

## COMMUNICATION

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## Communication

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### Active Listening

To communicate well, learn to listen well. Practice these listening skills:

- Make eye contact
- Sit at eye level
- Look relaxed and interested
- Avoid making distracting movements
- Lean toward the talker in a "listening posture"
- Nod your head or make other understanding gestures
- Make sounds of understanding and interest at appropriate intervals, such as "hmm" or "oh, my"
- Ask questions about what the speaker is saying, to clarify a point, focus the conversation, and show interest
- Touch the speaker or hold his hand if appropriate
- Use the seven skills of active listening



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### Effective Talking

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To get your message across, practice the following speaking skills:

- Speak clearly and distinctly
- Use simple words and sentences
- Give all the information the person needs, such as whom you are and what you are going to do
- Use descriptive gestures to reinforce your words
- Use humor when appropriate
- Use expressions, gestures, and body language that reinforce your message

### Five “Don’ts” of Communication

To be an effective communicator, eliminate the following habits:

1. Don’t offer your opinions. Help your patients make their own decisions; don’t tell them what you think they should or shouldn’t do.
2. Don’t become defensive. When a patient criticizes you or someone else, reflect his concern back to him so you can learn more about the problem.
3. Don’t make judgments. Instead of showing disapproval, ask the patient about his reasons for acting or feeling a certain way. Be open to differences of opinion.
4. Don’t ask “Why?” “Why” questions make people feel defensive. Word questions in a nonthreatening way, such as asking calmly, “What happened?” or “Can you tell me about it?”
5. Don’t give empty assurances. “Everything’s going to be fine” isn’t necessarily true. Focus on helping the patient talk about his or her concerns.



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**Seven Skills of Active Listening**

1. Show interest. Use encouraging sounds, and nod your head. Don't appear impatient or hurried.
2. Be other-focused. Ask questions so others will talk about themselves. Focus conversations on the person you are talking to, not on yourself.

**Other-focused**

Patient: "I have 15 grandchildren but Tommy lives closest to me."

Staff member: "You have 15 grandchildren?! That's wonderful. Tell me about them."

3. Reflect. Keep conversations focused on the other person by reflecting back their thoughts and questions. Concentrate on their feelings and concerns.

**Reflect**

Patient: "What should I do about my mother?"

Staff member: "What do you think you should do?"

4. Be quiet. Sometimes people need some silence to gather their thoughts.
5. Clarify. Find out exactly what someone means when he or she says something. You can learn valuable information this way. Clarify anything that raises a question in your mind.

**Clarify**

Patient: "I'm too tired to take a bath today. Leave me alone."

Staff member: "Can you tell me why you are so tired today?"

6. Ask open questions. Ask questions that require more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. You get more information that way. For example, rather than "Are you okay today?" ask, "How are you feeling today?"
7. Repeat. To be sure you understand something, repeat what you hear in your own words and then ask if you repeated it correctly.



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### Expressions, Gestures, and Posture

The following are some tips on expression to communicate effectively:

- Make eye contact to show respect and interest
- Offer a gentle, respectful touch on the shoulder or the hand to give support and encouragement
- Sit at eye level if possible, and lean forward in an attitude of interest
- Demonstrate your words with hand motions that help show what you mean

In return, look for nonverbal messages in the face, hands, and body of those you talk with. Be aware of the nonverbal messages you are sending as well. If you are annoyed, you might be showing it more than you realize, with your hand on your hip and your eyes rolling. Pay attention to your body and correct any signals that might inhibit communication.

### Barriers to Effective Communication

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Sometimes, patients have trouble speaking, hearing, or understanding, or sometimes they get angry or emotional, making it difficult to communicate. The following are some tips to follow when you're in this situation:

- Allow plenty of time for the person to respond to something you say.
- Turn off or remove distractions such as a television or radio. You might have to close the door to the room if there is noise in the hallway.
- Stay on the patient's "good" side, where his or her hearing or speech is best. Let him or her see your mouth as you speak.
- Don't rush the person or finish his sentences for him, unless you can help by patiently supplying a word or two.
- When you are speaking, use the correct voice volume. You may have to be louder if the person is hard of hearing, but remember that individuals with dementia or people who have had a stroke aren't necessarily hard of hearing. A normal volume works best in these situations.
- Use short, simple words and phrases.
- Ask "yes" or "no" questions to make it easier for the patient to answer.





