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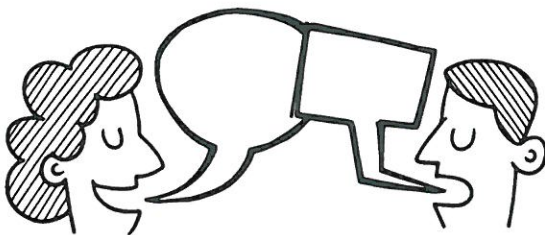
Introduction to  
communication in  
health, social care or  
children's and young  
people's settings

Standards

## *Understand why communication is important in the work setting*

### **Identify different reasons why people communicate**

Communication is a process. It is about passing on information from 1 person to another or to a group of people. The main reason for good communication in health and social care is that it develops knowledge and understanding about those who need care and support and enables the best care and support possible to be provided for each unique individual. It also helps build working relationships where each person's views are valued and taken into account.



Individuals need to be able to communicate how far they are able to manage independently with everyday tasks, what support they would like, what they like to eat and when and how often they might like to be with other people or see their family; the reasons are endless. You will work with individuals who have a wide range of needs related to physical conditions, learning disabilities, mental health and other related health issues. Each individual will have different communication needs: they may speak other languages or have needs associated with hearing or sight; they may have limited speech due to an illness or

disability or may have a learning disability such as autism, which can affect their ability to communicate. You will need to respect each individual's unique needs to understand how to communicate effectively with them.

Whatever form it takes, successful 2-way communication is crucial. A relationship based on trust and understanding from the beginning will provide the basis for good and effective care and support whether short or long term. However, poor communication can quickly lead to confusion and distress. The process of exchanging information is not always straightforward and if the information shared is inaccurate or misleading mistakes can be made which can result in poor care.

Health and social care workers develop many different relationships and methods of communication that suit the purpose or reason for the communication. Some will be formal and some more informal.

**Informal communication**, i.e. using familiar words, is likely to be used with the people you provide care and support for and their friends and family. You should always use the communication method that is appropriate for the person and situation.

**Formal communication** is likely to be used in the working environment, between you and other workers; the information exchanged is likely to be confidential, relating to the care of specific individuals. You may find that jargon or terminology is used and you will need to learn what this means to participate fully.

**Explain how effective communication affects all aspects of working in adult social care settings**

So communication is a 2-way process where each person is keen to understand what the other person is saying to avoid the risk of misunderstanding.



Establishing a good working relationship or partnership, in which each person's views are valued and taken into account, involves:

- respecting each person's rights and choices

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- supporting people's right to express their views and opinions

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- maintaining and respecting confidentiality

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- considering people's beliefs and cultural views

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- respecting diversity

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It can sometimes be easier to understand people who are similar to you.

For example, an interaction may take longer if 2 individuals speak different languages or have different accents.

The process of communication involves thinking about what information you would like to communicate and how you are going to do it. The brain supports the sending of the message in the appropriate format for it to be received by another individual. Then the part of the brain used for deciphering messages breaks down the message, tries to understand it and unravels its meaning, leading to a response. However, during an interaction, there could be many factors that impact on the effectiveness of the communication process. If you develop your range of communication skills, you can ensure that the interactions that you participate in are effective.

Speaking, or verbal communication, is 1 method of exchanging information between an individual and others involved to ensure that choices, preferences and needs can be met. If there are misunderstandings or there is any uncertainty about what has been said, this can be clarified either by rephrasing the message or making use of an alternative form of communication so that everyone is able to understand clearly the message being sent. It is very important for individuals to be encouraged to say if they do not understand or if they are confused. However, individuals may not always want to express their confusion or lack of understanding so it is your responsibility to look for signs of that happening and

to be able to provide the right form of communication for the individual so that they can express themselves and understand the response.

Every aspect of working in health and social care involves communication and the more effective the communication the better able you are to provide quality care and support.

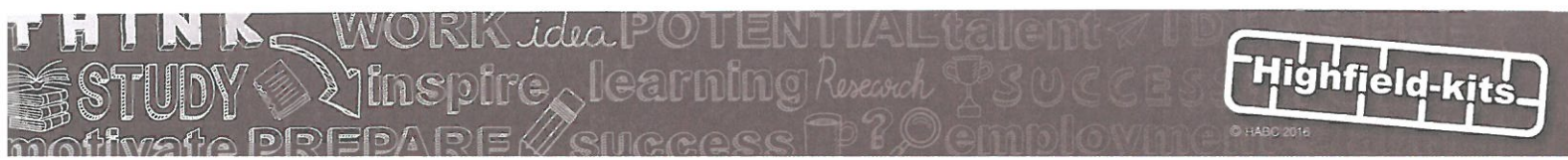
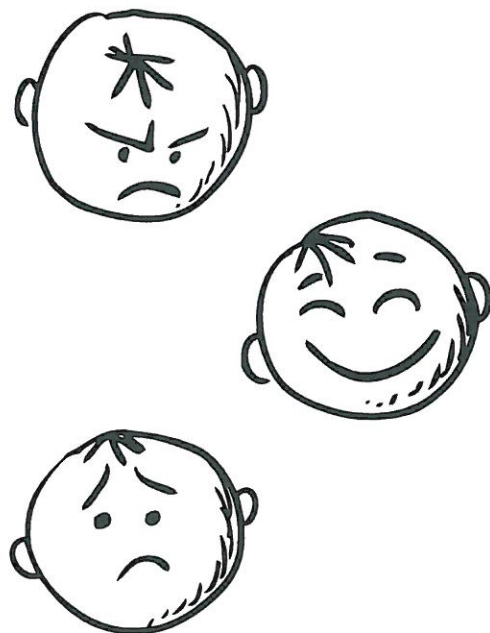
**Explain why it is important to observe an individual's reactions when communicating with them**

One of the most important things to know about communication is that it is not about simply listening to an individual's voice; there are many different factors to be aware of and observe so that you can find out as much as possible about their needs, wishes and preferences.

