



INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Communication skills



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Contents

Introduction to the Guide	3
Session structure.....	3
Communication skills	5
Learning objectives.....	6
Bottom line	7
Communication	8
Forms of communication	9
Core functions of communication.....	10
Benefits of effective communication.....	11
Challenges to effective communication	12
Improved communication	13
Improve communication – Environment.....	14
Improve communication – Organization	15
Improve communication – Health and care workers.....	17
Summary.....	24
References	25

Introduction to the Guide

This Facilitator Guide is part of the material developed to support training programmes on the WHO's Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) approach. This guide serves as a roadmap for trainers and facilitators, helping them navigate through the session on communication skills, while ensuring that key topics are covered and participants are engaged. It includes tips, potential challenges and suggested ways to handle different situations that may arise during the session.

Session structure

This Facilitator Guide is organized around four core facilitation actions that you will use throughout the session. These actions are represented by icons and indicate how you should guide participants through the content.

You will see these actions repeated across all slides and modules, providing a consistent structure for facilitation.



Show: The slides

This indicates the slide you should present from the slide deck. When you see the Show, display the corresponding slide to participants.



Say: What you explain

This provides a suggested narrative outline for you to explain the slide content. The text is intended as guidance rather than a fixed script. You may adapt the wording to suit your facilitation style, experience and the needs of your participants, while keeping the key messages intact.



Ask: Questions to prompt dialogue

This prompts you to ask questions and encourage dialogue with and among participants.

The discussion associated with these questions should generally take 2 to 5 minutes. However, you should use your best judgment to decide how much time to dedicate to such interactions, considering factors such as participant engagement, availability of time, and/or relevance of the topic.



Do: Actions to facilitate learning

This prompts you to carry out an action, such as guiding an activity, managing group interaction or providing instructions to participants.

Keep in mind that this Facilitator Guide is only a roadmap. You are expected to apply your voice and experience to make this tool work for you. As explained, the 'Say' sections are simply indications; you can use them as a script when you feel the need to, but you can and

should adapt them to suit your natural training style. Add your personal touch and personality to every training, while being careful to stick to the session objectives.

A key component of successful face-to-face training is establishing trust and rapport with your learners. Use your good judgement to assess the attitude and cultural sensitivities of the people in your workshop. Adapt your training techniques and approach accordingly.

You are going to be great at conducting this training.

Communication skills



Do:

- *Formal welcome*
- *Introduction of the facilitator*



Show: Slide 1



Say:

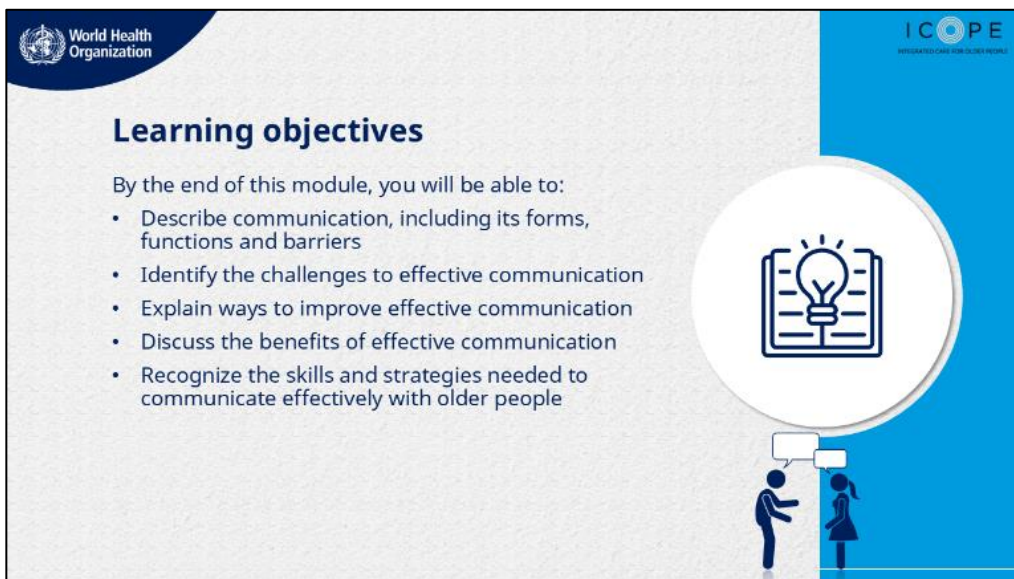
Welcome to the module on communication skills. By the end of this session, you will grasp the fundamentals of communication, including its forms, barriers, ways to improve, and benefits, especially when engaging with older people.

