

Learning Outcome

2. Understand barriers to communication

2.1. Analyse barriers to communication

Barriers to Communication: Transcript

If you ask people working in healthcare, social-work - or any other branch of the care and support professions - about what skills and qualities make a good practitioner, there's a high chance that many will tell you that communication skills are very near the top of the list.

Being a good communicator and listener is a vital interpersonal skill, but it is also something that many of us may take for granted. There are, in fact, many different factors that go into the communication process. Have a look at the separate video on this course about the Shannon-Weaver model of communication, for example. Furthermore, there are dozens of factors that might act as barriers or obstacles to clear and effective communication. The more you know about these risks, the better placed you are to mitigate them, or to avoid encountering any communication breakdown at all.

As there are many different factors that influence effective communication, let's break them down into a few different categories.

- Language barriers
- Psychological barriers
- Physiological barriers
- Physical barriers
- Systematic barriers

Language barriers

The person you are caring for may not share the same first-language as you, so be careful with your choice of words. Official literature related to support may need to be translated in different languages. When you're speaking, think about grading your language. This means avoiding using idioms and expressions, informal or colloquial phrases or specific cultural references.

In fact, it's a good idea to avoid using too much informal speech with all service-users, regardless of their first language. Furthermore, don't fill your speech with technical jargon or abbreviations which the other person might struggle to understand.

Psychological barriers

If either you, or the service-user is feeling stressed, anxious, angry, or any number of similar states, then this will have an impact on how a message is communicated or received. Other factors that might influence communication can include confidence and trust, or lack of. Remember, these apply equally to you and to the service-user, as communication is a two-way process. Furthermore, people with learning disabilities such as autism or Down's syndrome will have very different communication needs which will require special consideration, such as an increased use of signs and symbols.



Make sure that you do all you can to interact with service-users in a calm, patient and comforting way. Have a look at the separate video on this course about the SOLER method as an example of how body-language can influence this.

Physiological barriers

There are many elements of a service-user's physical health that will affect the way they communicate. If a person has impaired hearing or sight, this will make a major difference, and may require adapted communication methods such as sign-language or Makaton; or large-print or braille text for reading. Other physiological conditions which may impact a service-user's communication abilities include stroke, speech impediments, or temporary conditions such as being hungry, tired, or having a headache, as well as the fact that, as a service-user – meeting new people and attending new places - , they may well feel in a vulnerable position, and outside of their comfort-zone.

Physical barriers

Of course, one of the greatest barriers to communication is physical distance. Although we all know that modern technology facilitates talking, sharing, learning and communicating remotely, all new platforms and channels bring with them a few obstacles that we must learn to overcome. Think about how easy it can be to misunderstand a comment, request or even a joke when sent by text, rather than delivered face-to-face. Or how much of a message we miss out on if we can't fully see the body-language of the speaker.

Systematic barriers

If you don't have all of the information you need about a service-user because it has not been shared by your management or colleagues, then this is a systematic barrier. Similarly, if you are not clear of your role within a structure, and therefore not aware of how best to help, or if your workload prevents you from spending sufficient time with a service-user to truly support them, then systematic barriers are getting in the way of good communication and care. If a service-user feels that you don't have enough time for them, or that you are not giving them complete and reliable information, then they will not feel confident about opening up and communicating with you.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the factors that will affect your communication interactions in care work. By being aware of these and other possible barriers, and by continuously developing your interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, then you can put yourself in the best position to overcome these obstacles.

References:

- <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/barriers-communication.html>
- <https://www.nursingtimes.net/clinical-archive/assessment-skills/communication-skills-2-overcoming-the-barriers-to-effective-communication-18-12-2017/>