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- When the person has difficulty finding the right words, ask him to point to words or pictures on a board or a piece of paper. Encourage the patient to use gestures such as head nodding and hand motions.
- When giving directions, state one instruction at a time. Break your directions down into simple steps.
- Keep your mood, facial expression, body language, and voice calm, quiet, and relaxed.
- Do not argue. This will only increase the individual's anger and cause the incident to get worse.
- Maintain eye contact even if someone is angry.
- Avoid touching an angry person.
- Keep a clear exit for yourself, being sure that the angry person doesn't block your way to the doorway.
- Use the skill of reflection. Reflecting is the process of paraphrasing and restating both the feelings and words of the speaker.
- Reflect feelings back to the angry individual.
- Don't pass judgment on someone's words or behavior. Stay open-minded and listen actively to hear the underlying feelings and concerns.
- After you have listened to the reasons for the person's anger, help him or her solve the problem or handle the situation.

If these tactics don't work, or if you fear harm, leave the scene and notify your supervisor.



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**TEST****Communication**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Fill in the blank with the correct answer, or circle the correct answer.

1. Which of the following statements use the listening skill of reflection?
  - a. "You seem worried about something."
  - b. "What do you think is the best thing to do?"
  - c. "So you think it might be hard to follow the doctor's orders?"
  - d. All of the above.
  
2. If a patient is having difficulty saying the right words, you should \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. be silent and allow time for the patient to think
  - b. provide words or pictures on a board or paper for the patient to point to
  - c. guess at what he is trying to say
  - d. Both a and b
  
3. Open-ended questions are good for obtaining information, but it is better to ask questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" if \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. you are in a hurry.
  - b. the patient has difficulty speaking.
  - c. the patient has difficulty hearing.
  - d. you don't want too much information
  
4. Communication only occurs when \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. someone is talking
  - b. someone is listening.
  - c. a message is both given and received
  - d. the message is written down

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**TEST****Communications (cont.)**

5. Nonverbal communication occurs through \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. gestures, expressions, posture, and dress
  - b. silence
  - c. speech
  - d. none of the above
6. If a patient says something that raises a question in your mind, you should \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Ignore it
  - b. tell him he's thinking the wrong way
  - c. offer your opinion
  - d. clarify by asking the patient what he means
7. When a patient is angry, you should \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. give him a hug
  - b. remain calm and ask what is wrong
  - c. argue with him
  - d. stay away
8. When speaking, it is important to \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Both c and d
  - b. yell
  - c. speak clearly and use simple words and phrases
  - d. avoid looking directly at anyone
9. List the five "don'ts" of communication. Don't:
- \_\_\_\_\_
10. It is best if our conversations with patients focus on \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. the patient
  - b. other people
  - c. ourselves
  - d. the home health agency

Jan.

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“We communicate with our patients in all these ways, too, and we should be alert to what they are telling us through the various ways they try to communicate with us. For communication to occur, someone must send a message and someone must receive it. *If a message is not received and understood, then we are not communicating.* To be a good communicator, we must learn how to find out if our messages are received. We must learn how to ask questions and listen to *feedback* from our patients. For example, when you take the test at the end of this session, you will give me feedback about how well you understood the lesson. We must always be sure the receivers understand our message. Many things can hinder good communication. Eyesight and hearing problems, illness, stress, medications, emotions, fatigue, confusion, language or cultural differences, and even personality differences are some of the things that might affect how well a message is given and received. Learning how to communicate effectively can go a long way toward helping our patients feel happy and secure.”

Read the learning goals to the learners and proceed with the lesson.

**Conclusion**

Participants must score 70% or higher (seven correct out of 10) to pass.

**Test answers**

1. d
2. d
3. b
4. c
5. a
6. d
7. b
8. c
9. Offer opinions, Become defensive, Make judgments, Ask why, Give empty assurances
10. a