This session will take about 20 minutes. Let us get started on mastering the art of effective communication.

Learning objectives



Show: Slide 2



Learning objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe communication, including its forms, functions and barriers
- Identify the challenges to effective communication
- Explain ways to improve effective communication
- Discuss the benefits of effective communication
- Recognize the skills and strategies needed to communicate effectively with older people



Say:

Let us take a moment to understand what we aim to achieve by the end of this module. We will:

1. Describe communication comprehensively, including its various forms, functions and barriers.
2. Identify the challenges hindering effective communication.
3. Explain methods to enhance effective communication.
4. Discuss the benefits of effective communication.
5. Recognize the skills and strategies required to communicate effectively with older people.



Ask:

Have you ever wondered how to communicate effectively with older people? Broadly speaking, what are the key considerations when addressing the needs of older people?

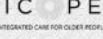
Bottom line



Show: Slide 3


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Bottom line


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Avoid stereotyping


- Older age is a time of great diversity
- Keep your message positive
- Use motives specific to older people

Look for the needs of older people


- Older people are generally satisfied with who they are
- Less interest in developing new traits or conforming to social norms
- Although initiating change may be harder, maintaining change may be easier
- Decision-making processes rely more on intuition than extensive weighing of merits



Say:

First, we must steer clear of stereotyping. Remember, older age encompasses a wide spectrum of people with diverse experiences and backgrounds.

When crafting our message, let us keep it positive and uplifting. Let us aim to resonate with the specific motives of older people, understanding that their priorities and concerns may differ from those of other age groups.

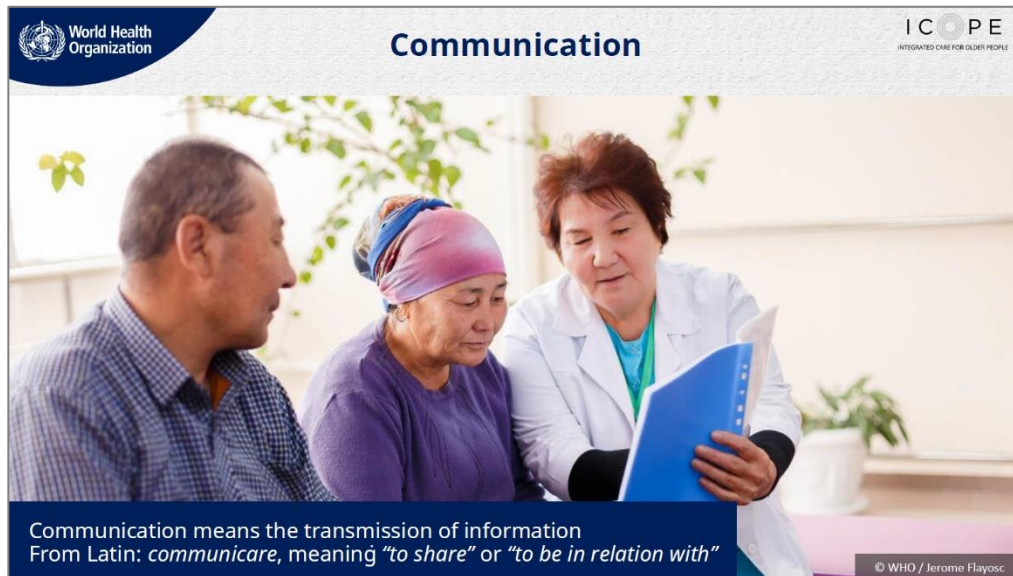
At the same time, we want to focus on the specific needs of older people. In this context, we need to recognize that they are generally content with who they are. They may have less inclination towards adopting new traits or conforming to societal norms. However, this does not mean they are resistant to change. In fact, while initiating change might be challenging, maintaining it could be easier for them. It is also essential to understand that their decision-making processes might lean more towards intuition rather than extensive analysis.

