

Session 4

listening | communication skills and the
mentoring process

the fostering network
helping children to thrive



Session 4:

listening | communication skills and the mentoring process

Introduction

Effective communication is at the heart of good mentoring and influences all stages of the mentoring process, helping to build up a relationship of trust.

Mentors need to be aware of how they communicate and have to develop skills that will overcome communication barriers. The experiential exercises in this session give people the opportunity to practise and reflect on the skills of verbal communication, giving feedback and active listening. This session is one where people gain more self-awareness and explore more open communication with each other as they express their emotions in response to the exercises.

It is vital that mentors can transfer these skills in order to be able to empathise with young care leavers who may feel that they have not been listened to as they have gone through the care system.

Purpose

To demonstrate why good communication is extremely important, especially in building up a relationship of trust with a young person who may not have felt listened to in care or who may be carrying issues of abandonment and loss.

Application

All the time in a mentoring role.

Overview

time

Total session running time: **3 hours**

objectives

By the end of this session you will:

- Have explored communicating with others, particularly young people
- Have practised active listening skills
- Be able to list the factors important in active listening
- Be able to identify barriers to communication and good listening
- Have practised giving effective feedback
- Have listed skills involved in giving and receiving feedback

key issues

Link each exercise to the mentoring role.

Link each exercise to issues relating to young care leavers and their experience.

materials

Flipchart stand, pad and marker pens, Blu-Tack

Paper and pens for note taking

OHP slides:

1. Session objectives
2. Things to consider and remember when talking with young people
3. Sometimes young people make it difficult to relate to them
4. Do's and don'ts of active listening
5. Key skills of active listening

handouts:

1. Session objectives
2. Fly and "F" cards
3. Communicating and listening
4. Barriers to effective listening
5. Do's and don'ts of active listening
6. Key skills in active listening
7. Giving and Receiving Feedback
8. Home task: Listening Assessment Questionnaire
9. Evaluation sheet

Training session

1. Session objectives

5 minutes

This exercise is designed to let everyone know what is going to be covered in this session.

What to do

- Show slide ①.
- Reveal and talk about each objective, one at a time.
- Ask if anyone has any questions or is unclear about anything.

2. Communication Eye Openers

10 minutes

These exercises are designed to highlight how limited our perception can be and how we can habitually block off key information which does not accord with the world as we perceive it to be.

What to do

- Hand each person a card with the statement "Finished files are the result of years of scientific study combined with the experience of many years" and ask the person to count the number of times the letter F appears in the sentence
- After a minute go round each person asking how many F's they see in the sentence. Invariably the number of F's people see will differ. Ask people to swap cards. Does this make a difference?
- Point out that the reason some people are missing some is because they are processing the information by sounding it out to themselves and therefore miss the F's in "of" where the F sounds like a V
- Highlight this as an example of how we filter communication unconsciously and thereby miss a lot
- Hand each person a FLY card - containing black images on a white background (See appendices for a copy) and ask them to tell you what they see on the card. We are so used to reading words as black print on a white background that they become invisible to us when presented as white print. This is most easily demonstrated to the group by blocking off the borders on the longer sides of the rectangular piece of card and hey presto the word "fly" is clearly visible

Again this exercise reveals how we are locked into habitual patterns of perceiving information. Widening our perception can have dramatic results!

3. Communication with adolescents/young people

25 minutes

This exercise gets people working in groups to consider some of the ways in which adolescents/young people may communicate.

What to do:

- Divide the large group into smaller groups of three or four people.
- Give each group a flipsheet to make notes.
- Ask each group to list ways in which adolescents may choose to communicate (emphasise that this includes non-verbal means)
- Ask each group to jot down what to bear in mind when communicating with young people.
- After 15 minutes bring the whole group back together.
- Fix the flipsheets to the wall and discuss the points made.
- Flag up any points that have been missed out eg. Importance of body language and tone of voice, understanding language young people use.
- Show slide ② – Things to consider and remember when talking with young people.
- Lastly show slide ③: "Sometimes young people make it difficult to relate to them – the more difficult it is the more the young person actually needs it" and invite discussion.

4. Barriers to effective listening

40 minutes

This exercise is designed to let everyone experience what gets in the way of effective listening.