**Body language**

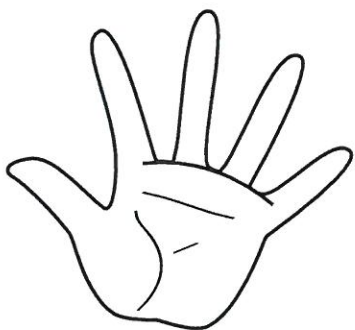
This is a way in which people give and receive non-verbal messages. For example, a smile will indicate that you are friendly and approachable. A person can convey their emotions, feelings and attitude through their body language. By developing an awareness of the hidden clues of body language, it will become much easier to understand others and to communicate effectively with them. It will also enable you to become more aware of the messages you are sending to others. Being able to understand these hidden clues will enable you to better understand an individual, as what is happening on the outside is often a reflection of their internal feelings, emotions and attitude.

**Facial expression** are 1 part of body language that can provide information about a person's emotional state. Consider an individual who is experiencing pain: what clues will be evident in a person's facial expression to demonstrate that they are in pain? A furrowed brow, a grimace and closed eyes? Alternatively, how will you know that someone has understood the information that you have just given them? How will this be evident in their facial expression? Think again about the individual who is in pain. They may bring their hand to their head or move their hand to a different part of their body to identify where they are experiencing pain. They could even ball their hand into a fist as evidence of the tension and discomfort that they are feeling in their body, in the hope that it will help to relieve the pain. These are all examples of arm and hand movements or **gestures** which can help to give you further clues about what someone is experiencing.



## Sign language

This is a method of communication which uses gestures to communicate within the deaf community. The use of facial expression also forms an essential part of sign language and much of the meaning expressed through a sign is emphasised through the facial expression that goes with it. The combination of hand movements, facial expression and mouth movements that are used in sign language enable individuals who have particular hearing needs to communicate.



## Active listening

Think about the term 'active listening'. What do you think is meant by this? The Japanese character for the verb 'to listen' is made up of many different symbols, including those for ears, eyes, heart, you and undivided attention. What does this tell us about what it actually means to listen?

To be genuinely involved in listening to another person it is essential to listen with your ears to the content of what is being communicated. This could be gathering information from an individual you provide care and support for about who they are by asking them to tell a story from their past.

You must also listen with your eyes to the way that a person is expressing themselves exploring the messages that may be hidden in their body language. For example, nervousness may be shown through fidgeting or avoiding eye contact; excitement may be demonstrated in symbolic hand gestures.

If an individual recalls a sad event, you may feel the emotion being expressed through their facial expressions and they might use a pause or silence to place an emphasis on the importance of what has just been said or what is about to be said.

Providing the individual with your undivided attention shows that you are focusing on them, and only them, at that particular moment.

The way you respond will demonstrate that you have been completely engaged with the interaction; you have not only 'heard' what has been said but you have also actively listened. You will bring part of 'you' to the interaction when you use empathising skills, by really trying to understand the situation for that individual at that moment. Actively listening will help to develop trusting relationships with individuals, their carers, family and friends, demonstrating that you see the importance of listening to their story and contribution, and helping individuals to feel valued.

Can you think of occasions when you may have heard someone say, 'It wasn't what you said, it was the way you said it'? It has been famously stated by Professor Albert Mehrabian, who has pioneered research into communication, that the majority of the information decoded during an interaction relates to the non-verbal

aspects of what was being communicated; therefore, how it was said can often provide a great deal more information than the content of what was said. Can you think of times in your life when this has been the case? Understanding the use of body language and gestures, reading facial expressions, focusing on eye contact or lack of it and the tone or pitch of the verbal parts of communication are just as important as the words that are spoken.



### Thinking about different needs

Being aware of the wide range of ways that people can communicate is especially important when you consider those who have very specific needs.

A **stroke** is a serious medical condition caused by a lack of blood supply to the brain; this can result in paralysis to 1 side of the body, affecting a person's ability to speak. In very severe cases a person may be incapable of speech completely and they may have to develop alternative ways of communicating with their carers and family. Being able to interpret an individual's reactions, such as their eye movements, their gestures and their use of touch, will be essential in these situations and these may become the most valuable methods of communication.

Now, consider those who have **dementia** or **learning disabilities**, or anyone whose behaviour may be affected negatively by unexpected changes in routine or unfamiliar situations. Usually the hidden messages that they may not be able to communicate verbally will come out through their body language and gestures. Someone with complex needs may demonstrate their anxiety through rapid hand gestures and bodily movements, and an individual with dementia may demonstrate their frustration through aggressive or uncharacteristic behaviour. As a care worker it is essential to be able to recognise these non-verbal clues and their triggers to avoid potentially distressing behaviour. Developing your awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication can support you in providing environments that are safe and that take into account the needs, wishes and preferences of all individuals.

Having explored the importance of observing individuals' reactions during conversations with them, you can also understand why the use of technology, such as mobile phones, text messaging, emails and even written communication, can lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, it is essential to know when and how to use the different methods of communication available.

As an observant worker you will be able to notice when an individual is becoming confused, angry, upset, stressed or anxious without them telling you. You can then take action to help stop this from happening or help them express their feelings in the best way for them.

By noticing an individual's reactions, you can ask yourself the following questions.

- Do I need to change the type of communication I am using to help the individual understand?
- Do I need to be aware of how the conversation is affecting them?

- Is there something that the individual is not communicating to me that may help?

Recognising the unspoken messages can help you to ask good questions and develop supportive relationships. It improves trust as the individual can see that you are interested in them and trying to understand and meet their needs.

*Be able to meet the communication and language needs, wishes and preferences of individuals*

### **Find out an individual's communication and language needs, wishes and preferences**

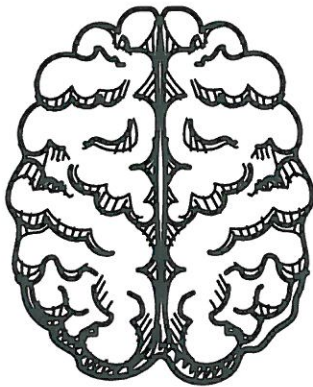
Social care workers use their communication skills to find out information from individuals about their care, needs and wishes. This may mean making use of a variety of different methods, as one method, such as verbal communication, will not be suitable for all. If you focus on the word **individual**, think about what it means to be an individual.