When we design our strategies or interventions, we need to keep these high-level insights in mind.

Communication



Show: Slide 4



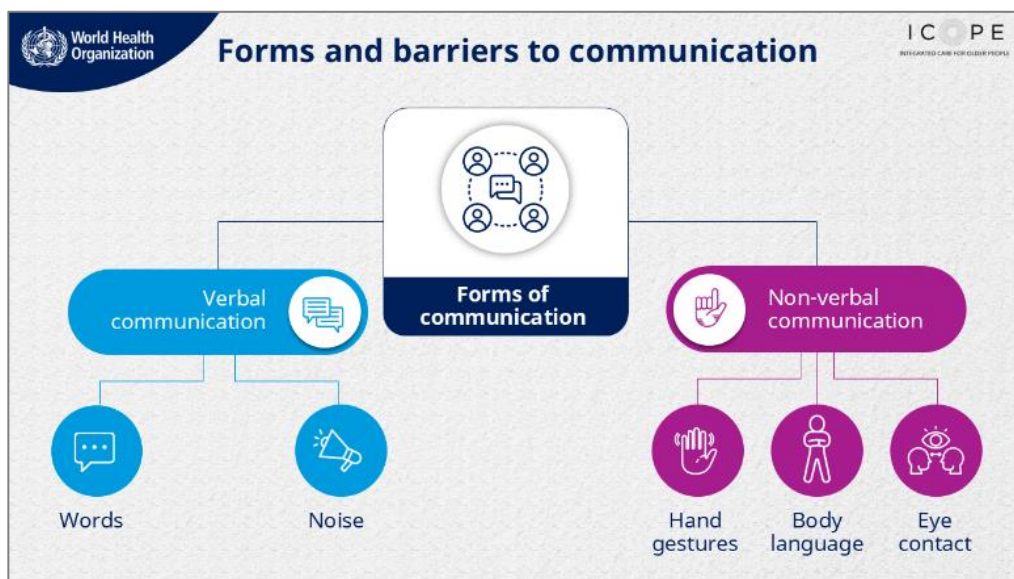
Say:

Let us delve more on details into the topic of communication. But, what exactly is communication? Simply put, it is the process of transmitting information. The word itself stems from the Latin word 'communicare,' which translates to 'to share' or 'to be in relation with.' So, when we talk about communication, we are essentially discussing how we share and connect with others.

Forms of communication



Show: Slide 5



Say:

Communication may have different forms. It might use verbal and non-verbal means. Verbal communication involves words and noises, while non-verbal communication encompasses gestures, body language and eye contact.

Core functions of communication



Show: Slide 6



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Core functions of communication





Information provision

- Older people may less actively seek and request information
- Lower ability to process information



Enabling decision-making

- Involvement in decision-making
- Need to identify meaningful goals of care



Empathic behaviour

- To build trust and relationships
- Greater satisfaction, decreased anxiety and better information recall
- Important if conditions may worsen



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Say:

Communication serves three core functions. We communicate because we want to provide information, enable decision-making and have empathic behaviour.

When it comes to information provision, it is important to recognize that older people may not actively seek or request information as frequently as younger people. This can lead to unmet clinical needs. Additionally, due to factors such as reduced working memory, older persons may have slower processing abilities, especially when large amounts of information are provided.

