

IC O P E

INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

COMMUNICATION
SKILLS

Version 2.0
Draft version for field testing

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.
- Understand the benefits of effective communication.
- Recognise the skills and strategies needed to communicate effectively 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 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

Strategies for an effective communication

- Take the time to **get to know the individual**.
- Focus on the **needs and priorities of the older person**.
- Identify and address any personal or perceived **barriers** to communication.
- Empower the older person to take part in the **decision-making process** by utilising their residual capacities.
- Be ready to **negotiate and make accommodations** as needed.
- **Avoid making assumptions** about the older person's capacities.
- In situations where the older person presents impaired capacities, involve **trusted family and friends**.



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



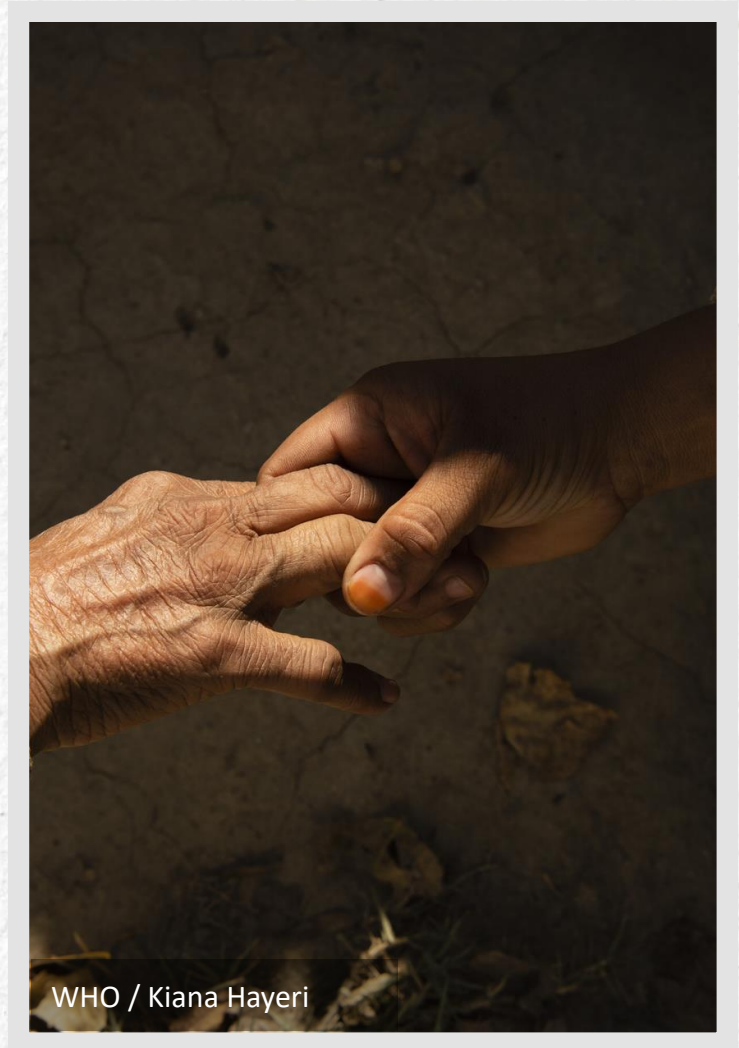
Enabling Decision-making

- 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



Challenges to Effective Communication

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



An older person

- Diverse needs, priorities, values, and capacities
- Potential skepticism towards younger or less experienced workers



Health and care worker-related factors

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



Person- and system-related factors

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

Effective Communication

Benefits from effective communication:

Prevention of medical errors



Improvement of a person's health outcomes



Optimisation of the (frequently limited) time available to interact



Strengthening of the relationship between a person and a health and care worker



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"> • Mobility limitations • Cognitive impairment • Sensory limitations (hearing loss and vision impairment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide seating in a quiet, comfortable area • Reduce noise and interruptions to the minimum • Maintain a comfortable temperature • Ensure good lighting • Make material easy to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness of surfaces and objects • Toilets should be easily accessible without environmental barriers • Availability of material for handwashing
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify the access and environment, taking into account 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. 		

Improve Communication - Organisation



Scheduling of appointments

- Provide clear information
- Schedule older people earlier in the day
- Allow additional time for older people







Make older people comfortable

- 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 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"> • Use formal language • Avoid using familiar terms (e.g., “dear”) • Eventually, inquire about preferred forms of address 	<p>Consider the distance (do not invade the personal space)</p>	<p>Avoid ageist attitudes</p>
<div>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself. • Clearly state your name and role within the organisation. • 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. </div>		