An individual could be described as a unique human being. In psychology, the word used to describe the study of a unique person is phenomenology, which means that every human being has a very distinctive and different experience of the world and no 2 people experience the world in exactly the same way. Individuals will have different beliefs, backgrounds, values, family structures, health, abilities and culture etc. but all of these differences create a person's identity and how they see themselves.

As all human beings are 'individual' this means that all care should be individually tailored to their needs. For example, consider dementia. This condition is defined by a number of symptoms such as memory loss, reduced concentration, language deterioration and a reduction in thinking speeds or problem-solving. Every person's experience of dementia will be different and the symptoms will affect people in very individual ways. Therefore, it is essential for care workers to understand all of the factors that help to make each individual unique, including how their condition affects them, how they would like to be treated, what their expectations are, and what their needs, wishes and preferences are in relation to their care.

The individuals you provide care and support for should always be involved in the decisions made about their lives, either directly or through an advocate; this could be in relation to any of the following:

- communication wishes
- food, drink and dietary requirements
- personal care
- days out and activities
- health and therapeutic care
- socialising with family and friends
- wishes in relation to end of life care
- emergency interventions that may need to be made
- wishes should deterioration occur
- beliefs, values and culture



Consider the communication needs of the following individuals. What are the different ways of communicating that they may use? How would you find out?

- An individual with Down's syndrome
- An individual with dementia
- An individual with an autistic spectrum disorder
- An individual who has had a stroke

You should consider verbal and sign language, symbols, gestures, written information, technology and non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact and touch.

An individual will choose to communicate in a specific way because it forms part of their identity as a person. If you ignore this and select a method that works better for you, how do you think this could affect them? It could lead to frustration and aggression because they are unable to communicate in a way that is more suited to their needs. This could result in unusual behaviour and could cause a great deal of distress to the individual. Not adhering to their communication preferences could also cause misunderstandings, and messages may be incorrectly exchanged, affecting the care they receive.

In these situations, their self-esteem, self-confidence and confidence in you and other workers will be affected and this will have a negative impact on the trusting and supportive relationship that should be in place.

### **Demonstrate communication methods that meet an individual's communication needs, wishes and preferences**

There is a range of communication methods that can be chosen to meet an individual's needs, wishes and preferences.

**Verbal communication** could be thought of as the most common method though you should now understand that communication takes place in a variety of different ways. When people communicate verbally they are passing on messages by using their vocal apparatus: our tongue and mouth movements and even our breathing. Their bodies help them to project verbally, which offers a very quick and efficient method of communicating.





### Vocabulary, tone, pitch and pace

Different aspects to verbal communication help to determine and influence the messages that are being sent. As with all communication it is not as straightforward as just speaking. The tone, pitch and vocabulary used can all have an impact on the meaning expressed. In adult social care, workers will often use jargon or complex specialist vocabulary and may include the names of medications, health problems, conditions and related terms and acronyms. This can be very useful for discussions between social care workers in order to save time. However, it can be very confusing for individuals and their families and should be used selectively to avoid misunderstandings.

The tone, pitch and pace of verbal communication also provide a way of understanding the messages being sent and the feelings or attitude of the sender. An individual's tone of voice would be on a scale between high and low pitch. Consider the feelings of the sender who is talking in a high pitch or an individual whose tone is getting louder. What can you understand about individuals from their tone and pitch? The pace or speed at which a person communicates will often provide information about their current state. A slower pace of communication may indicate that an individual's medication has

just started taking effect or a fast pace may demonstrate that an individual is becoming anxious or nervous. It is important to consider changes in tone, pitch or pace that are out of character. When an individual's verbal communication changes quite obviously this might reveal a change in feelings and behaviour. Social care workers can use these changes as signs and triggers to certain behaviours that may be difficult and use effective communication skills to manage these situations.

**Sign language** - this is recognised throughout the world. British Sign Language (BSL) is used in this country and it is important to remember that there are variations of sign language throughout the world. For example, in America they use American Sign Language (ASL) with the signs being quite different. As with all languages there are also dialects which means there are often different signs used in different regions of the country. For example, the signs for numbers may be different in the north of the country to the south.

Sign language is not simply reading the gestures and signs made using hand and arm movements; it is also concerned with understanding where the signs are positioned, the facial expressions that are used and the movements made with the mouth, as lip-reading is a very important way of communicating for individuals who have needs associated with hearing. The construction of sentences in sign language does not follow the same principles as spoken language.

**Makaton** - this is a form of language that uses a large collection of signs and symbols. It is different to sign language as

the structure of sentences using Makaton will follow the spoken language. Makaton can be taught from a very young age and is used successfully with babies and small children to help them to communicate before their verbal communication skills are fully developed. Makaton is often used with individuals who have learning and physical disabilities and those who have needs associated with hearing to encourage more effective communication.

**Braille** - this system was first introduced in 1829, by a blind man called Richard Braille. It is a code of raised dots that are 'read' using touch. For people who are visually impaired or who are blind the system supports reading and writing and increases independence for individuals.



### Non-verbal communication

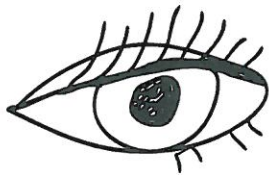
**Body language** - this is a non-verbal method of communication which supports other methods and adds further meaning to interactions. There are many different aspects of body language, including gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body positioning and body movements. Each of these aspects of your body will communicate information about you, often without you realising it. Conversely, you will be able to find out information about others from the messages displayed in their body language. Being able to read body language is an essential skill when working with people.

**Gestures** - these are movements of the hand or arm used to emphasise what is being said or as an alternative to verbal communication. Can you think of occasions in daily life when gestures are used? Perhaps by service workers at temporary traffic lights or by police officers after an incident. Gestures may be used by individuals to point to something or indicate what they need or would like as an alternative to verbal communication. The use of gestures may also provide information about the attitude and feelings of an individual and provide messages about their mood which could be negative or positive. Examples might be standing with arms open in preparation for a hug or having an outstretched hand to indicate not to approach further. These non-verbal clues provide care workers with greater ways of understanding human emotions.

**Facial expressions** - these are used to assist the expression of meaning. Facial expressions and movements of the mouth are essential to sign language; they emphasise certain aspects of words or phrases and help to understand lip-reading. An individual's facial expressions may not always tell the full story and therefore it is important to observe all aspects of communication. For example, a person may say that they are fine, but may look as if they are on the verge of tears.