What to do

- Tell the group that the focus of the next two exercises is on listening skills and that they will be working in small groups of three. First of all they are going to take part in an exercise, which shows how it can sometimes be difficult to listen effectively.
 - Ask the group to split into 3's.
 - Person 1 chooses a topic that is really important to them.
 - The other two then spend 3 minutes discussing this topic.
 - The person who has chosen the topic must not take part in the discussion and can merely listen.
 - After 3 minutes discussion is over, Person 1 briefly summarises his/her understanding of the main points of the discussion in a couple of minutes.
 - The other two have 3 minutes to give their perspective on how accurate this summary was, supplying any points which were missed.
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- After 8 minutes of the triad working together, tell people to shift roles and repeat the process.
- Continue this until everyone has had their turn, and then bring everyone back into the large group.
- Discuss the feedback from this exercise and write points relating to barriers to effective listening on a flip sheet. Give handout.

Trainers notes:

It is important to keep people to time during this exercise. Let the groups know when 8 minutes are up and it is time for people to change roles

Coffee break

15 minutes

5. Active listening

40 minutes

This exercise is designed to identify what active listening skills are and to let everyone practise them.

What to do

- Ask people to take a minute or two to think of a time when they needed to talk to someone and felt really listened to.
- Ask them how they felt and then ask them to identify what happened when they were actively listened to.
- Allow 15 minutes for the quick think to identify active listening skills.
- If people are slow to come up with ideas, prompt them or start them off.
- Write peoples suggestions on a flipsheet .
- Ask the group to pick out the most important skills and ask them why they are important.
- Reinforce the points and show slide ④ and slide ⑤.
- Explain to the group that this exercise focuses on practising active listening skills
- Ask the group to split into 3's, and for each person to take a turn at being speaker, listener, or observer.
- Give people 3 minutes for each role and 2 minutes at the end to talk about how they felt.
- Speaker to talk about something that interests them or that is important to them.
- Listener to actively listen.
- Observer to take notes on what is happening.
- Keep groups to time.

- After 15 minutes get everyone back into the large group and ask them to talk about what they have learned.
- Note everything on a flip sheet.

6. (i) Identifying feedback skills

10 minutes

This flipchart activity gets people to summarise the key skills involved in giving and receiving feedback

What to do

- On flipchart paper write the headings "Points to bear in mind when giving feedback" and "Points to bear in mind when receiving feedback"
- Explain to the group that you now want them to come up with two lists under these headings based on what they have learned and experienced in the previous exercise
- Add any points which you feel the group has missed out
- Give out handout "Giving and Receiving Feedback"

7. (ii) Feedback exercise in pairs

15 minutes

This exercise gives people practice in both giving feedback to and receiving feedback from another person in the group

What to do

- Introduce this exercise by emphasising the importance of effective feedback to the mentoring process and tell people they will now have the opportunity to practise this in the group
- Ask people to get into pairs and to each take 5mins in turn to give the following two items of feedback to their partner "Two things I have noticed about you on the course so far, one thing which is positive and one area for development." Explain that a degree of discomfort is common here given the early stage in the development of relationships within the group. Relate this to early stages of the mentoring relationship
- Emphasise that the content of what is said will remain confidential within the pair and that feedback to the large group after the exercise will focus on what taking part in this exercise felt like and the difficulties that people experienced with the exercise
- After 10 minutes bring the whole group back together and discuss peoples experiences of taking part in the exercise. Ask people how much more difficult it was to give constructive criticism than positive feedback and what was it like to receive constructive criticism?

8. Recap of session

5 minutes

This helps people reflect on what they have learned and recaps on the session objectives.

What to do

- Show slide ❶ again.
- Check that everyone is happy that each objective has been met.

9. Home task: Listening Assessment Questionnaire

5 minutes

Explain to people that this session's home task is a questionnaire about their listening habits that they are asked to fill out at home and score themselves on. The purpose of the exercise is for everyone to become more aware of their listening habits and to identify one or two areas where they might benefit from doing things differently

9. Looking ahead

Link forward to next session.

What to do

- Tell everyone what the next training session will be about.

11. Evaluation of session

10 minutes

What to do

- Give out evaluation sheets and allow 10 minutes for everyone to fill them in. Make sure you get them all back before everyone leaves!

12. Handouts

Give out session handouts.

