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COMMUNICATION SKILLS

VOLUNTEER INDUCTION

THE AIM OF COMMUNICATION

- The main aim of communication is to share information or ideas using the three types of communication explained in this session. There is a lot to consider when you are communicating during your volunteering activities. Poor communication can lead to conflict, complaints, confusion, mistakes and unsafe situations.
- Developing these skills will enable you to communicate with everyone, including your volunteer coordinator, the public, service users, managers and other volunteers.

Good communication is important to every organisation.

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication can be grouped into three different types that complement each other and improve overall communication.

Verbal
- Discussions
- Group discussions
- Telephone conversations

Non-verbal
- Body language
- Eye contact
- Active listening
- Appearance

Written
- Note-keeping
- Letters
- E-mails
- Social media/marketing

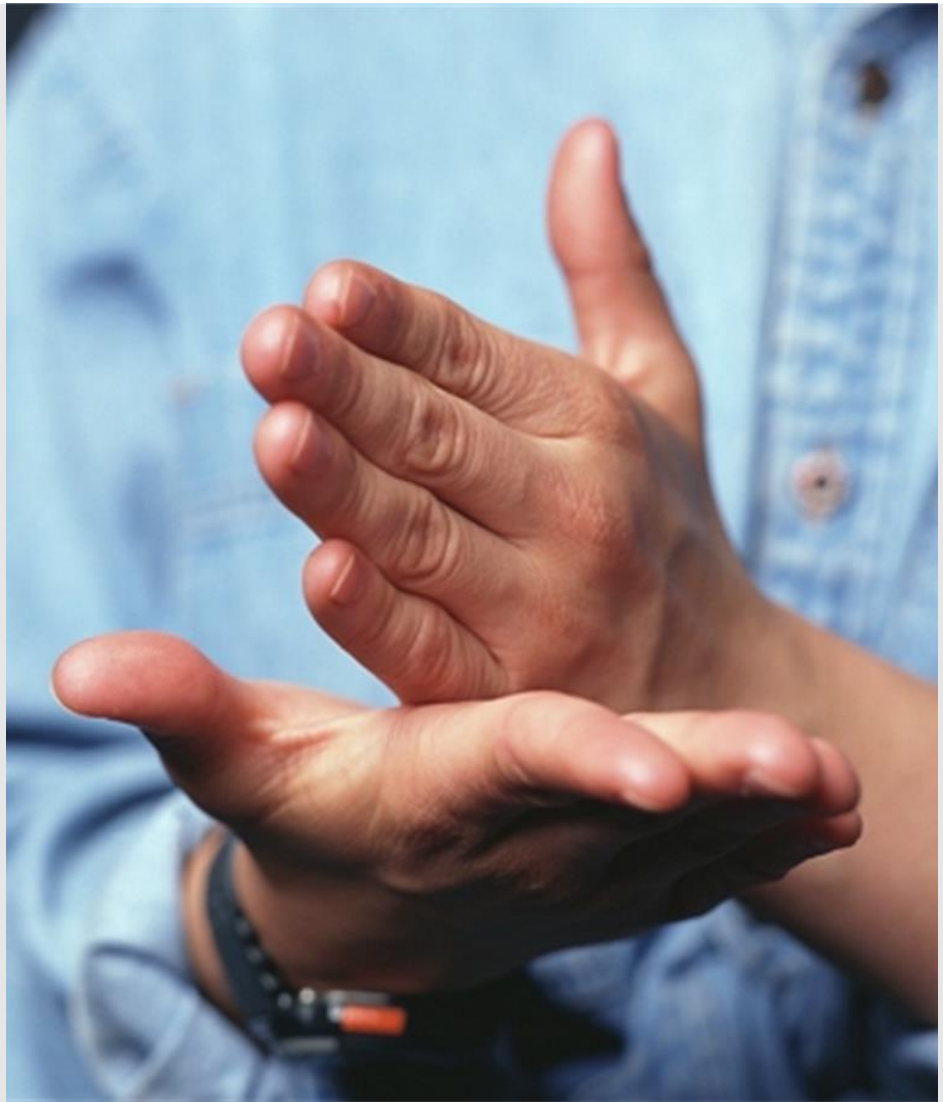
VERBAL COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

What are some of the verbal communication difficulties that you may face as a volunteer?

Some of the verbal communication difficulties that you may face as a volunteer can include people with:

- Hearing loss
- Loss of sight
- Language barriers
- Speech defects
- Learning disabilities



How might you overcome any potential communication difficulties?

- Hearing aids
- Symbol/picture cards
- Signs
- Translators
- Writing boards
- Other technical equipment

As a volunteer, if you are unsure about a person's communication needs, it is important you ask your volunteer coordinator or a member of staff for assistance. You may also need to discuss communication needs with the person's family/carer.

Common verbal communication errors when speaking to others

Some of the common verbal communication errors include:

- Interrupting
- Insensitivity regarding religion or culture
- Failing to pass on concerns or fears
- Asking pressing questions
- Use of jargon without explanation
- Sharing confidential information

TELEPHONE SKILLS

Developing good telephone communication skills is vital. A volunteer should always be courteous, polite and considerate when speaking directly or over the telephone.