**Eye contact** - this is also a very important aspect of non-verbal communication. It can provide clues to information about a person that they may not be communicating in other ways. Avoiding eye contact during a difficult or sensitive conversation may indicate they are upset, ashamed or unwilling to disclose information. Maintaining eye contact

is an important way for a care worker to demonstrate that they are listening; it helps those they provide care and support for feel comforted that they are being understood. However, care must be taken as constant eye contact can be intimidating and uncomfortable.



### Physical gestures

**Position** - the way that people position their bodies provides others with non-verbal clues to their feelings, attitude and emotions. Consider an individual who crosses their arms and legs during a meeting with a care worker.

This positioning can be an attempt to create a barrier between the individual and the care worker which may show that the individual is not willing or comfortable to provide the information being requested; or maybe they don't even want to be there. A person slouching in a chair may indicate a lack of interest or lack of care, whereas a care worker slouching in a chair when their shift has finished may be a sign of tiredness and that it is now time to relax. It is important to remember that body position and posture should be interpreted in the context of the interaction as it can have different meanings depending on the situation.

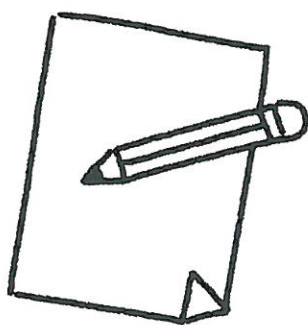
The way you position your body and how we use personal space can also offer further ways of understanding interactions. For example, a person's use of personal space with friends and family will be more informal and intimate in comparison to

the use of personal space in working relationships which will be based on clear boundaries and awareness of what is appropriate and acceptable. The distance between people can provide an indication of their intended behaviour. For example, an invasion of personal space combined with raised, tense shoulders, balled fists and maintaining eye contact is a clear indication of aggression. It is essential to recognise these clues to consider the most appropriate ways of resolving any conflict or challenge.

**Appearance** - the way a person dresses and the clothes they wear give an impression to other people; this could be intentional or unintentional. Could you think of any examples of how clothing or appearance creates an impression about a person? When working in health and social care, clothing should be appropriate for the task, and for the group of people you are working with. Your appearance could trigger an unwanted memory for an individual, especially dressing very smartly which might be a reminder of a formal meeting that they did not enjoy. Therefore, it is very important to be aware of the messages that your appearance may give to others. Additionally, uniform may initiate a response based on previous experiences or knowledge. For example, consider the impact of a police officer's uniform. Clothing may be used to help a person take on a role such as a nurse or doctor. Once they are in uniform they know that they are in their work role and will demonstrate the behaviour that fits their role.

**Touch** - this form of communication can be misunderstood easily or used inappropriately. There are clearly written regulations about inappropriate use of touch. However, it is important to acknowledge that appropriate use of touch to communicate information is often essential to social care practice; placing your hand on someone's shoulder or arm can offer comfort during a difficult or upsetting situation. Additionally, touch is used to communicate with individuals who have particular hearing and sight needs: the worker signs information on to the individual's hands as a way of passing on information. Here the use of touch is an essential method for understanding the world around them.

**Written communication** - this method is used around the world to send messages to provide evidence of something or to increase the effectiveness of other types of communication. As technology has advanced, the use of written communication has developed and email, text messaging and social networking on the internet all have a significant role in daily life. They provide quick and easy ways of sending information, but remember, quick and easy does not always mean effective.



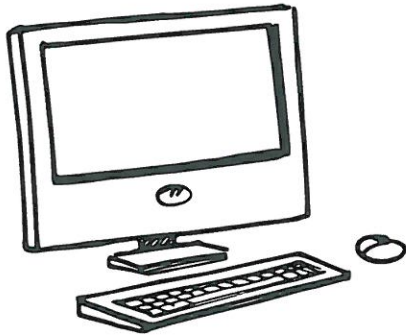
Within adult social care written communication is essential to provide evidence in the form of notes and care plans, letters of referral to other services and completion of written records. All written communication must be accurate and clearly legible as inaccurate or misleading information may lead to undesired or potentially fatal consequences.

Written communication can often be used to support other methods of communication. Writing words or sentences down on paper may be of use for an individual who has needs associated with hearing, to convey the message that you would like to send.

An individual who is unable to communicate verbally may write down their message in order for others to understand.

### Using technology or ICT

Electronic forms of communication are now well established and accepted in daily life, including email, the use of mobile phones and other mobile devices and the internet. Electronic forms of communication let you share information more quickly, allowing you to respond with ease and resolve issues more rapidly. Individuals can communicate over the internet with a number of people at the same time and it is recognised that these different ways of communicating can support businesses and services in engaging with their customers more efficiently. Many services now make use of text messaging as a way of contacting people to remind them of appointments. Email can be used by workers to exchange information providing additional written evidence for records.



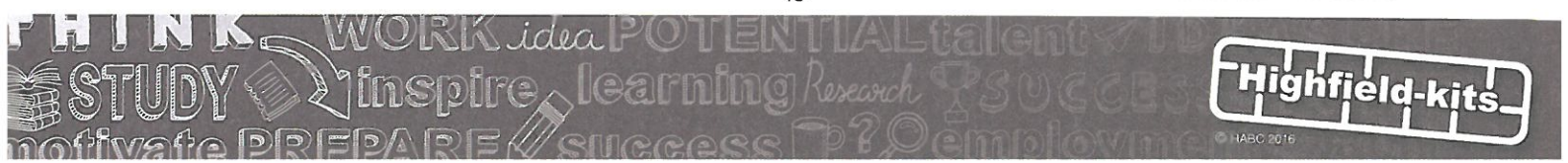
However, remember that a great deal of hidden information is communicated through the non-verbal messages that people convey and these non-verbal clues are missing from the majority of electronic communication. Therefore, misunderstandings and confusion may occur.

For individuals whose communication skills may be limited, technological aids can be used to enhance interactions. Hearing aids, hearing loops, text phones, text messaging on mobile phones and magnifiers are all forms of technological communication devices. Some individuals may use word or symbol boards to support their speech and the listener will be able to associate the picture or word with the verbal communication to increase their understanding of what is being said. Others may use speech synthesisers, which replace speech either by producing a visual display of written text or by producing synthesised speech that expresses the information verbally. Voice recognition software can be purchased for any

computer to translate speech to written text. This supports the communication of individuals who may have dyslexia or other learning difficulties, allowing them to advance their ability to communicate in writing.

