



Australian Government



Carer Skills 2: Effective Communication Techniques



How long will it take?
15 to 30 minutes



Learning outcomes

In doing this module you will:

- ✓ refresh your communication skills to help you manage the communication styles and behaviours of others to get the result you need
- ✓ be exposed to some skills and techniques that you may not have been aware of
- ✓ gain confidence to plan and talk about difficult issues
- ✓ develop a plan for your next difficult communication
- ✓ commit to putting your plan into action

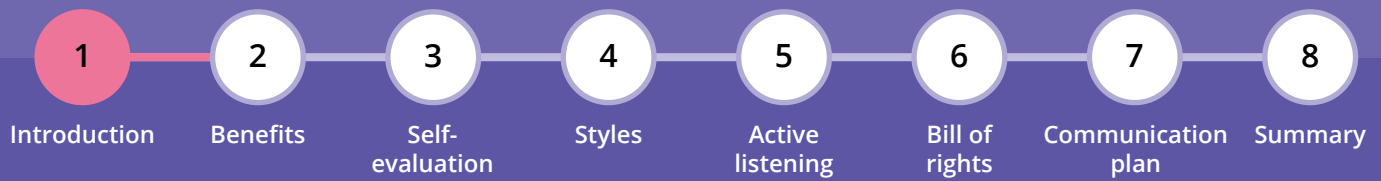


Your wellbeing is important to us.

If you find talking about your experience as a carer upsetting, you may want to talk to someone.

Lifeline **13 11 14** and beyondblue **1300 22 4636** are two services that are both available 24 hours / 7 days a week if you need support.

Introduction

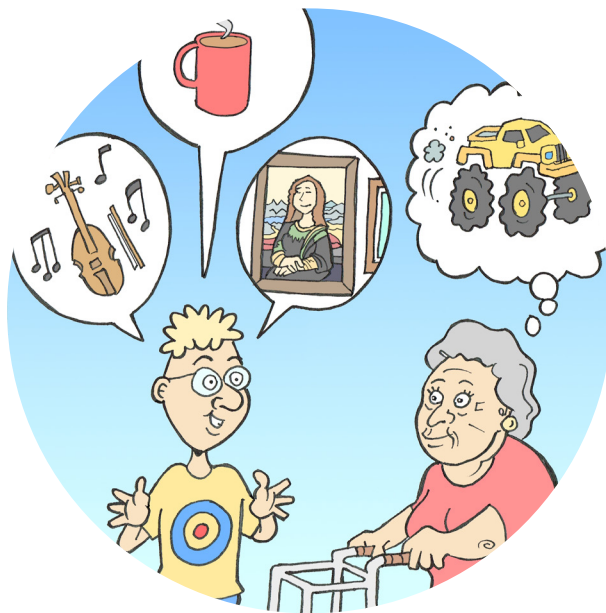


“

Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill – Buddha

Being able to communicate information accurately, clearly, and as intended is an essential life skill. Communicating as a carer can be complicated, especially when you need to communicate on behalf of the person you care for.

As a carer, you often need to participate in or make important decisions that affect the person you care for, yourself, or both.



Sometimes carers need to have challenging conversations at difficult times, including when they are stressed, tired, anxious or when speaking to health professionals or other people. Some common examples of 'difficult' conversations include:

- negotiating new relationship issues due to changes in the health, wellbeing and needs of the person you care for that may cause tension because you are also their partner/child/friend
- asking for help or support from family, friends and neighbours who may not understand the pressure on you to provide care
- explaining the impact of your carer role to employers or teachers
- feeling excluded from conversations with healthcare professionals around important discussions or decisions about the person you care for
- finding, managing and retaining service providers
- lack of recognition and authority to deal with financial and insurance institutions or government agencies in your role as a carer

Why is effective communication important?



Words that are carefully framed and spoken are the most powerful means of communication there is – Nancy Duarte

Effective communication skills are essential for healthy relationships, whether at home, work or in business or social situations. People are often more inclined to work with you and help you reach your goals if you communicate effectively.

The table below lists the benefits of effective communication and the costs of poor communication.

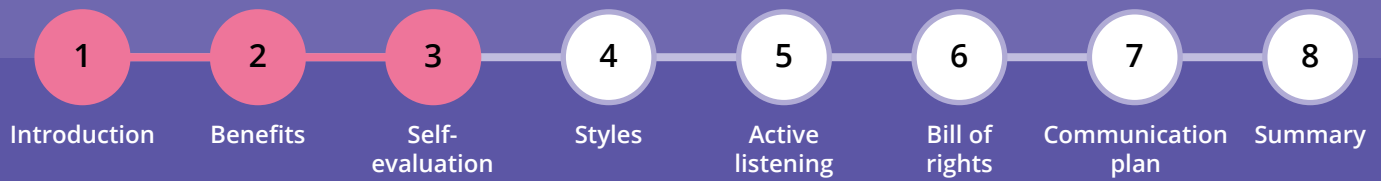
Benefits of effective communication	Costs of poor communication
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. leads to the right information being shared2. minimises conflict and confusion3. saves resources such as time and money4. helps establish a bond5. leads to the intended results being achieved6. leads to appropriate feedback being given and received7. helps build strong relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. sends mixed messages instead of a shared understanding2. increases risk of a negative outcome3. leads to conflict and strained relationships4. intended results are not achieved, or only partially achieved5. creates stress6. emotional reactions confuse or distract from the information being conveyed



Our relationship has been under a lot of pressure since Nancy had the injury. We used to talk about everything, we were a great team ... now it feels like there are times we are speaking a different language.

Tom, 67. Caring for his wife Nancy, 60, who has a spinal cord injury.

How well do I communicate?



The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place – George Bernard Shaw

How well do you communicate?