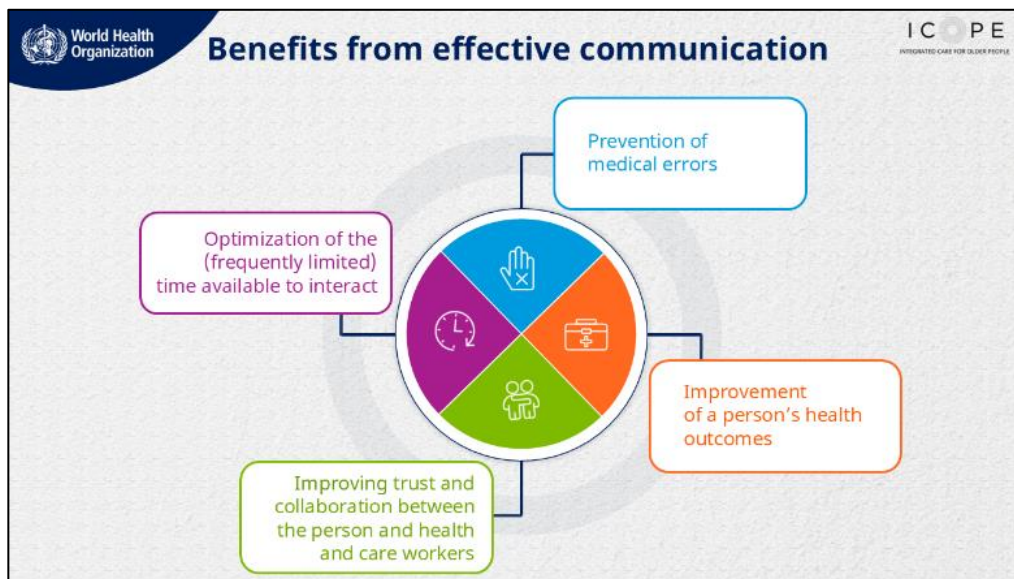
Most patients, including older people, want to be involved in the decision-making process. This involvement leads to a better understanding of treatment options, increased confidence in decisions, and higher satisfaction with care. It is essential to identify meaningful goals of care, considering what is meaningful for the person and addressing any concerns they may have.

Finally, empathic behaviour plays a crucial role in building trust and relationships with patients. This not only leads to greater patient satisfaction but also reduces anxiety and improves information recall. It becomes particularly imperative in situations where conditions may worsen.

Benefits of effective communication



Show: Slide 7



Say:

Be aware that effective communication is necessary to:

- Prevent medical errors
- Improve the person's health outcomes
- Strengthen the relationship between the person and the health and care provider
- Optimize the (frequently limited) time available to interact

Indeed, prioritizing clear communication is crucial for positive health care experiences.

Challenges to effective communication



Show: Slide 8



Challenges to effective communication

Perceived challenges to effective communication are related to multiple factors, including:





Older person

- Diverse needs, priorities, values and capacities (i.e., hearing loss, vision impairment, cognitive impairment, psychological disorders)
- Potential scepticism towards younger or less experienced workers



Health and care worker

- Difficulty prioritizing problems
- Difficulty establishing rapport and trust
- Insufficient knowledge and skills in geriatric care
- Unease in discussing bad news, poor prognosis or realistic care goals
- Ageism
- Time constraints



It is critical for the health and care workforce to:

- Tailor information and its delivery
- Develop communication skills



Say:

Various factors can challenge effective communication.

Some factors are specific to the individual. These include needs, values and priorities that, in an older person, may differ from those of a younger individual. Impaired capacities (e.g., hearing loss, vision impairment, cognitive impairment, psychological disorders) may impact effective communication. Social dynamics may also influence communication, including scepticism towards younger or less experienced healthcare workers.

On the other hand, barriers may also be present in health and care workers. These may be represented by difficulties in prioritizing problems or establishing rapport and trust with the older person. They might stem from inadequate training in geriatric care and/or time constraints in the clinical routine. There may also be discomfort in addressing specific, difficult topics (e.g., bad news) or setting realistic goals of care.

