

Communication skills

TIP SHEET



We communicate with people every day - at work, at home and in the community. How we communicate with others is very important, particularly when we want to convey a specific message to someone or we need to work with other people to achieve a task. Do other people hear what you want to say? How do you know?

Sometimes people hear a different message to what you were intending. This may be because of the language used or your body language. It may be the result of the other person's different experiences and associated different meanings. It may also be because you are thinking about something else and not really hearing what the other person is saying.

It's important to communicate effectively at home and at work as misunderstandings can lead to disagreements and strong emotions such as anger and sadness. These emotions and the accompanying behaviours can then be misinterpreted and escalate the situation and make future interactions more difficult.

How can we communicate clearly so that our messages are received as we want them to be heard?

The following key communication skills will help you to communicate effectively with others.

Attending

- Be present. Focus on the person without being distracted by internal or external noises.
- Create a comfortable space to talk.
- Have relaxed, open body posture. This conveys the message that you are available.
- Use a calm, relaxed voice.

Active listening

- Make eye contact.
- Listen well. Find out what the real issue is. Listen to both sides of the story.
- Listen for more than the information being relayed. Listen for the emotions and for underlying issues.

- Affirm that you are engaged while the person is talking. For example, by nodding your head, saying "hmm" and "yes," and through body language.
- Let the person finish what they are saying before responding.

Using empathy

- Communicate that you understand their world.
- Reflect back, in your own words, what the person has said.
- Think about what is the most important part of what they have said.
- Ask the person if you have understood them correctly.
- Use sentences such as "It sounds like you...", "it seems you are...", and "are you feeling...because..."

Questioning

- Clarify the issue, including what, when, how, who and why.
- Is there missing information? Ask questions to find out more.
- Use open questions. These provide an opportunity to give more information. For example, "tell me about how this has affected you."
- Use closed questions when specific information only is needed. For example, "how long has this been going on for?"

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Summarising

- Paraphrase what has been said to demonstrate that you understand the issue.
- Be concise.
- Focus on content.
- Ask if your understanding is correct.

Managing your emotions

- If you are experiencing high emotions, try and calm yourself down. Try activities such as breathing slowly and deeply, go for a walk, making a cup of tea, talking to a neutral party and squeezing a stress ball.
- Take time out from the conversation.
- If the other person is experiencing high emotions, ask what would help them.
- Suggest meeting at a specific time and day when all parties can be present and able to discuss an issue rationally.



More information

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a leading provider of services supporting young people, parents and families through counselling, relationship education courses and other services that can foster strong communication skills.

RAV also provides quality training and professional development in a range of areas related to family relationships.

About Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV)

RAV is a valued provider of specialist family and relationship services. A community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Our vision is for positive, safe and respectful relationships for couples, families, schools, workplaces and communities.

Visit www.rav.org.au or call 1300 364 277 for more information on our programs, locations and how to access our services.



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