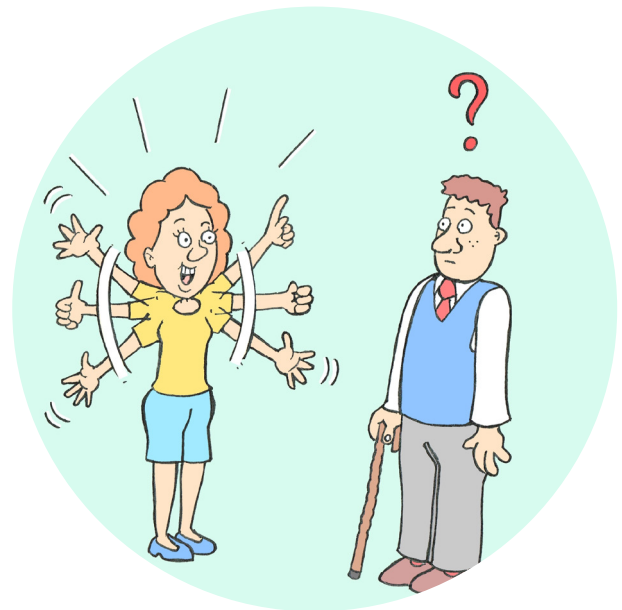
The ability to listen, build rapport, and communicate feelings, thoughts and intentions are core communication skills. Most people experience communication breakdown with important people in their lives at one time or another.

During important communications, have you experienced any of the following?

- feeling misunderstood
- being so caught up in what you have to say that you're unaware of the reactions of your listeners
- speaking over others or finishing their sentences
- difficulty expressing your feelings or opinions
- feeling foolish asking for clarification when you don't understand someone's explanation
- finding yourself diverting or ending conversations that don't interest you

- grappling to understand things from someone else's point of view
- struggling to resolve problems without losing control of your emotions

If you answered yes to one or more questions you could benefit from refreshing your communication skills.



I try my best ... but in the heat of the moment I can't seem to catch myself before I say something unhelpful. I hope this module can help me find better ways to communicate how I am feeling.

Cheryl, 56. Carer and parent to her son, Daniel, 33, who abuses substances and her daughter, Lily, 29, who has generalised anxiety disorder.

Communication styles



Lack of communication is the key to any successful relationship going wrong – Pepa

Every person has a unique communication style. There are three main styles and while people use a combination of these they usually have a dominant style. It is important to know what your dominant style is so that, if necessary, you can modify it to increase the likelihood of achieving the outcome you want.

Passive communicators put their feelings and needs last. They feel uncomfortable expressing their feelings or needs, instead allowing others to express themselves. This approach can lead to misunderstandings, anger or resentment. They often:

- lack eye contact
- have poor posture
- find it difficult to say 'no'
- avoid conflict.

They are easy to get along with as they 'go with the flow'.

Aggressive communicators put their feelings and needs first, at the expense of others, and are defensive or hostile when confronted. They tend to speak loudly in a demanding voice and dismiss, ignore or insult the needs and feelings of others. They often:

- make demands
- ask questions in a blaming, threatening or accusing way
- don't listen to others
- use 'you' statements



Communication styles



Assertive communicators express their needs and feelings in a respectful way while balancing their rights with the rights of others. They own their feelings and behaviours without blaming the other person by using 'I' statements.

You can use assertive communication to draw out the feelings and needs of passive communicators and to help manage aggressive communicators.

How to become an assertive communicator

Understanding how you and others communicate helps get your message across. Here are a few tips to help you become an assertive communicator:

- use 'I' statements
- maintain good eye contact, remembering that too much eye contact may be intimidating and that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic and Native American cultures, eye contact can be seen as disrespectful
- learn to say 'no'
- practise what you want to say

- keep emotions in check – if you are feeling too emotional, wait a bit before continuing
- say your needs and wants confidently
- start small by practising your new skills in a low risk situation, for example with your partner or a friend

And remember, being assertive takes time and practice.



At one time or another I've used each of these styles of communicating. I was definitely a passive communicator as a child. I found my voice as a teenager ... but reading over this I was probably more aggressive even though I thought I was being assertive.

At the moment I feel I flip flop between passive and aggressive. I find it hard to get my point across with dad's treating team. I get so annoyed as I try to tell them he's deteriorating and they don't seem to listen. I want to try out assertive communication with my dad's doctors as I think it might help me keep my emotions in check but still get my point across.

Renee, 22. Carer to her father, 48, who lives with schizophrenia.

Active listening



Listen with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply – Stephen Covey

Another important communication skill is active listening.

Active listening helps us build relationships, solve problems, improve understanding, resolve conflicts and retain more information.

Research suggests that we only remember between 25 and 50 percent of what we hear. That means that when you are talking your audience pays attention to less than half of the conversation.

Active listening is more than just hearing. There are five main techniques.

1. Pay attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention:

- face the speaker
- don't be distracted by your thoughts, feelings or biases
- don't mentally prepare a reply
- avoid being distracted by other things (for example, background activity and noise or your mobile phone)
- pay attention to the speaker's non-verbal cues (for example, their body language, tone and volume of their speech) to pick up hidden meaning

2. Show that you're listening

It is important that you are 'seen' to be listening. Use your body language and gestures to show that you are paying attention:

- combine eye contact with smiles to encourage the speaker
- keep your posture open and interested – so try not to cross your arms or legs
- try not to distract the speaker by playing with your mobile phone, fidgeting, looking at a clock or watch etc.

3. Give feedback

Our life experiences and beliefs can distort what we hear. Your goal is to understand the speaker's knowledge, thoughts, ideas and feelings. You can do this by:

- reflecting on what is being said and the non-verbal cues
- asking questions
- summarising the speaker's comments.

