policies and procedures closely. Your organisation will usually have regular suppliers or services that it uses, depending on the services available locally and on funding arrangements. There may also be step-by-step instructions about how to carry out particular tasks.

Often a way to support someone appropriately is to call on that person's **natural supports**.

Natural supports are any assistance, relationships or interactions that a person already has occurring in their lives with family/whānau, friends, peers, co-workers, and healthcare staff or community volunteers. Your role could be to encourage people to call on these existing support systems.

Communicating with others

As part of your role, you may need to communicate with:

- your manager/supervisor.
- other support staff who work alongside you.
- health care professionals who also provide support to the person (for example multidisciplinary team members, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists).
- other organisations (for example interpreter services, disability groups).



Communicating at a team meeting.

Remember that any information communicated about a person must meet the privacy, confidentiality and reporting requirements of the organisation you work for and the organisation that you are passing the information to.

All New Zealand organisations are bound by the 12 principles of the Privacy Act (1993). For the health and disability sector in particular, the Health Information Privacy Code (1994) provides specific rules about how information about is collected, used, held and disclosed by organisations and their staff.

Boundaries of your role

If you act beyond the boundaries of your role and disclose information in an unethical way, there can be significant consequences for you, the person whose information you disclosed and your organisation.

The consequences of acting outside your role may include:

- loss of privacy for the person affected.
- impact on how the person feels or behaves.
- harm to the person.
- distress or upset to the person's family/whānau.
- legal consequences for your organisation.
- difficulties for you, including potentially losing your job.

Privacy

Key principles about privacy that you need to apply in your work include:

- only gather information from people for a specific and legitimate purpose.
- only use or share personal information for the purpose for which it was gathered, unless there is a serious or imminent threat and the information you have can lessen that threat.
- if collecting personal information you must approach the person concerned or someone who has that person's permission to pass the information on.
- keep everyone's personal information safe – for both the person and staff members.
- keep personal information up to date and accurate.
- people can ask to see any information that has been collected about them.
- people can request that personal information about them is changed if they believe that it is not correct.

Confidentiality

At all times, use your judgement and think before you speak. If you do not feel comfortable in giving information then you should seek advice from your supervisor first. It is acceptable to delay responding to people's requests by saying "I am not sure", "I can find that out for you", or "I will get my supervisor to call you".

- Always put personal plans or other written material away, whether you are at work or at home, so that they are not lying around where other people can see them.
- Be aware of where you are when you are having personal discussions with a person, so that visitors or other people cannot overhear.
- Avoid making promises to people about what you will tell to whom.

For example, a person might say to you, "Please don't tell my daughter that I've had another fall". Or the daughter may be worried and ask you about her mum. Be guided by your organisation's policies and procedures and by that person's personal plan. If you are unsure, always check before formally disclosing the information.



Always hold meetings about people you support in a private office or space.

Checking instructions

Health professionals will communicate with you, either directly or indirectly, and it is your responsibility to make sure that you understand what is written or said. These instructions are provided to support and promote the person's wellness and your own.

You will receive instructions that are:

- written down (ie, in the personal plan or in medical notes).
- spoken to you.
- provided by the organisation you work for through its policies and procedures (ie, infection control policies, disposal of body fluids procedures).

When instructions have been given to you, you must ensure that you:

- comprehend (understand) the instructions. You may need to check that you have interpreted the instructions correctly.
- interpret (carry out correctly) the instructions as they have been given.
- understand the clarity of intent (why the instructions have been given and what they are aiming to achieve).

If you come across instructions that you are unsure of, make sure you check with your supervisor or with an appropriate health professional. If this is not possible straight away, check with someone else who is supporting the person. Always ask rather than risk getting it wrong.

Questions you could ask include:

- 'It says to..... does this mean.....?'
- 'By doing this.....does this mean.....?'
- 'I am not sure if I have understood this, can you just confirm that is correct?'

 **Write**

Think about a time when you had to communicate with other people to support a person's wellness. **Answer** the following questions, but **don't identify** the names of any of the people involved.

What did you need to communicate?

Who did you need to communicate this information to?

How did you communicate this information?

How did you meet the confidentiality requirements of your organisation?

How did this communication support the person's wellness?

Reporting

A person's personal plan or your organisation's policies and procedures will give guidance about what you need to record and report. In general, some examples of communication that may need to be recorded are:

- where the person or a family/whānau member discloses information to you that you think is important in promoting the person's wellness.
- where you observe a change in condition or behaviour that you think reflects a change in a person's wellness, either for better or for worse.
- where an individual goal has been met.
- exchanges that take place between the person and other health professionals.

Accuracy

You may need to record or report information in the person's case notes or other progress note records. This task is essential as all people supporting the person need to be aware of the latest developments so that they can provide the relevant care. To record accurate information, it is important that you listen to the person and make careful observations.

Importance of observation and listening

There are many changeable aspects of a person's condition that you will be the first or only person to see. These aspects may include:

- changes in physical condition.
- changes in mental or emotional condition, such as increasing confusion or persistent low mood.
- events such as falls, cuts or other incidents that may have impacted on the health and wellbeing of a person.
- changes in skin integrity, such as ulcers, sores or rashes.

People may not tell you about these changes so it is crucial that you observe and listen closely in all your interactions. For example, if someone says "It takes me two hours to get dressed on the days you don't come", this comment could be a signal that the level of support may need to be re-evaluated.

When you are working with people, listen or watch for:

- tasks that take shorter or longer times to complete.
- comments that indicate a task has become easier or more difficult.
- any of their symptoms that have become better or worse.
- events such as falls or confused spells that are happening more regularly.
- changes in other supports, for example, the person may say - “My daughter can’t come every night any more” or “My neighbour is sick and can’t take me shopping at the moment”.

Where you have to complete case notes or other records, make sure that you report:

Reporting:	You should:
Statements made by the person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report or record relevant statements made by the person. • Use the person’s own words. • Include any symptoms that the person reports. • Include what the person says about the symptoms’ severity and duration.
Observations you make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report or record any information you observe while listening to the person. • Report or record any information you observe while completing support tasks with or for the person. • Report or record any changes in the person’s condition that you observe.
Actions you took	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any action you have taken in response. • Occasions when you contacted your organisation for a person.