**Show how and when to seek advice about communication**

There will be times when you need to seek advice about how to support effective communication with different individuals. Information can be found from a whole range of sources, for example, specialist charities and associations. Websites can provide material on forums, services or groups in the local area that you could attend or use to find out more. In addition, some local charities offer specific human aids such as befrienders, advocates or mentors. A befriender could support an individual in overcoming emotional difficulties that are a barrier to communication. An advocate could communicate on behalf of an individual whose skills are very limited. A number of additional experts available to support individuals with their communication needs include speech and language therapists, interpreters, translators, and clinical psychologists or counsellors. Further learning can come from other workers, your manager and a range of courses and qualifications.



*Be able to reduce barriers to communication*

**Identify barriers to communication**

There are a number of possible barriers to effective communication:

**Your attitude**

This can affect communication in many ways, acting as a barrier which restricts the development of an interaction.

When a worker is abrupt towards an individual due to time constraints, insufficient resources or mood, the individual could feel intimidated, frustrated and not want to respond. They may feel that the worker is not being patient or interested in their needs; or feel like a burden.



An insincere approach or lack of empathy may make an individual feel that they are not going to be taken seriously or are being patronised; it may limit how they feel about divulging personal information.

A sincere and polite attitude, which demonstrates empathy, is likely to promote more open communication and will help to develop trust.

**Limited use of technology**

Technological aids can be used by individuals to support their ability to communicate. When such aids are not available, communication may be more difficult. For example, the absence of a hearing loop in a public area such as a doctor's surgery could be a barrier to someone who has a hearing aid.



Workers who have limited experience of using technology may find that this could interfere with their ability to communicate. You should be provided with the correct training to use such technological aids. Being unable to use effective and modern communication techniques could result in delays to messages being received and responded to. It could affect an individual's opinion of and confidence in communicating with services or workers in the future and result in frustration and unhappiness.

**Sitting too far away or invading personal space**

How you position yourself in relation to others could affect their attitude and behaviour. For example, sitting too close could be intimidating and would make an individual feel uncomfortable, restricting

their ability to communicate; sitting too far away could demonstrate lack of interest or concern, resulting in negativity or conflict, and it may also mean that speech will need to be louder, which could affect privacy and confidentiality.

The positioning of objects between you and another individual could also act as a barrier to communication. For example, a computer on a desk may restrict the opportunity for 2 people to see each other properly.

### **Emotional distress**

When individuals experience distress or anxiety they can be afraid or depressed because of the stress and tension affecting them. Their emotions may be expressed through being aggressive or introverted, which has an impact on their ability to communicate appropriately and effectively. Social care workers may be experiencing their own emotional issues that can create barriers to communicating with others. The worker may not be able to focus or may be tired due to worry and lack of sleep. Listening and empathising takes mental energy, which may not be available if the worker is thinking about their own difficulties or concerns. Social care workers must ensure that they have allowed sufficient time to undertake a meaningful conversation with an individual and that they are focused on that individual for that particular moment to achieve effective communication.

### **Not giving individuals time to say what they want to say**

Some individuals need more time and support than others to express themselves. This may be due to a lack of confidence or because they have communication

difficulties. When individuals are not given the time they need, they may feel rushed and reluctant to express their true feelings and opinions.



### **Poor or negative body language**

Communication will not be encouraged if a care worker displays negative body language in the form of crossed arms or legs, poor facial expressions, poor body positioning, constant fidgeting or looking at their watch or mobile phone. A great deal of information is communicated non-verbally and poor or ineffective body language can influence others in a negative way.

### **Poor interpersonal skills**

A worker who has poor interpersonal skills does not make an individual feel supported or listened to. They may choose inappropriate language that is not suitable for the situation or individual. If the care worker is not focused on the individual and is not demonstrating care and compassion, it could affect the relationship and important information may be misinterpreted.

### **Lack of privacy**

Think carefully about where and when private and confidential conversations should take place with individuals and between workers when discussing their care and support plans. Individuals should always be included in conversations which

involve them, in a way that will not be overheard by others and will not make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. In situations where individuals experience a lack of privacy, they will not feel respected or cared for and their right to privacy is being taken away, which could limit their willingness to communicate.

### Stereotyping

This involves making assumptions and labelling an individual or group of individuals based on a characteristic or shared characteristics usually associated with them or their group. To stereotype means to focus on this characteristic in a negative way, disregarding the factors that make the person unique or individual. Stereotypes provide individuals with ways of understanding the world; however, they are usually negative and the effects can be very damaging. An example of a stereotype is 'all older people are hard of hearing'. This statement is a generalisation about a group of people that is inaccurate and misleading. When assumptions are made, the individual's confidence and self-esteem will be affected in a negative way. They will feel disempowered and will not feel encouraged to be themselves because of the way they think others will see them. It could affect their ability to communicate as they may not feel understood, leading to frustration, a lack of interest or even aggression.

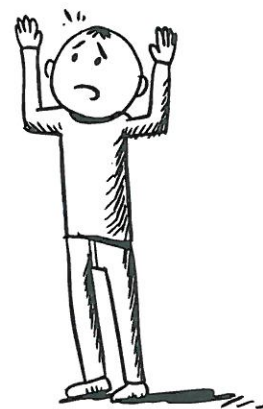
Social care workers should take care not to impose their own assumptions, views and opinions on situations at work. These assumptions could be based on their background, upbringing and experiences or on social networks. It is essential for a worker to avoid the use of stereotypes or labels which are derogatory and offensive

by being knowledgeable about individuals and how to support their needs in an inclusive way. As part of good practice, care workers will explore their values and beliefs to increase their self-awareness, ensuring that they do not judge others unfairly and in a disrespectful way.

### Demonstrate how to reduce barriers to communication in different ways

As your communication skills develop, you will become more aware of the different ways that you can use communication to interact with other workers, those you provide care and support for, their carers, family and friends. You will develop an understanding of how you can communicate effectively with people with a wide variety of needs.