Active listening



4. Keep an open mind

Try not to interrupt. It frustrates the speaker and limits the understanding of the message:

- try to think about the situation from the speaker's perspective
- allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions
- avoid jumping to conclusions
- avoid interrupting with counter arguments

5. Respond appropriately

Active listening encourages respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. Don't attack the speaker or put them down:

- be open and honest in your response
- give your opinions respectfully
- don't offer opinions or solutions unless asked to do so
- treat the other person in a way that you think they would want to be treated

Sometimes it might be helpful if you write down a summary and leave it with your audience

And remember, practice makes perfect

Active listening can take a bit of practice to master. Over the next week, try practising your active listening skills. Make a conscious effort to more actively listen and summarise the main points at the end of each conversation. This will help you get into the habit.



After a long day at work I pick up the kids, start on dinner and call Liz (43) at the same time. I'm probably only half listening to what she has to tell me ... as I'm juggling the kids and dinner at the same time. I can see how this might be upsetting and frustrating for her – I'm going to try to make time to call her when I can focus on her and actively listen to what she is telling me.

Megan, 44 years old, mother of two, working full-time and carer to her sister Liz, 43, who is living with Down Syndrome.

Learning to say 'no'



You can be a good person with a kind heart and still say no – Lori Deschene

Do you sometimes wish you could say no? You are not alone. Many people struggle to say 'no'.

You might feel that saying no is uncaring or selfish, or you might fear being disliked or criticised, or that you risk a friendship if you say no.

Many carers have busy lives with little time for themselves. One way to reduce the overload and find some time for yourself is to learn when and how to say no.

Sometimes saying no may be the only way to achieve the best outcome.

Learning to say 'no' is a powerful skill and it takes practice to become comfortable in saying it.

Tips for saying no

Keep your refusal simple. Be firm, polite and brief. You're not asking permission to say no. You don't need to give a reason unless you want to. Use phrases such as "I can't ... my plate is overloaded as it is" or simply "No, thank you".

Practise saying no in front of a mirror or in front of a friend. Practising saying no will help you become more comfortable and confident in saying the word.

Start by saying no to little things – this could be telemarketers or something minor. The more you practise saying no, the better equipped you'll be to decline the bigger propositions in life.

Give yourself some time by saying "I'll get back to you". When you've had time to think about it you'll be able to say no more confidently.

Think about a compromise, but only if you want to. Suggest an alternative to suit both of you.

Separate refusal from rejection. You're saying no to a request, not rejecting the person! People usually understand that it's your right to say no, just as it is their right to ask the favour.

Don't feel guilty. It's important for the people around you to hear you say no because it reminds them that you are in charge of setting your boundaries. True friends will respect your boundaries.

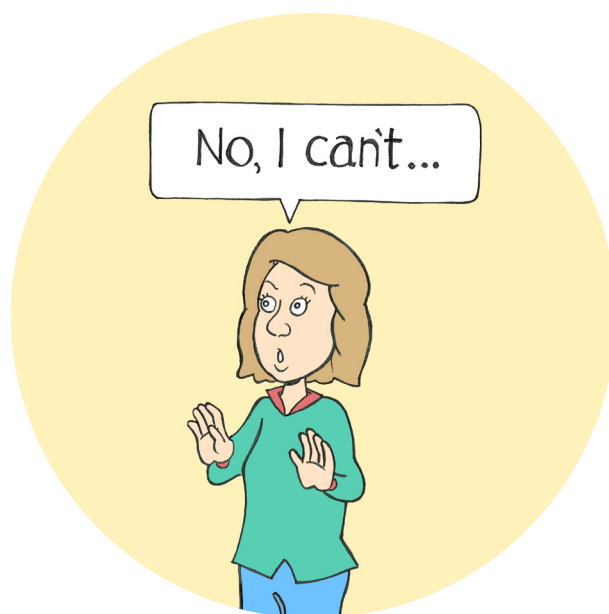
Learning to say 'no'



I was so glad to read this information. I have always struggled with saying no because I really don't want to upset anyone. But, I am exhausted ... I know I've been burning the candle at all ends lately.

My son, John, 36, called me at the last minute to babysit the grandkids – and while I would usually drop everything, this time I said a simple “No, sorry John – it’s been a crazy week – I need some time out”. I felt bad, but I know it was the best decision for me. I told John that if he gives me more notice next time I will try to help out ... he was fine with that.

Mary, 57, carer to her husband with MS, and her father-in-law with dementia.



Your communication 'Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities)'



To effectively communicate, we must realise that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others – Anthony Robbins

As you know, communication involves two or more people. To guide our communications, it is helpful to remember our communication rights (and responsibilities).

Communicating effectively means recognising your rights but also recognising that other people have rights too. The following rights highlight the freedom you have to stand up for yourself and be clear about your position while respecting others.

At times we all need to be reminded of these rights (and responsibilities).

Identify which of these rights are the most important for you to remember. You can select items on the list and then print or save the document for later use.

I have a right to:

express my feelings and opinions appropriately and have them taken seriously by others

offer no reasons or excuses

ask for what I want in a respectful way

ask questions

disagree with others, regardless of their position or numbers

set my own priorities

take the time I need to respond

make mistakes

say 'no' without feeling guilty

change my mind

say 'I don't know'

make my own decisions and deal with the consequences

be treated with respect and not taken for granted

feel good about myself, my actions and my life

feel all my emotions, including anger, and express them appropriately

exercise any and all of these rights, without feeling guilty

Your communication 'Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities)'

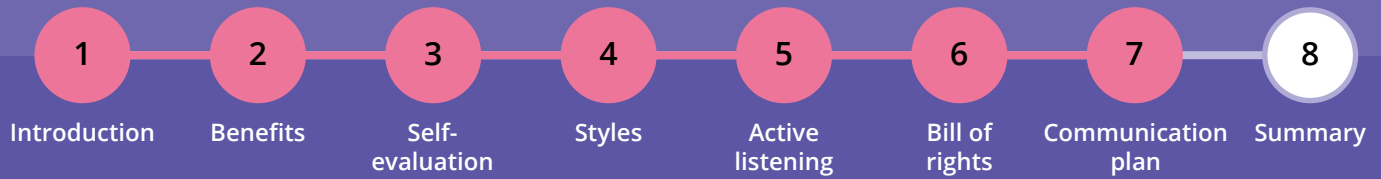


Things have been tough over the last few months since Jane's diagnosis. Reading the Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities) has helped me decide that now, more than ever, I need to tell my boss about what is going on at home. In doing so I need to tell him that I will have to hand over some of my workload when Jane starts chemotherapy next month.