It is thus critical for the health and care workforce to:

- Tailor information and its delivery
- Develop communication skills.

Improved communication



Show: Slide 9



Say:

To improve communication, it is necessary to simultaneously act at different levels:

- Environment
- Organization
- Health and care workers

Improve communication – Environment



Show: Slide 10



**Improve communication:
Environment**



 Promote easy accessibility	 Promote a familiar environment	 Guarantee hygienic conditions and tidiness
Consider the potential need to compensate: • Mobility loss • Cognitive impairment • Sensory limitations (hearing loss and vision impairment)	• Provide seating in a quiet, comfortable area • Reduce noise and interruptions to a minimum • Maintain a comfortable temperature • Ensure good lighting • Make material easy to read	• Cleanliness of surfaces and objects • Toilets should be easily accessible without environmental barriers • Availability of material for handwashing



- Verify the access and environment, considering the specific needs the older person may have.
- Do not assume that something that works for younger individuals will also work for older people.
- Experiment and identify which solutions are most effective.



Say:

First, let us focus on improving communication by optimizing the environment. Under this perspective, it is important to:

1. Promote easy accessibility:
 - Consider potential needs to compensate for mobility loss, cognitive and sensory limitations such as hearing loss and vision impairment.
2. Promote a familiar environment:
 - Provide seating in a quiet, comfortable area with minimal noise and interruptions.
 - Maintain normal temperature, good lighting and ensure easy-to-read materials.
3. Guarantee hygienic conditions and tidiness:
 - Ensure the cleanliness of surfaces and objects.
 - Provide easy access to a toilet without environmental barriers and materials for handwashing.
4. Verify access and environment tailored to specific needs:
 - Do not assume what works for a younger person will work for an older person.
 - Experiment to find the best solutions.

By focusing on these environmental factors, we can enhance the overall comfort for older people, thus paving the way for more effective communication.

Improve communication – Organization



Show: Slide 11



**Improve communication:
Organization**



 Scheduling of appointments	 Make older people comfortable
- Provide clear information - Schedule older people earlier in the day - Allow additional time for older people	- Greet the older person warmly - Ensure their privacy is guaranteed - Be prepared to physically assist them - Check the older person periodically - Help the older person stay relaxed and focused - Say “Goodbye”
 - Older people expect staff to be friendly, considerate, humorous and to take sufficient time with them. - Improving communication from the first contact can help the individual feel at ease and comfortable.	



Say:

Let us now discuss strategies for improving the organization of care delivery to older people. It is important to consider actions on:

1. Scheduling of appointments:
 - Provide clear information about appointments.
 - Schedule older people earlier in the day when possible.
 - Allow extra time for appointments to accommodate potential needs.
2. Making older people comfortable:
 - Greet them warmly upon arrival.
 - Ensure privacy during consultations.
 - Be prepared to assist the older person, if necessary, physically.
 - Check on them periodically to ensure their comfort.
 - Keep the atmosphere relaxed and focused.
 - Bid them farewell courteously at the end of the appointment.

We need to keep in mind that older persons expect staff to be friendly, kind and able to engage in light conversation. Also for this reason, be sure to allocate sufficient time for consultations to avoid rushing through appointments.

By implementing these practices, we can enhance communication and create a more comfortable environment for older people from the moment they engage with our facility.

**Ask:**

Have you ever wondered how healthcare workers can improve communication with older people?

Improve communication – Health and care workers



Show: Slide 12



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Improve communication: Health and care workers

 Use the proper form of address	 Sit face-to-face	 Establish a rapport
• Use formal language • Avoid using familiar terms (e.g., "dear") • Eventually, inquire about preferred forms of address	• Consider the distance (do not invade the personal space)	• Avoid ageist attitudes
 • Introduce yourself. • Clearly state your name and role within the organization. • Explain that you are here to listen to a person's concerns. • Show respect. • Avoid taking anything for granted. • Do not assume a person's capacity without assessing them.		



