

ICCOPE

INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

COMMUNICATION
SKILLS

Version 0.1
Draft version for field testing

Learning Objectives

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

- Describe communication, its forms, functions and barriers.
- Identify the challenges to effective communication.
- Explain the ways to improve effective communication.
- Learn the benefits of effective communication.
- Recognise the skills and strategies required to communicate with older people.



Bottom Line



Avoid Stereotyping

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



Look for Needs of Older People

- Older adults 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

Strategies for a Person-centred Approach

- **Get to know a person.**
- Focus on the older person's **needs and priorities.**
- Identify and address personal and perceived barriers to communication
- Empower the older person to participate in the **decision-making process**, leveraging their residual capacities.
- Be prepared to **negotiate and compensate.**
- **Avoid assumptions** about the older person's capacities.
- Engage with trusted family and friends when the older persons presents impaired capacities.



Communication



WHO / NOOR / Sebastian Liste

Communication means the transmission of information
From Latin: *communicare*, meaning “to share” or “to be in relation with”

Forms and Barriers to Communication

Forms of Communication



Verbal communication

Words, noises



Non-verbal communication

Hand gestures, body language and eye contact

Barriers to Communication



Hearing loss, visual impairment, cognitive impairment, psychological disorders



Cultural and educational background may also influence communication



It is critical for the health and care workforce to:

- Tailor information and its delivery
- Develop communication skills

Core Functions of Communication



Information Provision

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



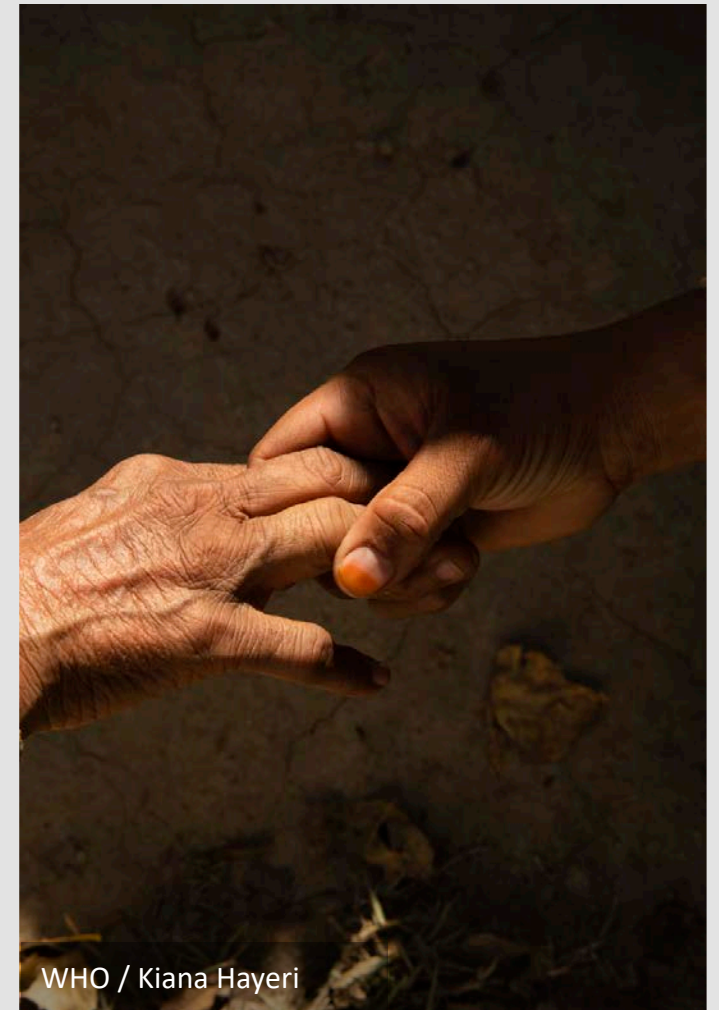
Enabling Decision-making

- 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



WHO / Kiana Hayeri

Challenges to Effective Communication

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



An older person

- Heterogeneous needs, values, priorities and capacities
- Possible scepticism towards younger or training workers



Health and care worker-related factors

- Difficulty in prioritising problems
- Inability to establish close rapport and trust
- Lack of knowledge and skills in geriatric medicine
- Discomfort in discussing bad news, poor prognosis, or realistic goals of care
- Ageism