Ian, 35, carer to his wife Jane, 28, who has a diagnosis of breast cancer.



Communication plan – Step 1



Begin with the end in mind – Stephen Covey

Carers sometimes find themselves in complex situations which require difficult discussions.

Perhaps in the past you haven't got the outcome you had hoped for. Or you might have avoided a stressful discussion and the situation worsened.

Use the templates below to help you plan your next difficult communication so that you have a better chance of getting an acceptable outcome.

Step 1 – What is the outcome you want?

What is the outcome you want and by when? Be clear and realistic. If you have more than three outcomes, identify only your top three.

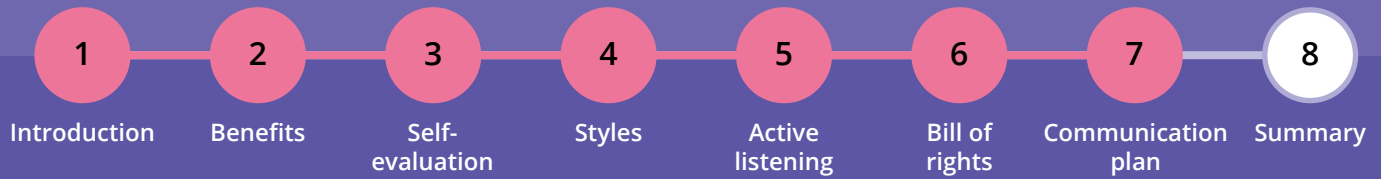
You might need to do some research first – for example, investigating what options are available. Remember to be specific about the 'when' so you can track progress.

1.

2.

3.

Communication plan – Step 2

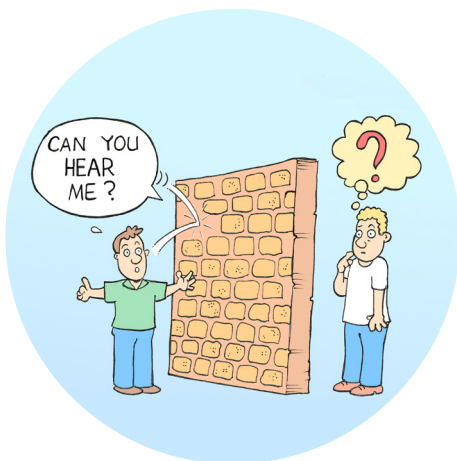


Step 2 – What are the challenges in achieving these outcomes?

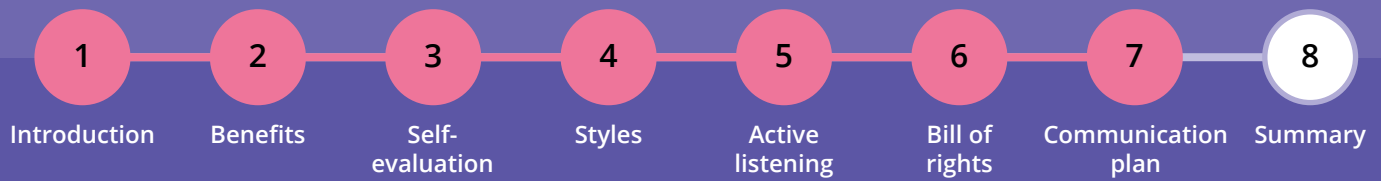
What might stop you from achieving your outcome? If you have tried to achieve the outcome in the past, what worked and what didn't?

Think about:

- which 'rights' you identified as most important for you in the Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities)
- how well you think you can manage your emotions and, if necessary, develop a strategy to manage them
- how clear you are about the outcome you want, whether you are prepared to compromise and, if so, on what
- whether the other person/people have a flexible or inflexible mindset



Communication plan – Step 3



Step 3 – What are your key messages and how will you communicate?

Write down the key things you want to communicate. If you have more than three key messages, limit your choice to your top three.

Think about the most respectful way of saying them. Be clear about what you want and why.

Think about whether you will write a letter, send an email, speak via telephone, or have a meeting. If you decide to have a meeting, what is the best venue and time to have it.

1.

2.

3.



Irene and I used the communication plan to organise our thoughts and plans for an upcoming case conference with everyone involved in Alice's care. In the past, we have walked away from these meetings feeling unheard and unhappy. For this reason, we have written out everything we want to achieve from the meeting.

We also talked about what the priorities are – as we know, it might not be possible to have everything actioned at once. By writing things down we are hoping that we will be able to not only have something to keep us on track in the meeting, but also something we can give to everyone so we are all on the same page.

We hope that our communication plan will help us all work as a team to get things moving in the right direction for Alice.

Jack, 42, and Irene, 40, parents to three children, including Alice, 7, who is living with autism.

Putting your plan into action



The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives – Tony Robbins

When you're putting your plan into action:

Make sure your key messages are clear. Know what you are going to say and why you are saying it.

Be assertive. Don't back down or change your mind mid-conversation unless there is a good reason. Think about which communication 'rights' might best apply to this situation.

Be empathic. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and give them time to think about what you have said, to ask questions and to make comments.

Be prepared to negotiate. Often difficult situations need some negotiation – aim for an outcome that benefits all parties.

Remember your Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities).

Use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication. Speak clearly, avoid jargon and slang, make eye contact and sit or stand in a relaxed way.