Say:

It is recommended that, at the initial approach, care workers use the proper form of address and formal language, avoid using overly familiar terms (e.g., "dear"). Eventually, they may ask the person about their preferred forms of address.

The positioning is also important. Sit face-to-face with the older person to establish a connection. Always consider maintaining an appropriate distance to respect personal space. To establish rapport, it is critical to:

- Avoid ageist attitudes and stereotypes.
- Introduce yourself clearly, stating your name and role within the organization.
- Express that you are here to listen to their concerns.
- Be respectful, and do not assume the person's capacity without testing them.



Show: Slide 13



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**Improve communication:
Health and care workers**



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Communicating effectively with older persons

- Take time — avoid rushing, interrupting, or distractions.
- Maintain eye contact and show empathy.
- Listen actively: **clarify, summarize, paraphrase.**
- Observe tone, pace, gestures, and body language.
- Allow time for the person to process questions and responses.
- If time is limited, ask them to prepare a list of concerns.
- In difficult moments, apply **SARAH**:

Stop talking : Actively listen : Reflect : Act with empathy : Handle objections



Say:

Effective communication also requires patience and attentiveness. Take your time, avoid rushing, interrupting, or distractions. Maintain eye contact to show that you are listening and demonstrate empathy throughout the conversation.

Active listening is key. This involves clarifying, summarizing, and paraphrasing to ensure complete understanding. Also observe non-verbal cues — such as tone, pace, gestures, and facial expressions — as they often reveal how the person feels or what they might hesitate to say.

Allow enough time for the older person to process questions and respond. If time is limited, it can help to suggest they prepare a list of concerns in advance, so no key points are missed.

When communication becomes difficult, you can apply the SARAH approach:

- S: Stop talking — resist the urge to interrupt.
- A: Actively listen — show engagement through nods or brief affirmations.
- R: Reflect — restate what you have heard to confirm understanding.
- A: Act with empathy — acknowledge emotions and experiences.
- H: Handle objections — listen carefully to concerns and respond constructively.



Ask:

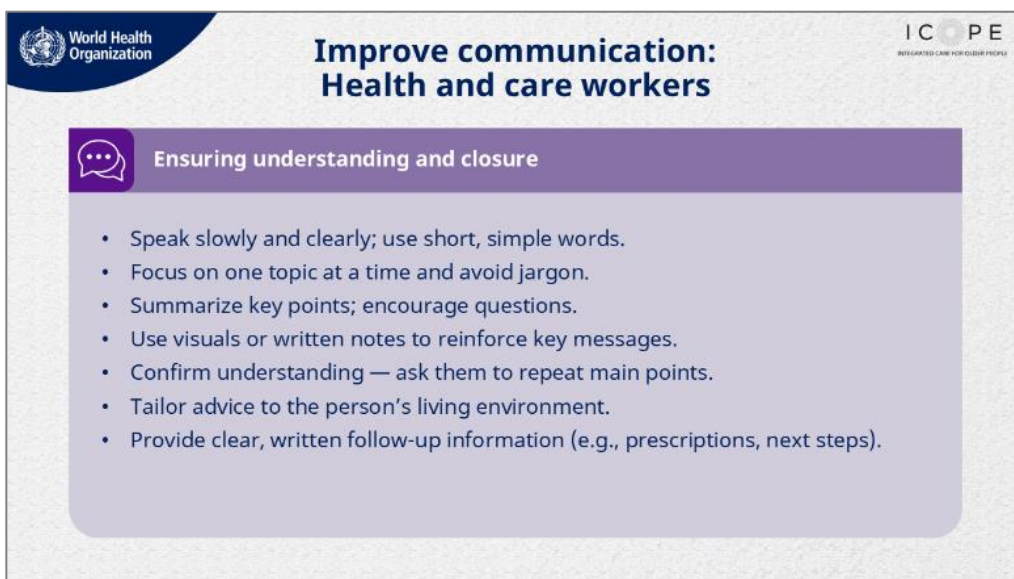
What are some ways you currently demonstrate active listening or empathy when speaking with older persons?