As a social care worker, there are a number of points for you to remember to reduce the barriers to communication that individuals may experience.



### Understand each individual

The most effective way to ensure that you are meeting an individual's communication needs and providing person-centred care is to be fully informed about who they are, their wishes, needs and preferences. Having an understanding about how they



respond to certain situations will ensure that you are prepared to manage and meet their needs. Being familiar with their body language will help to develop your awareness of who they are and how they express themselves. A communication passport can often be used by individuals, which provides care workers and others with vital information about their needs, wishes and preferences.

### **Increase your awareness of communication needs and preferences**

It will not always be possible to be fully informed about all those you come into contact with. Therefore, you will need to increase your awareness of different communication needs. This could be through further training and attending courses that would contribute to your continued development (CPD) or undertaking research and reading. It is also essential to develop your experiences with those who have alternative communication needs to further develop your awareness and understanding.

### **Develop a 'communication toolbox'**

It is essential to develop your experiences and skills with a whole range of individuals who have alternative communication needs, therefore providing you with a 'toolbox' of communication skills that you can dip into and use as needed. You will be able to develop new methods of communicating suitable for individuals that you may encounter. It is very important to remember that there are many communication methods; do not always resort to verbal communication.

There are further ways of reducing barriers to communication that could be used as basic principles:

### **Leave part of you at the door**

All social care workers can experience things that may impact on their work. This could be an argument at home, lack of sleep, an incident that occurred at work, or feeling unwell or tired. Imagine that you have just left an individual who was very uncooperative and it took a great deal of patience on your part to support that individual. Now you are feeling very frustrated and you take that frustration with you. What impact will this have on the interaction with another individual before any communication has even begun? Your body language will be tense, you may be prepared to become more frustrated and even angry and this will be evident. Anyone who has a sensory loss may not even need to see you to know that you are already frustrated. Make sure that you keep yourself and all those you work with safe by starting afresh each time a new interaction takes place.

### **Use open body language**

On greeting an individual, ensure that your body language is open. Do not cross your arms or legs as this posture can immediately act as a barrier. Ensure that your facial expression is friendly and approachable; a smile and eye contact is the simplest way to demonstrate this attitude. It may be appropriate to use a gesture to communicate 'hello' or touch the individual, by shaking their hand or gently touching their arm, to demonstrate that you are present.



### Select an appropriate communication method

Once an individual knows that you are present the next stage is to decide on the most appropriate communication method to use to interact. Think back to the 3 points above:

1. What do you understand about the individual?

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2. What is your awareness of their communication needs?

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3. Which communication method from your 'toolbox' is most suitable?

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The cycle of communication requires you to make sure that your message is decoded and understood to remove barriers. How will you know that you have been understood? If a misunderstanding does occur, go back to your 'toolbox' and try an alternative method.

### Remove judgements and attitudes

Barriers to communication can be created when assumptions are being made about a person and/or their capabilities. For example, the worker may assume that an individual is unable to make decisions for themselves and so the worker chooses to speak on their behalf: 'Harry will have pork for his dinner tonight; he had fish yesterday so he won't want it again.'

Making assumptions like these can be very disempowering, which means an individual's confidence and power to speak for themselves can be taken away by accepting that these assumptions are okay when clearly they are not.

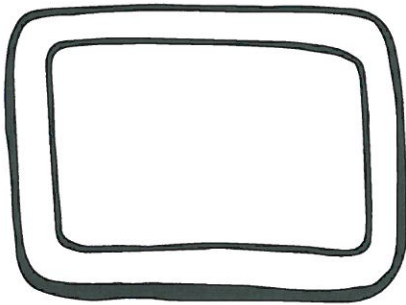
### Removing the environmental and physical barriers

Environmental and physical barriers can limit effective interactions. Consider the positioning of furniture: sitting opposite someone at a desk, with a computer in between, will not contribute to effective communication. Physical or environmental barriers could also include lighting or noise. An individual with a sensory loss such as deafness will need clear lighting to see a person's facial expressions and to lip-read; a light shining through a window will become a barrier to this form of communication. An individual who has needs associated with sight will use their other heightened senses to obtain information from their environment, so if their surroundings are too noisy they will not be able to focus on the interaction. Additionally, if the telephone is ringing continually, your ability to focus on those you provide care and support for will be impaired. The space between you and a person can act as a physical barrier: too little space can be intimidating and can feel like an invasion of privacy; too much space can affect an individual's ability to hear or understand correctly. It is very important to assess the environment to ensure that there are no physical barriers that will limit effective communication.

### Using technological or human aids to support communication

Technology could act as a barrier to communication. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that appropriate technological devices are available, and are being used, to reduce the likelihood of barriers occurring. Examples include hearing aids, induction loops, text phones and other communication software and devices. There are a number of human

services that can help to remove barriers to communication including translation and interpretation services, speech and language therapists and advocacy services. These human aids could be available through the local authority services or via charities.



**Demonstrate ways to check that communication has been understood**

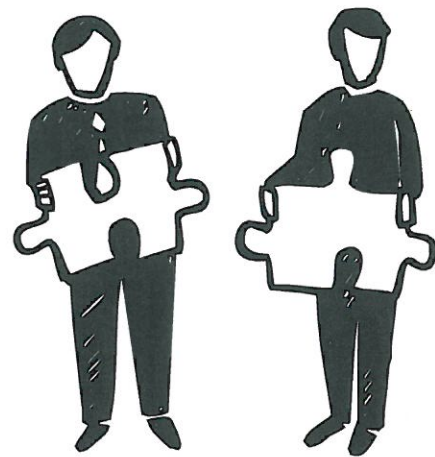
If communication is a process which involves the sending and receiving of messages, checking that communication has been understood is an essential part of the process and is necessary to ensure that the person you are interacting with has understood the message that you are trying to send.

There are a number of skills that can be used to check that communication has been understood.