Person- and system-related factors

- Time constraints
- Poor consideration of an older person's needs and priorities

Effective Communication

Benefits from effective communication:



Improved Communication

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

Environment







Organisation

Health and care workers



Improve Communication - Environment

 Promote easy accessibility	 Promote a familiar environment	 Guarantee hygienic conditions and tidiness
<p>Consider the potential need to compensate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical limitations • Cognitive limitations • Sensory limitations (hearing and vision impairment) 	<p>Provide seats in a quiet, comfortable area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce noise and interruptions to the minimum • Maintain a normal temperature • Good lighting • Make things easy to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness of surfaces and objects • Easy access to toilet without environmental barriers • Availability of material for handwashing
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify the access and environment, considering the specific needs the older person may have. • Do not take it for granted that it will work for the older person as it does for a younger one. • Experiment and find which solutions work best. 		

Improve Communication - Organisation



Scheduling of appointments

- Clear information
- Schedule older people earlier in the day
- Allow extra time for older people







Make older people comfortable

- Greet them
- Guarantee privacy
- Be ready to escort the older person physically
- Check on the older person from time to time
- Keep the older person relaxed and focused
- Say “Goodbye”



- Older people anticipate a staff that is friendly, considerate, able to joke, and take enough time for them.
- Communication can be improved from the first contact by helping a person feel comfortable.


Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers

 Use the proper form of address	 Sit face-to-face	 Establish a rapport
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal language• Avoid using familiar terms (e.g., “dear”)• Eventually, ask a person about preferred forms of address	<p>Consider the distance (do not invade the personal space)</p>	<p>Avoid ageist attitudes</p>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce yourself.• Clearly state your name and role within the organisation.• Explain that you are here to hear a person’s concerns.• Be respectful.• Do not take anything for granted.• Do not assume a person’s capacity without testing him/her.		