**Do:**

Invite participants to share ideas or examples.

**Say:**

Thank you for your thoughts. These approaches help create trust and understanding, ensuring older persons feel heard and respected during interactions.

**Show:** Slide 14

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**Improve communication:
Health and care workers**

IC O P E
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Ensuring understanding and closure

- Speak slowly and clearly; use short, simple words.
- Focus on one topic at a time and avoid jargon.
- Summarize key points; encourage questions.
- Use visuals or written notes to reinforce key messages.
- Confirm understanding — ask them to repeat main points.
- Tailor advice to the person's living environment.
- Provide clear, written follow-up information (e.g., prescriptions, next steps).

**Say:**

Now, let us look at how to make sure older persons clearly understand and retain the information shared.

Speak slowly and clearly, using short and simple sentences. Focus on one topic at a time and avoid medical jargon whenever possible. Summarize key points frequently and encourage questions to confirm understanding.

Using visuals or written notes can be very helpful. For instance, charts, diagrams, or clear written instructions make information easier to recall later.

Always confirm understanding by asking the person (or caregiver) to repeat back the main points in their own words.

Also, tailor your advice to the person's living environment. For example, ensuring that recommendations are practical within their home setting.

Provide clear written follow-up information, such as prescriptions, next steps, or referrals, to help support continuity of care.

**Ask:**

What are some simple ways to check understanding or make instructions easier for older persons to follow?

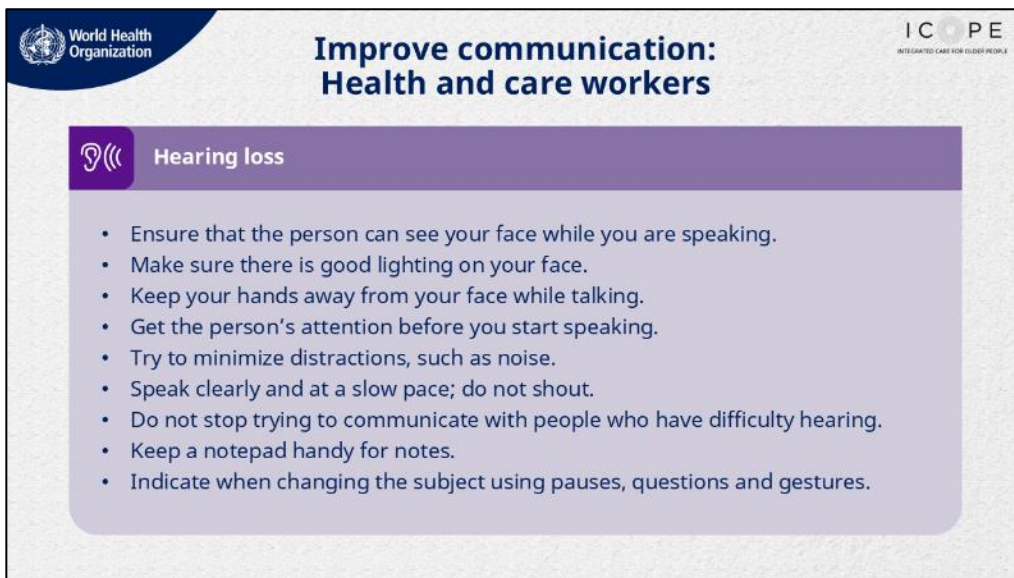
**Do:**

Invite participants to share ideas or examples.



Say:

Excellent insights! Remember, clear and patient communication — both spoken and written — helps older persons feel confident and supported in managing their health.

**Show:** Slide 15

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**Improve communication:
Health and care workers**

I C O P E
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Hearing loss

- Ensure that the person can see your face while you are speaking.
- Make sure there is good lighting on your face.
- Keep your hands away from your face while talking.
- Get the person's attention before you start speaking.
- Try to minimize distractions, such as noise.
- Speak clearly and at a slow pace; do not shout.
- Do not stop trying to communicate with people who have difficulty hearing.
- Keep a notepad handy for notes.
- Indicate when changing the subject using pauses, questions and gestures.