**Using your active listening skills**

You have explored the importance of active listening for effective communication and to support a good working relationship. Active listening involves using many of your senses to perceive the signals and signs that are being sent by an individual during communication. Using your eyes, you will be able to see a person's facial expressions, gestures and body language. A nod of the head would indicate that

a person understands and that they are nodding in agreement. A furrowed brow and a blank stare may indicate confusion. A shrug of the shoulders may indicate a lack of understanding. Recognising the non-verbal clues to communication are invaluable for checking that your message has been understood. You should also think very carefully about the content in the person's answer; if the answer is not what you were looking for then perhaps they did not understand the original communication. Demonstrating effective listening skills helps an individual to feel that they are really being listened to. You are not simply hearing what is being said, but you are also looking for additional clues to confirm what is being said verbally, as often what is said verbally does not match what their body language is saying. It is your responsibility to focus on these differences and make sure that the person you are interacting with truly understands the message being sent. An individual may sometimes be reluctant to admit that they do not understand. Using your effective listening skills will help to increase confidence and trust.



**Using appropriate encouraging skills**

In any relationship, using these skills, whether verbal or non-verbal, will enable a conversation to continue. Verbal encouraging skills would include, 'Um-hum', 'So', 'Go on' and 'Yes'; non-verbal skills might include nodding the head or providing a reassuring facial expression or even a hand gesture to empower a person to continue. These skills act as prompts which demonstrate your understanding of what is being said and also support the person you are interacting with to develop their story further.

**Summarising and paraphrasing skills**

A vital skill that checks understanding is summarising. Providing a summary, overview or conclusion, that brings together the main points of an interaction or part of an interaction, will help you to check that you have correctly understood the content of what has been discussed. 'Right then Elsie, can I check that I've got this right? For lunch today you'd like a ham and salad sandwich on brown bread but you don't want any tomato. Is that right?' This summary will make sure that you are checking the accuracy of your understanding. It will also allow the individual to correct you if necessary.

Paraphrasing is a skill which demonstrates your active listening in practice.

To paraphrase means to take the meaning of what someone has said and relay this back to them with different wording. You could paraphrase the verbal content and also the feelings, emotions and behaviours that are expressed in a person's body language: 'So Mrs Soherra, you're saying that you would like to go out today but you want to wait until your daughter has been to visit as she may want to come with you.'

Is there something else concerning you?'

Paraphrasing demonstrates that you have heard and understood, helping you to check your interpretation of the hidden messages that they are sending and providing the individual with the opportunity to expand further if necessary: 'Well...actually...I'm worried about my daughter. I don't think she understands that she is welcome here.'

**Using questioning effectively**

Questions are often taken for granted as a way of checking understanding.

**Worker:**  
'Do you understand?'

**Individual:**  
'Yes...I think so... maybe.'

**Worker:**  
'Are you sure?'

**Individual user:**  
'Yes.'



The questions above are examples of closed questions. Why do you think they are classed as closed? The clues are in the answers above in that they provide very little information. Therefore, a closed question is one that can provide very short, quick responses.

Closed questions can be very useful when the information you obtain needs to be brief and to the point. For example, if you enter an individual's room to find them unconscious on the floor, the first question you would ask would be closed: 'Hello, can you hear me?' Often, closed questions are not always sufficient to check and clarify understanding. For instance, open questions would be a more appropriate way of checking understanding.

**Worker:**

'OK, tell me what you understand about what we've just discussed.'

**Individual:**

'I understand that I'm going to have to have some physiotherapy to help my leg and hip, but I don't understand why I need to increase my medication. It always makes me feel so drowsy and horrible.'

Open questions encourage people to open up and say more than simply 'yes' or 'no'. They provide a way of obtaining detailed information that can really help you to explore their needs, wishes and preferences.

Open questions could start with the following:

- **what**

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- **how**

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- **where**

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- **when**

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- **who**

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- **why**

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- **in what way**

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- **how come**

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As with all methods of communication, it is important to remember that you should select the best method for the particular needs of the individual whom you are interacting with.

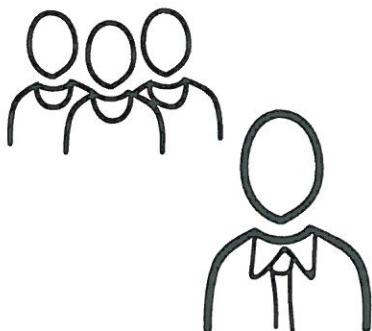
### Identify sources of information and support or services to enable more effective communication

A wide range of services can be accessed, which will enable individuals to increase the effectiveness of their communication. Ensure that you are supporting someone to communicate as effectively as possible by working with them to overcome challenges and barriers that impact upon communication, using your 'toolbox' of communication skills.

There may be occasions when the skills and expertise of others will help to provide additional support or services to make communication better or clearer for individuals, including guidance on how you could improve your skills.

People may have problems in communicating with others due to:

- sensory difficulties
- learning and physical disabilities
- speech problems
- low self-confidence or low self-esteem
- problems in understanding social interaction



Information and support can be obtained from a wide range of sources including specialist charities. This could be electronically via websites for guidance relating to technological aids to support communication. Alternatively, websites could provide information on forums, services or groups in the local area that you, your individuals, their friends, family and carers could attend. In addition, some local charities offer specific human aids for individuals such as befrienders, advocates or mentors. A befriender could support an individual in overcoming the emotional difficulties that restrict their opportunities to communicate. An advocate could communicate on behalf of an individual whose communication skills are very limited. The following websites offer a few starting points:

**Mind:** <http://www.mind.org.uk/>

**Sense:** <http://www.sense.org.uk/>

**Action on Hearing Loss:**

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk>

A number of additional key experts available to support individuals with their communication needs include speech and language therapists, interpreters, translators, and clinical psychologists or counsellors to help with problems affecting processes and emotions.

Speech and language therapists can work with individuals across their lifespan. They offer specialised services that are usually accessed via the local authority health services through GP and social service referrals. Depending on a person's individual needs, the speech and language therapist will work collaboratively with the individual to address the factors that are having a negative impact upon

communication, which could be related to malfunctioning of the vocal apparatus, the emotional and psychological barriers that limit communication or the muscles and posture. Speech and language therapists will work with a range of individuals covering rehabilitation for patients who have had a stroke or help for individuals whose communication is affected by

learning and physical disabilities. Interpreters and translators can provide specialised language and translation for those who speak other languages. To support equality, services should ensure that information is made available for individuals in a range of languages and formats, including provision for a translator and interpreter if required.