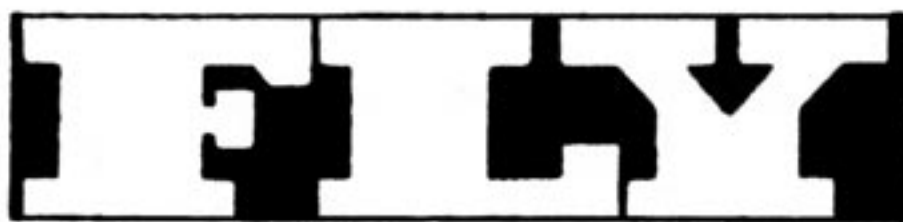
Objectives

Slide 1

By the end of this session you will:

- Have explored communicating with others, particularly young people
- Have practised active listening skills
- Be able to list the factors important in active listening
- Be able to identify barriers to communication and good listening
- Have practised giving effective feedback
- Have listed skills involved in giving and receiving feedback

**Finished files are the result of years
of scientific study combined with the
experience of many years**



Things to Consider and Remember when Talking with Young People

Slide 2

1. Watch and listen to the young person. Young people use language and interpret language literally.
2. All young people are not the same. What they experience, their environment and social upbringing, shapes their language use and understanding.
3. Do not presume or take for granted that you will immediately know and understand what young people mean when they use certain words and language or that the young person understands or knows what you mean.
4. People learn and acquire language over time.

Last message

"Sometimes young people make it difficult to relate to them – the more difficult it is the more the young person actually needs it "

Communicating & Listening

Introduction

Many of us in a variety of roles or life experiences will come into contact with adolescents and young adults (e.g. as a parent, family member).

Not all of us are experts or claim to know everything about how adolescents think and how they reason, communicate, learn and utilise language.

As adults there are many hidden messages in what we say to each other. Sometimes our body stance, actions, or facial expressions can mask what we are actually trying to say.

We often use humour to hide from embarrassment or criticism; as a result, the messages we give out are not the messages, which are being received.

E.g. "that's really good work, for you"

Does the person interpret that to mean ?

" I'm really impressed by your work"

"I really did not expect much from you, you've done better than I thought you would"

By encouraging adolescents to give clear messages and to question ambiguity, we can reduce confusion and hurt that may be caused unnecessarily.

Language

We all use language in different ways.

The young people that you are going to be working with may have limited vocabulary and may use slang words.

- There is a need for clear communication - watch and listen.
- They can interpret language literally ! Use humour sparingly initially and, when you do, use it against yourself e.g. does my bum look big in this.
- What is important is that you call them what they wish to be called so ask them? If they give you their nickname, this is what you call them, e.g. spike. If you are offended by what they call you (e.g. big man) - say so.
- It is not helpful to call them any pet names e.g. son, pet - you don't know what this will mean to them.
- Do not presume or take for granted that you will immediately know and understand what young people mean when they use certain words and language or that the young person understands or knows what you mean.

All young people are not the same. What they experience, their environment and social upbringing, shapes their language use and understanding.

How Do We Communicate?

The face and body, not the voice is the major organ of communication. Only a fraction of the Brain is dedicated to verbal communication. The vast majority of communication with other people is non-verbal.

A large percentage of what we pick up from other people focuses (without us being aware of it) on non-verbal signals:

- Eye movements
- Facial gestures/expressions
- Tone of the voice
- Speed of response to a question
- The move of a hand (e.g. speak to the hand not the face)
- Tip of the head etc
- Silence

As one part of the brain processes the words, the other areas are processing and responding to all the non-verbal actions and signals that accompany the words.

Non-verbal communication dominates our lives, words will fail us if they are ALL that we use to communicate, they are a complement to our non-verbal actions.

Putting meaning into words

- Most effective communication involves verbal and non-verbal combinations of words and matching actions
- Facial expressions are the most important form of communication, when the words do not match the expressions, trust the expression!
- To really communicate, use your eyes, smile, touch (if appropriate), watch the tone of your voice and be consistent in your actions.
- Eye contact is important, but remember that it can make some people feel very uncomfortable. If you can make eye contact it will add meaning to what you say.

Client Group

Their experience will be very individual and personal – this group's basic survival instinct is finely tuned. They will have met many people in their lives, maybe had many moves, and sadly been let down by many people in their lives.