**Say:**

Sometimes, communication might be challenging when the older person presents hearing or vision impairments.

For those with hearing loss:

- Ensure they can see your face when you speak, with good lighting.
- Keep your hands away from your face while talking and minimize distractions.
- Get their attention before speaking and speak clearly and slowly without shouting.
- Do not give up speaking to them; keep a notepad handy to aid communication.
- Clearly tell the person when changing subjects and use pauses, questions and gestures to indicate the same.

**Show:** Slide 16

Improve communication: Health and care workers

Vision impairment

- Ensure there is adequate lighting, especially on your face.
- Check whether the person uses eyeglasses.
- Make sure all instructions (both written and unwritten) and materials are clear.
- If there are issues with reading, consider alternative options (e.g., recording instructions, diagrams, using aids or devices).

**Say:**

Now, turning to persons with vision impairment:

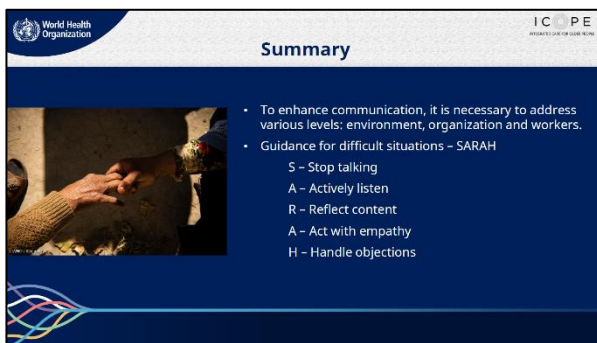
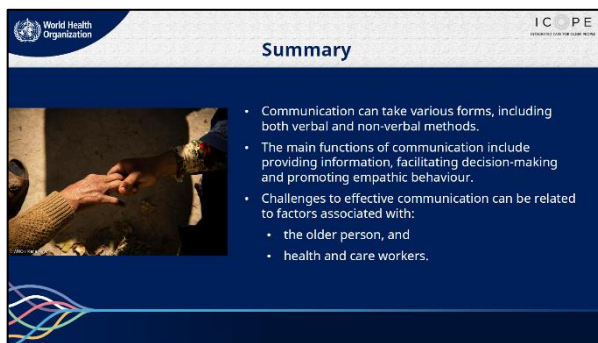
- Check for adequate lighting, including on your face, and inquire if they use eyeglasses.
- Ensure all instructions and materials are clear, considering alternatives if reading is challenging, such as recorded instructions, diagrams, or aids/devices.

By implementing these simple strategies, we can ensure effective communication, promoting better and more inclusive care for older people.

Summary



Show: Slides 17 and 18



Do:

Go through the slides and recap the points discussed during the session.



Say:

To summarize this session, we explored communication as a core element of effective, person-centred care for older people. Communication can take many forms, including both verbal and non-verbal methods, and each plays an important role in how information is shared, understood and acted upon. We highlighted that the key functions of communication are not only to provide information, but also to support decision-making and to promote empathic, respectful behaviour in care interactions.

We also discussed common challenges to effective communication. These challenges can arise from factors related to the older person, such as health conditions, sensory changes or emotional concerns, as well as from factors related to health and care workers, including time pressures, assumptions, attitudes or communication skills. Recognizing these challenges is an essential first step toward improving interactions.

To strengthen communication, we emphasized the need to act at multiple levels. This includes creating supportive physical environments, putting in place organizational practices that value good communication, and building the skills and attitudes of health and care workers. Finally, we introduced the SARAH approach as practical guidance for managing difficult communication situations: stop talking, actively listen, reflect the content, act with empathy, and handle objections. Using this structured approach can help foster understanding, reduce tension and support more respectful and effective communication with older people.

References



Show: Slide 19

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IC O P E
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Say:

Here are some useful links and citations for your reference. Thank you for your time and participation.