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



Interview with older person

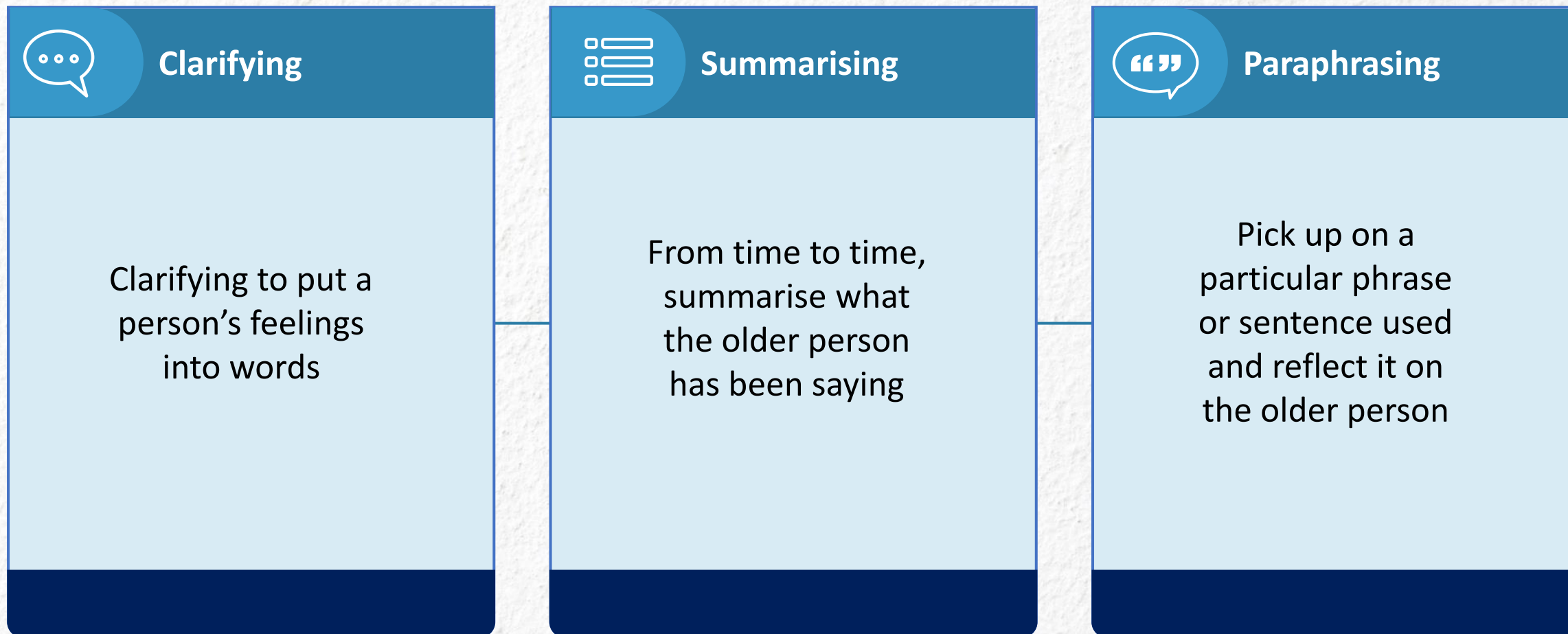
- Try not to rush
- Avoid interrupting
- Avoid distractions
- Maintain eye contact
- Active listening
- Evaluation of the older person's tone of voice, pace of talking, body language, gestures, and facial expressions
- Demonstrate empathy



- Allow time for the older person to process both questions and answers.
- Interrupting, especially at the beginning of a conversation, can reduce the likelihood of a person to express all of their concerns.
- If time is limited, consider asking the person to prepare a list of their 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 them with non-verbal communication (e.g., nodding and verbal affirmations like '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**

Demonstrate to the person that you are supporting them, and that you acknowledge both their words and emotions.

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 for possible hearing loss and/or vision impairments.
 - Focus on one topic at a time
 - Avoid overwhelming with too much information at once.
 - Use short, simple words and sentences.
 - Speak slowly and clearly.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - Be careful with language.
- Ensure understanding of health information
 - Frequently summarise the critical points
 - Allow older individuals to ask questions and express themselves
 - Write down key takeaways
 - Simplify and write down your instructions
 - Use charts, models, and pictures

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



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



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).

Improve Communication – Health and Care Workers



Concluding the discussion

The conclusion of a consultation is a crucial part of the overall process.

- Do not rush this final step!
- Take into account the older person's living environment when making recommendations.
- Ensure that the recommendations are clear and understood by both the individual and their caregiver. It's a good idea to ask them to repeat the information back to you.
- Provide written notes that clearly outline the recommendations, prescriptions, future appointments, and any referrals. Aim for a schematic and organised format!

Summary

- Communication can take various forms, including both verbal and non-verbal methods.
- The main functions of communication include providing information, facilitating decision-making, and promoting empathic behaviour.
- Challenges to effective communication can be related to:
 - The older person,
 - Factors associated with health and care workers, and
 - Person-related and system-related factors.

Summary

- To enhance communication, it is necessary to address various levels: environment, organisation, and workers.
- Guidance for Difficult Situations – SARAH
 - S – Stop talking
 - A – Actively listen
 - R – Reflect content
 - A – Act with empathy
 - H – Handle objections

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