Then you arrive – they might challenge you!

These young people are very intuitive

They can use other ways of communicating that you might not be too familiar with

- poor eye contact (wearing of baseball caps)
- might not even acknowledge that you are there
- might invade your body space (sit right down beside you, approach you face on)

Tips

Be yourself

Take it slowly; be aware of what messages that you are sending out

Listen to what they are saying

Last message

"Sometimes young people make it difficult to relate to them – the more difficult it is the more the young person actually needs it "

Jackie Dougall
Leap Project
Dept. of Child Health
Ayrshire Central Hospital

Listening, Questioning & Understanding

Barriers to Effective Listening

1. The person's views are different from yours.
2. The person's culture, education or work experience deviate from yours.
3. It is not easy to follow the thoughts expressed because the vocabulary is not known to you.
4. The person speaks with a dialect or accent.
5. The accent or appearance of the speaker is extreme in some way.
6. You have heard the discourse before by the speaker or someone else.
7. The thoughts or feelings being expressed shock you or cause you to feel anxious.
8. You realise that you are out of your depth.
9. The person is telling you something you do not want to hear.
10. The environment is noisy or frequent interruptions occur.
11. You are experiencing stress or discomfort to any degree (physical, emotional, social).
12. The words of the speaker belie his or her actions or true feelings.
13. Your emotions are getting in the way.
14. You have to admit an error.
15. You realise an apology should be forthcoming from you.
16. The values you support are under attack.
17. You are very self-centred and only hear your own voice.
18. The news or outcome of a situation is not good.
19. The needs of others will demand a commitment or involvement from you.
20. You decide you dislike the person.

Listening Skills

Listening is a key skill, yet it is apparently in short supply. This handout explores some of the reasons why we tend to be poor listeners.

1. We tend to listen least well to the middle of a statement.
2. Our previous knowledge and expectations may lead to our hearing only what we expect, or want, to hear.
3. Also, due to previous knowledge or existing attitude, we frequently reduce a message by eliminating detail - in other words, we listen selectively.
4. Before the speaker has finished delivering his/her message, we are already formulating an answer, this means that we do not listen to the end of the message, and may even finish the sentence for him/her.

Common errors

There are a number of interventions which do not encourage the talker, but which many listeners find themselves using. Among the most frequent are :-

1. Inappropriate Probing - "Why exactly do you feel this way ?"
2. Excessive Assurance - "Everything is going to be okay".
3. Avoidance - " Please don't be upset".
4. Evaluation/judgement - "You must feel upset, but just think how your wife feels".
5. Hostility/judgement - "Your behaviour is stupid and foolish".

Effective Listening

The aim of effective listening is to allow the individual to explore his or her own feelings in depth. Only by coming to terms with emotions will he/she be able to cope with and understand the personal consequences of new information and experience and thus formulate a plan of action.

Adapted from: Matches Mentoring Project (Glasgow Mentoring Network/The Big Step)

DO:

- respond to the mentee, by nodding, making eye contact and showing that you are interested
- express empathy
- be aware of the mentee's body language
- say if you don't understand
- use your own words to repeat back to the person what you think you have heard, to check if you have understood them [or to show that you have]
- allow the mentee to finish what they are saying
- let silences happen, as they are a natural part of communicating
- accept that it's OK to have a different opinion, but don't force your opinion onto the mentee
- try and keep focused on what is being talked about

DON'T:

- interrupt the mentee, or finish their sentences
- look distracted or continually stare at the mentee
- be judgmental
- feel that you have to give advice or solutions to problems
- get into arguments over what is being said
- use the time to sort out your own problems, past or present

- **Reflecting:** both meanings and feelings
- **Paraphrasing:** do this occasionally to describe the meanings and feelings you perceive. The mentee will correct you if you are wrong.
- **Summarising:** the ability to summarise the mentee's feelings and concerns from their perspective
- **Good questioning:** use of prompts, open ended questions, and probing where necessary
- **Remaining focused:** meetings should not be distracted by environmental factors or by straying from objectives
- Allowing **silences**
- Creating a safe, friendly, unthreatening **environment**
- Building **rapport**
- Maintaining good **eye contact**
- **Congruent body language:** i.e. the way you look is consistent with what you are doing
- **Empathy:** tuning into what the mentee is feeling and having some understanding from their point of view

Giving and Receiving Feedback

The giving and receiving of effective feedback is essential in any mentoring relationship. It is the only way that the relationship can grow and begin to address developmental goals. Feedback, even negative feedback, should always be an activity aimed at helping the other person to change or modify some limitation that is hindering them and it should always be empowering.