Listen – try to relax and really listen to the views and feelings of the other person.

Try to stay calm and focused:

- Communication is easier when we are calm and others are more likely to remain calm if you do.
- Stay focused on what you want to say.

If you feel yourself or the person you are communicating with becoming emotional, pause the conversation until everyone's emotions are under control.

You may want to practise the discussion with a friend, colleague or family member. If this is not possible, you can record yourself and play it back to hear how you sound.

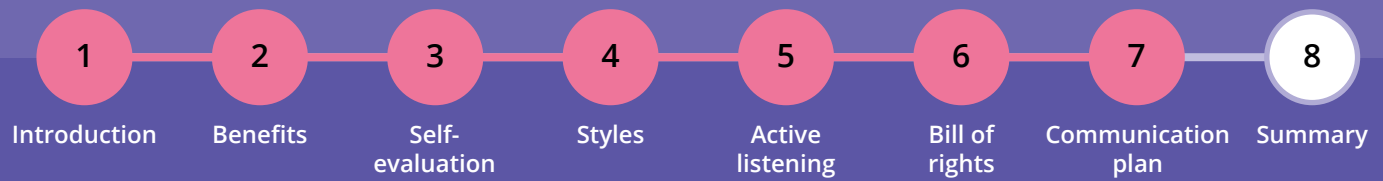
Remember:

- You have the advantage because you have planned your conversation. You have put a lot of thought into developing your communication plan, including selecting the time and place.
- While you will do the best that you can, you are only 50 percent responsible for the outcome of the communication.

Celebrate your successes, even the small successes, and be kind to yourself if the communication didn't go quite as you had hoped. Sometimes plans need tweaking.

Don't forget to review your communication plan. You can redo the module as often as you want.

Putting your plan into action



The nursing home staff told me that dad was refusing to shower, and was being 'non-compliant'. Trouble is, there is a language barrier ... he couldn't communicate his concerns. When I tried to explain that dad felt uncomfortable – for cultural reasons – with young women showering him, they told me that the male staff did not work the day shift.

At first, I was frustrated ... I felt like they were not respecting or listening to his concerns (which is probably not far off how he was feeling). But, doing this module has taught me to slow things down so I can communicate better.

I sat down and planned out what I wanted to say, including dad's rights, and my understanding of the staffing situation. When I met the nursing home manager, I used my active listening skills, my Bill of Rights, and my assertive communication skills to get a better outcome for dad – and it worked!

Dad now showers in the evenings when the male nurses are rostered on and he is much happier.

George, 49, carer to father Rafael, 75, who has depression, diabetes and vascular dementia.



Additional resources



More resources for carers



Emotions are one of the main things that derail communication. Once people get upset at one another, rational thinking goes out of the window – Christopher Voss

The guides below will be useful if you want to improve your skills in the following areas:

- non-verbal communication
- methods of communication
- dealing with criticism/feeling belittled/inappropriate feedback

Carer Gateway also has the following communication resources for **all carers**:

- [talking with your family](#)
- [talking to health professionals](#)
- [questions to ask your doctor](#)
- [making a complaint](#)
- [what is advocacy](#)
- [working and caring](#)
- [talking with your employer](#)
- [your rights as a working carer](#)
- [time management](#)
- [working with professionals](#)
- [your privacy and confidentiality](#)
- [care coordination and case management](#)

- [decision making](#)
- [caring for someone with challenging or changing behaviours](#)
- [legal rights for carers](#)
- [mental health: rights and responsibilities of carers](#)
- [what to do when someone refuses help](#)
- [what to do when caring changes](#)

Carer Gateway also has the following resources for **young carers**:

- [high school and caring](#)
- [university and caring](#)
- [talking with your school](#)
- [parents and teachers of young carers](#)
- [young carers and health professionals](#)

Learning summary



“

What is the shortest word in the English language that contains the letters: abcdef?
Answer: *feedback*. Don't forget that *feedback* is one of the essential elements of good communication – Anonymous



**Congratulations,
you've completed
the *effective
communication
techniques* module.
Well done!**



Having completed the *effective communication techniques* module, you should now:

- ✓ be familiar with a range of effective communication techniques to help you manage the communication styles and behaviours of others
- ✓ feel confident to plan and talk about difficult issues
- ✓ have developed a plan to help you manage a difficult communication to get the result you need
- ✓ have committed to putting your communication plan into action

Please see the following pages for more resources on:

- [Dealing with criticism](#)
- [Methods of communication](#)
- [Non-verbal communication](#)