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers

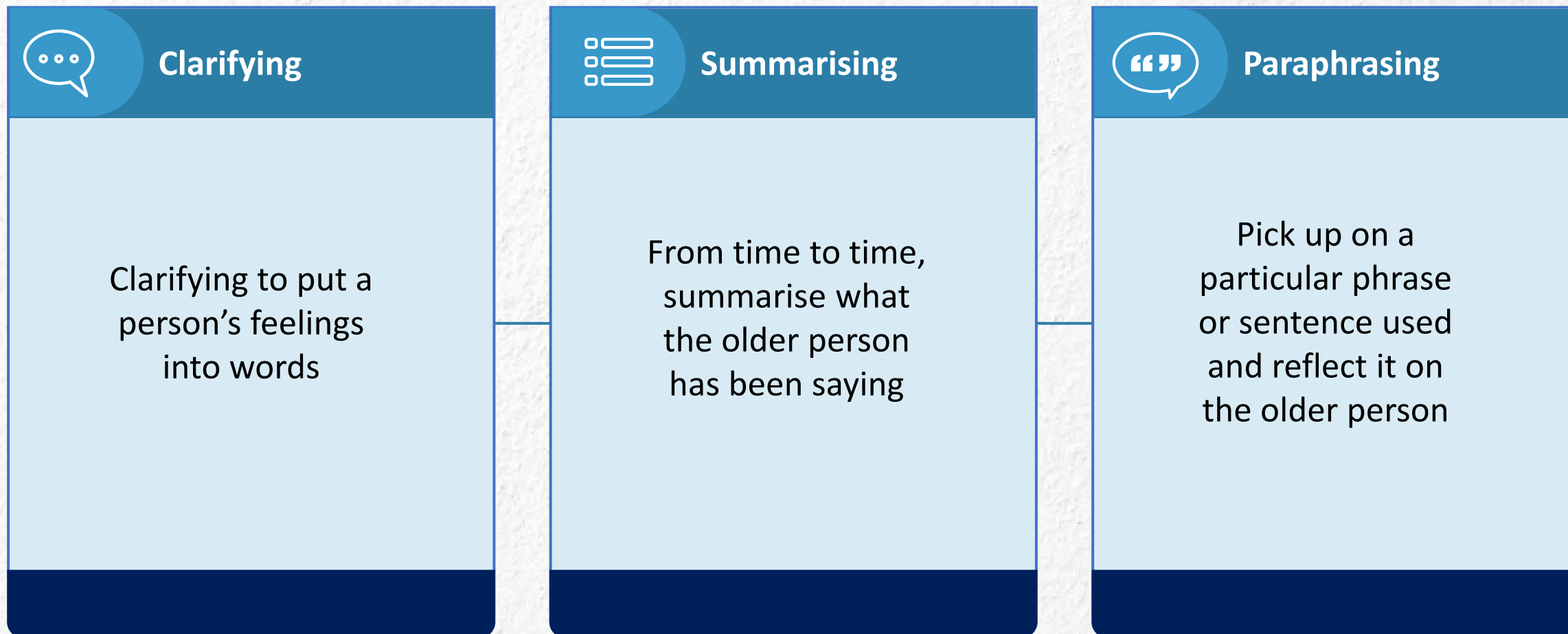


Interview with older person

- Try not to rush
 - Avoid interrupting
 - Avoid distractions
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Active listening
 - Evaluation of the older person's tone of voice, pace of talking, body language, gestures and facial expressions
 - Demonstrate empathy
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- Give time to process questions and answers.
 - Interrupting, especially at the very beginning, impacts the likelihood of a person to express all his/her concerns.
 - If time is limited, consider asking a person to prepare a list of concerns in advance.

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers

Skills to show listening:



Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers

Here is a guidance in case of difficult situations (SARAH)

S**Stop talking**

Attempt to listen carefully to what the person is saying and resist the urge to speak.

A**Actively listen**

Give the person an opportunity to speak and encourage him/her using non-verbal communication (e.g., nodding and small rewards such as 'Aha', 'I see').

R**Reflect content**

Intermittently, reflect on what a person is saying to show that you are listening to what is being said.

A**Act with empathy**

Show the person that you are with them and that you recognise what they are saying and how they are feeling.

H**Handle objections**

Listen to the person's objections and complaints and show a willingness to deal with them.

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



Discussing with the older person

- Consider and compensate possible impairments.
 - Hearing impairment
 - Vision impairment
 - Stick to one topic at a time
 - Avoid too much information at once.
 - Use short, simple words and sentences.
 - Speak slowly and clearly.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Be careful about language.
- Ensure understanding of health information
 - Frequently summarise the critical points
 - Allow an older person to ask questions and express themselves
 - Write down take-away points
 - Simplify and write down your instructions
 - Use charts, models and pictures

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



Hearing Impairment

- Let a person see your face when you speak.
- Make sure there is good light on your face
- Keep your hands away from the face while talking.
- Get a person's attention before you speak.
- Try to avoid distractions (e.g., noise).
- Speak clearly and slowly. Do not shout.
- Do not give up speaking to people who have difficulty hearing.
- Keep a notepad handy.
- Tell a person when you are changing the subject (also by using pauses, questions and gestures).



Vision impairment

- Check for adequate lighting, including on your face.
- Check if a person uses eyeglasses.
- Make sure all the instructions (including those unwritten) and materials are clear.
- If there are problems with reading, consider alternatives (e.g., recording instructions, diagrams, using aids or devices).

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



Concluding the discussion

The conclusion of the consultation is a critical part when the entire process is wrapped up.

- Do not rush!
- Consider the older person's environment in the delivery of recommendations.
- Be sure that recommendations are clear and understood by a person and, eventually, the caregiver. Eventually, ask to repeat.
- Provide clearly written notes about recommendations, prescriptions, future schedules and eventual referrals. Try to be schematic!

Summary

- Communication can take many forms – verbal and non-verbal.
- Core functions of communication involve information provision, enabling decision-making and empathic behaviour.
- Perceived challenges to effective communication are related to:
 - The older person,
 - Health and care worker-related factors, and
 - Person- and system-related factors.

Summary

- To improve communication, it is necessary to act at different levels of environment, organisation and workers.
- Guidance for Difficult Situations – SARA H
 - S – Stop talking
 - A – Actively listen
 - R – Reflect content
 - A – Act with empathy
 - H – Handle objections

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