*Be able to apply principles and practices relating to confidentiality at work*

**Explain the term 'confidentiality'**

Confidentiality is a term used to describe how personal and private information concerning an individual should be used. Information obtained from or about someone must only be shared with agreed others on a 'need-to-know' basis. Social care workers must be very careful to ensure that information given to them is not disclosed without the person's informed permission or consent.



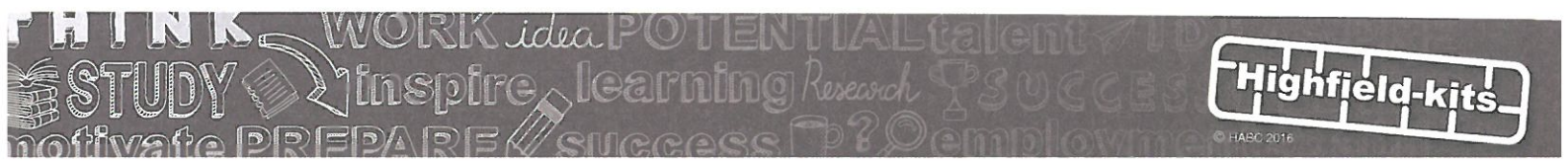
Confidentiality is an essential principle in health and social care and forms the basis of all policies and procedures. It provides guidance on the amount and type of personal information and data that can be disclosed without consent. An individual who engages in a trusting relationship

with a social care worker expects their privacy to be protected, i.e. they expect the information to remain confidential. However, they are also aware that there may be times when information cannot remain confidential, for instance if there is a risk to the safety of the individual, the worker or to the safety of others.

The foundations of an effective working relationship between adult social care workers and those they provide care and support for centre on trust, and trust is dependent on the individual being confident that personal information they disclose is treated confidentially.

**Demonstrate confidentiality in day-to-day communication, in line with agreed ways of working**

Maintaining confidentiality involves a great deal of trust and without it communication is less likely to progress. It is essential to respect the trust that individuals place in you by ensuring that you follow the policies and procedures that relate to confidentiality within your workplace. An individual's right to confidentiality



means that a person's notes or personal details must always be stored securely in an area with limited access and should not be left where they can be seen by unauthorised individuals. This same principle applies to electronic information which should be password protected and the password given only to authorised staff. When using electronic devices to look at information always ensure that you log off fully and do not allow your screen to be seen by others.

As a care worker it is very important to think carefully about how you will maintain confidentiality during communication. When necessary, interactions with individuals should be undertaken in a location where privacy can be maintained, for example, in a private meeting room with authorised individuals present. If a separate room is not available, care workers must ensure that an individual's privacy and right to confidentiality are maintained by communicating in a manner that will not be heard or seen by others.

It is also essential to ensure that information that you are communicating to others would not identify the individual being spoken about. For example, to 'off-load' after your shift, you may speak to friends and family about your day at work, but you must ensure that you do not provide any details that could identify the person. Imagine if you were chatting on your phone on the bus on your way home and the person behind you overheard your conversations and recognised the individual you were discussing. In this situation the safety and privacy of the individual is being put at risk and you are not maintaining confidentiality or keeping to your duty of care.

There will be times when it is necessary to communicate information about an individual to other workers. On these occasions you must ensure that you place the individual's wishes and preferences at the heart of your practice, ensuring that you have their consent to disclose the information. Communicating with other workers is an example of multi-agency working which has many benefits to ensure that individuals receive a personalised service.

However, when sharing information with other professionals it is essential that you abide by the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.



This act provides individuals with rights in relation to the handling of their data including:

- **the right to confidentiality – information should not be accessible to unauthorised people**

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- **the right to know what information is held on them and to see and correct this information**

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- **the right that data held should be accurate and up to date**



- the right to refuse to provide information
- the right that data held should not be kept for longer than is necessary

### **Describe situations where information normally considered to be confidential might need to be passed on**

Individuals should be made aware that there will be occasions when confidentiality may need to be broken, either by referring to other workers or asking others for guidance to better assist the individual. Alternatively, it may be necessary to provide information to support investigations or allegations. Whenever possible, all those involved should provide their consent for the transfer of information. However, this may not always be possible and there will be occasions when information normally considered confidential needs to be shared with agreed others. Occasions when confidentiality may have to be broken have been identified below:

- an individual is likely to harm themselves
- an individual has been, or is likely to be, involved in a serious crime
- an individual is likely to harm others
- your safety is placed at risk
- a child or vulnerable adult has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm

If and when these issues arise it is essential that you use your effective communication skills to manage the situation in the most appropriate way, while continuing to respect the individual's rights as much as possible. It is likely that this situation may cause upset or anxiety for the individual and you must ensure that you are considerate and sensitive. It is important to remember the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998 when considering a person's information and their right to privacy. However, you also have a duty of care to protect others as well as protecting the individual.

### **Agreed others**

To support multi-agency working and to share information you will communicate with a wide range of individuals, services and different workers. These could be colleagues who are internal to your organisation. Additionally, you may need to communicate information to family members, friends and carers. Specific people should be agreed, meaning the individual will have given consent for these individuals to be involved in the sharing of the information. The same applies to other workers who may need to be involved and need you to communicate to them information normally considered confidential:

- social workers
- occupational therapists
- GPs
- speech and language therapists
- physiotherapists
- pharmacists
- nurses and specialist nurses
- psychologists or counsellors

- psychiatrists
- advocates
- dementia care advisors

### **Explain how and when to seek advice about confidentiality**

There will be occasions when you face dilemmas regarding confidentiality and it may be necessary to seek advice or guidance to help you make decisions. Within your workplace, it is important to respect all information as confidential, applying this as a general principle to help you maintain privacy and ensure individuals' rights are respected. You may be provided with information that needs to be passed on or referred to others.



However, as part of your duty of care to individuals you may also feel the need to respect their wishes and not break confidentiality. In these situations it is essential that you speak with your manager if you receive information that concerns you or if you are ever unsure about what to do with information that is passed on to you. If someone says they want to tell you something in confidence, you should say that you may not be able to keep the information to yourself because part of

your job involves safeguarding people's welfare and keeping others safe from harm. It is then up to the person to decide whether to tell you.

You must always ensure that you are familiar with the policies and procedures of your organisation with regard to confidentiality and refer to them if you are ever unsure.