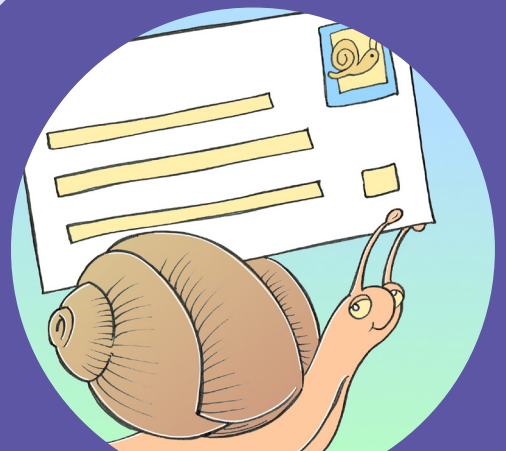
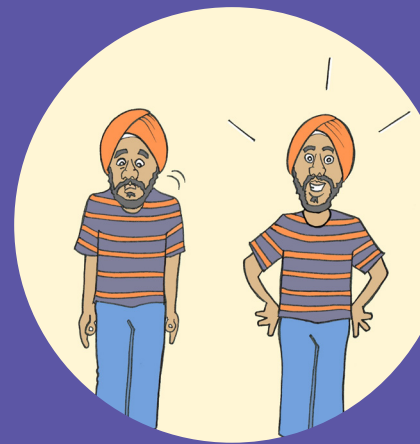
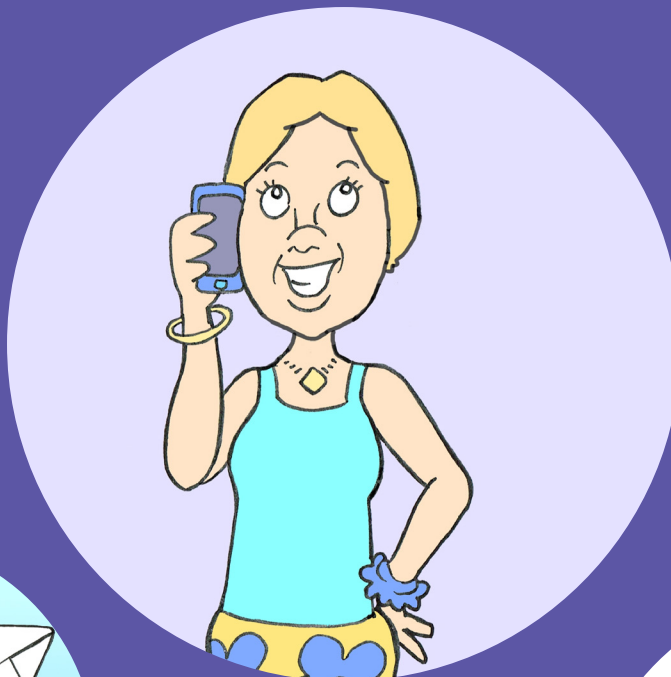


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Resources

You can find further resources on the following pages on **Dealing with criticism**, **Methods of communication** and **Non-verbal communication**



Dealing with criticism/belittling comments/inappropriate feedback



Any fool can criticise, condemn, and complain but it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving – Dale Carnegie

Criticism, feeling belittled and inappropriate feedback can be hurtful and unpleasant – especially when it is from family and friends who don't understand what it's like to provide care or who don't do any of the caring.

Some criticism is completely unfair. However, sometimes constructive feedback may not have been delivered as well as it could have been.

The next time someone criticises the way you provide care or belittles you, try the strategies below.

Remain calm

The first thing to do is to remain calm. Getting upset or becoming defensive will only escalate the situation and lend weight to the unjustified criticism or feedback. Take a few deep breaths to settle yourself.

Don't make it personal

Whether the criticism came from the person you care for, another family member, a friend, a healthcare professional or a service provider, try to avoid taking the criticism or comment personally. More often than not the criticism or comment is more about the other person and has little to do with you.

Repeat the criticism

Calmly repeat the comment back to the person to make sure you understand their point correctly:

- make eye contact, use a non-aggressive tone and start with "So what you're saying is ..."
- put their comment in your own words
- stick to the facts and avoid exaggeration.

Politely tell them how you feel

Using "I" statements, calmly tell the person how you feel. For example, when your brother criticises or belittles you because your father's house isn't as clean as it normally is, you could say "I feel unappreciated when you focus on what else needs to be done instead of recognising all the things that I already do for dad".

Move the conversation on gracefully

Move the conversation onto something pleasant as soon as you can.

Dealing with criticism/belittling comments/inappropriate feedback

Other strategies and tips for dealing with sharp remarks

Use the tips below to help you deal with sharp remarks or comments that make you feel belittled.

Acknowledge their concern, then ask them what they'd suggest instead

The next time someone criticises your caring, calmly acknowledge their concern and ask for their suggestions on how to improve. You may not be interested in their opinion, but this response will surprise them and change the tone of the conversation.

Politely stand up for yourself

When the behaviour is completely out of line, stand up for yourself. The key is to do it calmly and politely. The other person is more likely to listen to you and will think twice before criticising you in the future.

If the person is a habitual critic or belittler, calmly tell them that you refuse to be treated that way and walk away.

Listen to understand, not to rebut or defend

Even if the criticism is way off base, there may be things you can learn and benefit from if you think about the broader message.

Accept that you can't make everyone happy all the time

It's an oldie but a goodie – and especially true for carers: if you try to please everyone, you will end up pleasing no one, least of all yourself. Family and friends will not always agree with how you provide care. However, when appropriate, it is a good idea to think about the viewpoints of others. It is also important to learn to trust your gut and stand by your choices.

Understand that criticism is inevitable

Criticism is something that we all face at every stage of life.

Get support

Some people don't think before they speak, don't realise the hurt they cause or come across as critical. Many critics don't understand what is involved in caring. Find someone you can share your experiences with and receive honest feedback from people who are, or who have been caregivers. Another good source of support is carers groups and online resources.

Take care of your self-esteem

Remember that the criticism is just one person's point of view. Know what your strengths are and don't let other people's opinions undermine your self-esteem and confidence in your caring.

Smile!

Research shows that even a fake smile provides mood-boosting benefits and can help you mentally and physically relax.

Dealing with criticism/belittling comments/inappropriate feedback



There was a time in my life when I distanced myself from mum because her criticism really affected my self-esteem. Truthfully, now I find it hard not to be resentful that I've given up my time to help her, and she never thinks to say thank you ... instead she continues to belittle me.

Since reading this, I've been trying not to take her criticism as personally. What this has also encouraged me to do is to finally get help – I want to learn more skills for managing my emotional wellbeing and, in particular, the impact of being a carer for mum.

Sally, 34, carer to her mother Joan, 62, who has pancreatic cancer.