On giving feedback:

- There has to be an existing relationship of reciprocal trust and appreciation between the two people. If this is not the case, positive feedback will often not be believed and critical feedback will only be resented.
- We cannot force feedback on someone who has not asked for it and does not want it. If we do, it cannot help the other person because they will not recognise its legitimacy.
- Feedback should be about something that the other person can realistically change. Therefore, it should always also include perceptions about how they may change.
- We should not assume that we know why the other person did what they did. No one can ever really know another person's motivation, so we should give feedback on the consequences of what they did and what it felt like for us.
- Everyone giving feedback is only speaking for him or herself. We need to 'own' our feedback and not assume that all 'right-thinking people' think the same way. If they do, they will have to say so for themselves.

On receiving feedback:

- We must listen attentively and not interrupt. We must give the other person the space in which to express their point.
- We should not be defensive about what the other person is saying and start giving reasons why. If there really is a misunderstanding, we can address that later.
- We must respect the legitimacy of the feelings and perceptions that the other person is expressing. People's feelings and perceptions are a 'fact of life' and it is pointless arguing against them.
- We have the right to evaluate the feedback. The person giving us the feedback is only speaking for him or herself and we may wish to check it out by soliciting feedback from other people as well.
- We have the right not to hear the feedback. Likewise, we may decide that we have heard enough for the time being and would prefer to return to it later.

Taken from: Depaul Trust "Working Out"

Homework for Session 4

Listening, Questioning and Understanding

LISTENING ASSESSMENT

(Taken from "Listening : The forgotten Skill" by Madelyn Burley-Allen; published by John Wiley and Sons Inc.)

To help you start to be more aware of your listening habits, complete the following listening self-evaluation. It will give you an idea of which listening habits you can be happy about and which ones you might want to re-shape. Answer each question thoughtfully.

Put an X in the appropriate column Do you :	Most of the time	Frequen- tly	Occasio- nally	Almost Never
1. Tune out people who say something you don't agree with or don't want to hear?				
2. Concentrate on what is being said even if you are not really interested?				
3. Assume you know what the talker is going to say and stop listening?				
4. Repeat in your own words what the talker has just said?				
5. Listen to the other person's viewpoint even if it differs from yours?				
6. Learn something from each person you meet, even if it something ever so slight?				
7. Find out what words mean when they are used in ways that are not familiar to you?				
8. Form a rebuttal in your head while the speaker is talking?				
9. Give the appearance of listening when you aren't ?				
10. Daydream when the speaker is talking ?				

	Most of the time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
11. Listen to the whole message - what the talker is saying verbally and non-verbally?				
12. Recognise that words don't mean exactly the same thing to different people?				
13. Look at the person who is talking?				
14. Concentrate on the talker's meaning rather than how he or she looks?				
15. Know which words and phrases you respond emotionally to?				
16. Think about what you want to accomplish with your communication?				
17. Plan the best time to say what you want to say				
18. Think about how the other person might react to what you say?				
19. Re-state instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly?				
20. Paraphrase what you believe the talker is feeling?				
21. Consider the best way to make your communication (written, spoken, phone, bulletin board, memo etc.) work?				
22. Think about what kind of person you are talking to (worried, hostile, disinterested, rushed, shy, stubborn impatient etc.?)				
23. Interrupt the talker while he or she is still talking?				
24. Think "I assumed he or she would know that?"				
25. Allow the talker to vent negative feelings towards you without becoming defensive?				
26. Practise regularly to increase your listening efficiency?				
27. Take notes when necessary?				
28. Hear noises without being distracted by them?				
29. Listen to the talker without judging or criticising?				

EVALUATION SHEET

1. Rate today's training session by circling one number

Not interesting

Very interesting

1

2

3

4

5

2. How will today's training session help you carry out your role as a mentor?

3. What did you enjoy most about today's training session?

4. Anything you didn't enjoy or didn't feel was useful?

5. Any suggestions to improve this training session when it is next run?

6. Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this form