These are basic skills which apply to everyday life. These skills include:

- Ensuring that you introduce yourself at the beginning of a call
- Being polite and courteous
- Recognising that the person at the other end of the phone is not usually able to see you, i.e. no reliance on body language
- Using tone of voice and appropriate emphasis to make the message content as clear as possible

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication can be used to support, clarify or in some instances replace verbal communication. However, be aware, in some situations non-verbal communications can contradict verbal messages leading to confusion.

It is easy to take non-verbal communication for granted as it takes many forms.

Examples of non-verbal communication:

- **Slouching**
- **Pointing**
- **No eye contact**
- **Shaking hands**
- **Laughing**

What are the common non-verbal communication errors that people make?

Folding arms

Getting upset

Being distracted

Answering the phone during a conversation

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding as it focuses on the person you are talking to. It requires you to suspend your own judgements.

All volunteers should actively listen and respect other people's views and sensitivities.

Flexibility, empathy and a sensitive appreciation of other peoples' points of view, facilitates good team working.

Here are some suggestions of how you can show you are actively listening to someone:

- Give the person your full attention
- Avoid distractions
- Observe the person's body language, whilst being aware of your own
- Nod, smile and use other facial expressions
- Encourage the person to continue, using 'yes', 'uh huh'
- Paraphrase, ask questions and summarise
- Do not interrupt
- Check the person understands what you are saying by asking questions

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK

As part of your volunteer role, you may be required to take notes, send e-mails, write letters, etc. Important points to consider when writing include:

- Be as clear as possible
- Address the person you are communicating with
- Sign off with your name
- Be polite
- Get the message across
- Use short sentences
- Write in the order you wish them to read
- Re-read and check before sending
- Where possible, ask someone to check the writing before sending

LOOK AT THIS EXAMPLE EMAIL.
CAN YOU SPOT ANY COMMON ERRORS?

Dear Volunteer

You are invited to an event we're holding next month. The event is to celebrate everything volunteers do and we really hope you can come.

The event will take place in the grand hall in our main offices in Rochdale where there are plenty of accommodation possibilities if it's easier for you to stay overnight and we ask you to 'dress to impress' which means take the opportunity to to dress up in you're sparkliest and and most glamourous outfits.

We need to know about numbers so let us know if you can come and if you're bringing anyone with you.

TTFN!

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Abbreviations**

  What does TTFN mean? It actually means 'Ta Ta for Now' but the problem is many people might not know that.

  TTFN is an abbreviation. Avoid using abbreviations wherever possible as you don't know if the person you are writing to will understand what you mean.

- **Not enough information**

  The invite says 'next month' but doesn't give a date. Ensure you have included all the information someone may need.

- **Spelling errors**

  There are some mistakes here - it should say '**your** sparkliest' and the words 'and' and 'to' are repeated twice.

  Most email and document software have spelling and grammar check tools so make sure you use them to check everything you've written is correct.

- **Sentence length**

  This is a really long sentence and it's difficult to take in all the information. Try and keep sentences short as it makes them easier to read.

COMMON ERRORS

Some common written communication errors include:

- Use of abbreviations
- Writing not readable
- Not sticking to facts
- Not being clear

TEAMWORK

Volunteers are a vital part of an organization. Together with staff, volunteers form a team.

Good team working involves:

- Having clear objectives that are understood by all team members
- Effective communication
- Mutual trust and support
- Sort out conflicts as early as possible

Working with others involves:

- Taking responsibility for your own actions
- Communicating well
- Listening actively to the team leader and other team members
- Being honest, reliable, supportive and helpful
- Acting in a professional manner - you are an ambassador for your organisation

CONSENT

Everything we do for the people we support, whether it is supporting the person to make choices, helping them up out of a chair or taking an arm when crossing the road, requires their consent.

So how does a person give consent? The first step is to ask the question, such as:

- “Mr. Brown, is it OK if I take your arm whilst walking to stop you from falling?”

What response would suggest Mr. Brown is giving you consent?

The following responses from Mr. Brown could be considered as offering ‘consent’:

- Saying 'yes' or something similar ('Alright', 'OK', etc.)
- Nodding their head

If you don’t receive any of these, you don’t have Mr. Brown's consent. If in doubt, please seek advice from your volunteer coordinator or a member of staff.

KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES

Knowing when to call for help is a key skill.

As a volunteer, people may share concerns, complaints or queries with you. However, it is not your responsibility to deal with issues shared with you. It **is** your responsibility to ensure that issues and related information is passed on to your volunteer coordinator or another relevant staff member. It is important you communicate this information in a clear and factual manner. This may require written notes and verbal communication. Apart from communicating this information with your volunteer coordinator or appropriate team member; this information should be kept **confidential**.

KEY POINTS

- Communication is a vital skill
- Communication is central to improving relationships with others
- Good communication is an essential part of effective team working
- Communication needs to consider the communication preferences of the person/s
- Communication includes verbal and non-verbal aspects
- Good telephone manners complement good communication skills, particularly in non-face-to-face contact
- The development of good communication skills is a lifelong process, with no definite endpoint
- As an ambassador for your organisation you should be polite, considerate and professional

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THANK YOU!

The content of this training was developed by NHS England, E-Learning for Healthcare and has been adapted by **Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**, to provide an accessible format, ensuring that all volunteers have the same basic learning when they start in their role.