Methods of communication

The two most common methods of communication are:

- verbal, which includes in-person, video conferencing and telephone
- written, including email and letters

Verbal communication

“

Be sincere; be brief; be seated
– Franklin D. Roosevelt

The key advantage of verbal communication is that it occurs in real time, which gives the speaker the opportunity:

- to receive immediate feedback
- to correct themselves
- to make themselves clearer by changing their voice, tone, pitch etc
- to clarify the audience's understanding

The main disadvantage of verbal communication is that the messages can be distorted:

- because the audience may not remember the key messages
- because the speaker may not recall what they said or meant
- because unless the communication is recorded, there is no permanent record
- if English is a second language for any of the parties to the communication

Face-to-face communication

Face-to-face communication, including video conferencing, gives you and your audience the most non-verbal feedback and the best opportunity to build stronger relationships – more so than all other forms of communication. It gives you the opportunity to:

- better understand your audience's feelings through their body language and facial expressions
- see and respond to your audience's reactions so you can adjust your messages if need be
- show your audience that you are actively listening to try to understand their perspective
- confirm your audience's understanding of the situation and gather feedback in real time
- address sensitive issues and protect confidentiality
- reduce the risk of miscommunication because:
 - you're able to continually monitor your audience's non-verbal communication and receive instant feedback
 - your audience is able to ask questions and clarify any potential misunderstandings
- build credibility and trust through the shared experience



Methods of communication

When planning an important face-to-face conversation think about:

- the best venue for your purposes (for example, your home, the other person's home or somewhere neutral such as a café, park, office or meeting room in a public library)
- the best time to have the conversation so you can avoid interruptions and distractions or times when you or your audience are likely to be tired
- the first impression you want to make (if it is the first time you are meeting the person/people), remembering that you get one tenth of a second to do this
- your appearance and clothing, because they provide clues about your personality, background, culture, level of confidence and values and beliefs

Telephone communication

Talking on the telephone can be more difficult than face-to-face because without seeing a person's face and body language, messages can become muddled and meanings misinterpreted.

When you are talking to someone on the telephone give the other person your full attention and don't be tempted to do other things at the same time. Even though the other person can't see you they will pick up that you are distracted, which can come across as disrespectful or suggest that you are not interested in them.

Other tips when using the telephone:

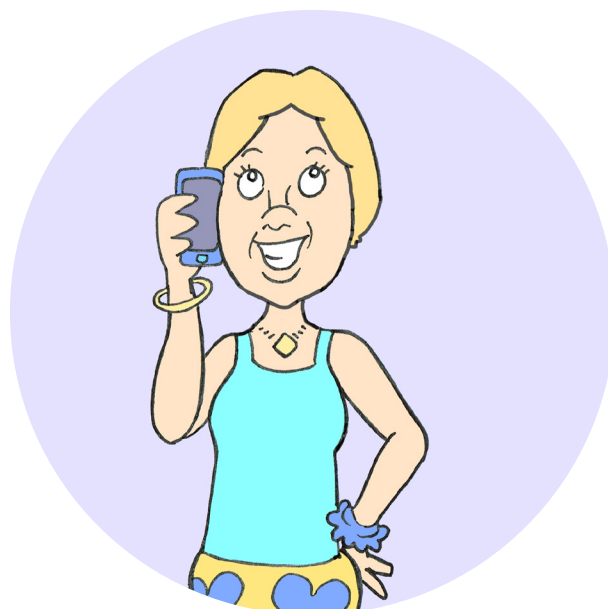
- ask the person whether they have enough time to speak; if not, arrange a mutually convenient time
- use a positive tone
- pace your speech – too fast makes it difficult for your audience to understand and too slow gives the impression you are hesitant and don't know what you are talking about or want

- speak clearly and use simple words and phrases
- avoid jargon and slang since they detract from the quality of the interaction
- be respectful and sincere
- remember the other person is receiving very few non-verbal cues

At the end of the conversation, summarise the discussion so that everybody knows what's expected of them and by when. This reduces the risk of misunderstandings.

When leaving voicemails:

- leave a short, clear message
- make sure the other person knows how they can contact you and, if appropriate, include any times when you know you are unavailable
- say your telephone number slowly and clearly, leaving sufficient time for the person to write it down



Methods of communication

Written communication

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This report, by its very length, defends itself against the risk of being read
– Winston Churchill

The biggest advantage of written communication is that written messages do not have to be delivered ‘in the moment’. They can be edited and revised several times so the content can be shaped to maximum effect before they are sent.

Another advantage is that written communication provides a permanent record.

The major disadvantages of written communication are:

- inaccurate, unclear or inconsiderate communication can alienate your audience and destroy goodwill
- the writer does not receive immediate feedback on their message

email communication

The most widely used written communication is email. It is generally fast and efficient.

Remember, you can easily miscommunicate by your tone, so write emails with care:

- **DO** use a short and clear subject line
- **DO** keep the message focused and limit it to one page or less
- **DO** identify yourself clearly
- **DO** carefully proofread for content, spelling and grammar
- **DO** respond promptly
- **DO** show respect and restraint

There are also several things you should avoid doing:

- **DON'T** inflame the situation – choose your tone and words carefully
- **DON'T** write in an informal, casual style in formal/more official situations
- **DON'T** write and send an email if you are angry or tired – it is more likely to be emotionally loaded or get things out of proportion
- **DON'T** include strongly worded phrases – reword to make it more neutral

If you have strong feelings about the subject of your email, it is always a good idea to sleep on it or discuss it with a friend before you hit the send button.

Emails are a good way to confirm face-to-face or telephone conversations so everyone knows what's expected of them and by when. You can also use email to introduce yourself or outline your concerns before a face-to-face or telephone meeting.



Methods of communication

Letters

People now tend to send emails rather than letters but sometimes letters are the best or only method of communication. Writing letters is a more formal way of communicating and is mostly used to complain, ask questions, request or deliver information, follow up and apply for jobs.

Writing a letter varies from the more conversational style often found in emails so keep them short and business-like and, if you can, type them.

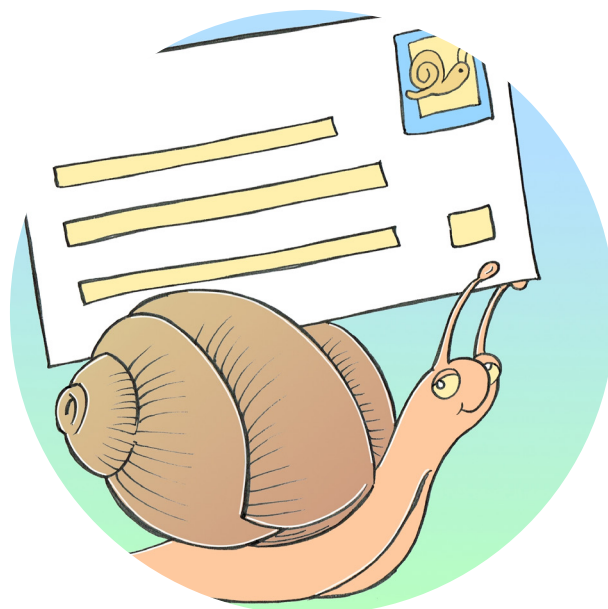
Like emails, it is easy to miscommunicate your message in a letter so choose your words thoughtfully.

Don't forget to carefully proofread your letter, especially names and addresses, and if the subject is something you feel strongly about sleep on it overnight or ask a friend to review it before you post it.

Letter writing is fast becoming a lost art. A simple structure for writing a letter is to:

- write your address, including your telephone number and email address, and the date in the top right-hand corner of the letter
- write the name and address of the person you are writing to on the left-hand side of the letter beginning on the line below the date
- begin with "Dear" followed by the name of the person you are writing to

- the body of letter:
 - a short paragraph about why you are writing so that your purpose is obvious from the beginning
 - following paragraphs provide more information and specific details about your request or the information you are providing
 - the last paragraph should repeat the reason you are writing and thank the reader for reviewing your request (and if appropriate, ask for a meeting to further discuss your request)
- end the letter with:
 - "Yours sincerely,"
 - your signature
 - your printed name, immediately below your signature



Non-verbal communication

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Every communication is two conversations: the verbal and non-verbal. When the two conversations are not aligned, people believe the non-verbal every time – Dr Nick Morgan

You might be surprised to learn that between 60 and 90 per cent of communication is non-verbal.

It is important to be aware of your non-verbal communication so you don't undermine your verbal communication. Your audience's non-verbal communication gives you clues about how your messages are being received which gives you an opportunity to modify your messages.

Non-verbal communication varies between cultures and country of origin. For example, in most Western cultures eye contact is a good thing. It shows attentiveness, confidence and honesty. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic and Native American cultures, eye contact can be seen as disrespectful.

Types of non-verbal communication

The different types of non-verbal communication include:

First impressions

It takes one tenth of a second for someone to make their first impression. Be sure to make your best first impression.

Appearance and clothing

Be mindful that your appearance and clothing provide clues about your personality and background as well as your culture, level of confidence, age and values/beliefs. The same is true for the people you communicate with.

Body movements

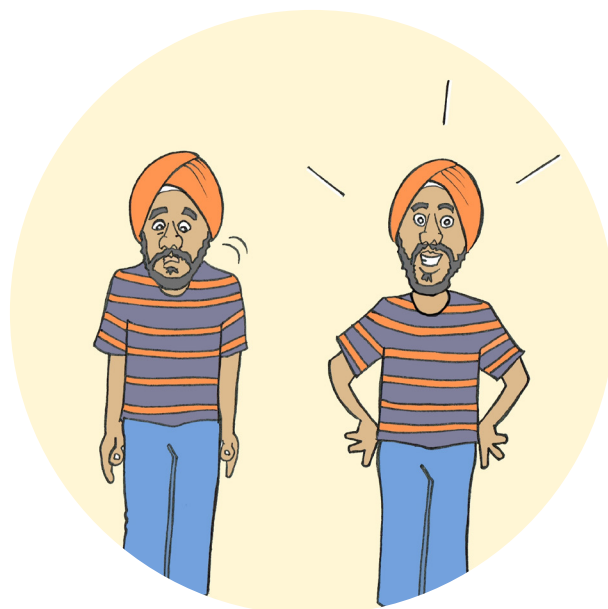
Body movements can convey intent, emotion and meaning, such as shaking or nodding your head. It can show how people feel or think about you.

Too many body movements can be distracting – for example, too many hand gestures can be off-putting and pointing your finger can be offensive.

Posture

How you stand or sit, such as whether your arms and legs are crossed, determines whether your posture is open or closed. Posture can communicate:

- mental status – for example, defeated
- physical condition – for example, slouching can indicate tiredness



Non-verbal communication

Eye contact

Where and how often you make eye contact can affect your audience's level of trust in you. Try and keep eye contact to about 60 per cent of the conversation since too much eye contact can be intimidating.

Para-language

Para-language includes the pitch, tone and loudness of your voice and speed of speaking. Changing the tone of your voice can change the meaning of a sentence.

Closeness or personal space

How close you stand or sit determines the level of intimacy. Standing or sitting too close can be intimidating and off-putting.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions represent a huge part of non-verbal communication. Be mindful of how you use your facial expressions, such as smiling or frowning.

Physiological changes

Physiological changes such as sweating or blinking can be more pronounced when you or your audience are nervous.



I'm naturally a shy person, and so I've learned some tips here that I can use to work on my communication with Cathy's doctors.

Cathy has learned that the social rules for eye contact vary between cultures ... but understandably she still finds it hard because eye contact is disrespectful in our culture. To make matters worse, the doctors change every few months so she doesn't get a chance to build trust.

I try to explain this to the doctors at her appointments, and try to keep my voice calm when I make requests for consistency where I can, but we otherwise make do with what we have.

Jessica, 37, lives in a remote community and is a carer to her friend Cathy, 63, who lives with heart disease, retinopathy and an amputation.

