



COMMUNICATION SKILLS: TIPS FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION

Improve the quality of your care through better communication. This page provides clear, easy-to-implement techniques for daily interactions with the person you support. Whether you need scripts for daily check-ins or guidance on respecting boundaries, find the practical advice you need to speak with confidence and care.

Tips and tricks on how to communicate better with someone you care for who has a mental health illness:

Things to remember before you speak

Without clear boundaries, carers often experience burnout, frustration and exhaustion physically and emotionally. Setting boundaries can help you:

- Avoid overcommitting to too many activities or obligations
- Protect your mental and physical health
- Strengthen relationships
- Be more mindful and patient as a carer for the person you look after

Active Listening

- Give them time to respond
- Don't finish their sentences
- Reflect what you hear: "It sounds like you're saying..."
- Ask for clarification when needed
- Use affirming body language instead of verbal prompts
- - A nod, eye contact, or soft "mmm" shows you're listening without interrupting their flow

When They Prefer Not to Talk

- Respect their choice completely
- Offer quiet companionship if appropriate
- "I'm here if you change your mind, but no pressure"
- Use gentle, non-verbal ways to show care
- Check in briefly and infrequently

Creating Safe Spaces

- Use non-judgmental language (I feel, if you are going to talk about something to do with you)
- Validate all feelings as real
- Respect privacy and confidentiality (don't ask excessive questions on one topic)
- Allow people to define their own experiences
- Be aware that trauma can affect how people communicate

Red Flags - When to Seek Additional Support

- Significant changes in mood or behaviour
- Expressions of wanting to harm themselves or others
- Confusion about time, place, or identity
- Reporting abuse or neglect from a situation or experience
- Refusal to eat, drink, or take medication

Assisting Neurodiversity

- Some people may communicate differently (autism, ADHD, etc.)
- Allow extra processing time if needed
- Respect different sensory needs
- Don't insist on eye contact if it's uncomfortable
- Be flexible with communication styles

Avoiding Assumptions

(you may already know this if this is a loved one)

- Ask about preferred names and pronouns if appropriate
- Respect diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs
- Recognise that mental health affects everyone differently
- Remember that visible and invisible disabilities both matter and are present (they can coexist)

Ways to Phrase Questions and communicate with someone with Mental Health

Using Open-Ended Questions to encourage conversation

- Tell me about...(something they are interested in, or that relates to them)
- What was that like for you?
- How did that make you feel?
- What would you prefer?
- What's important to you about this?

Using a Closed Question when you need specific information

- Are you comfortable?
- Would you like help with this?
- Do you prefer option A or B? (This can be a positive way to help with decision-making.)

Example: Are you ready for lunch? Would you like a sandwich or some leftover curry?

Respecting Boundaries

You can say this at the start of the conversation

- You don't have to answer that if you'd rather not"
- "We can talk about something else if you prefer"
- "There's no right or wrong way to feel about this"
- "Take your time - or we don't need to discuss it at all"
- "I'm just checking in - you can share with me what you would like to"

Daily Check-ins

Emotional Wellbeing

- How are you feeling today? (Pause and leave space for any kind of response)
- How is your energy level today?
- Is there anything you'd like to share about how you're feeling?
- What's been helping you feel good lately?
- Is there anything on your mind you'd like to talk about?

Getting them involved or asking about Activities and Engagement

- What activities do you enjoy the most?
- Is there something you'd like to try or do today? (wait, and you could offer some suggestions on things you know they like if they are stuck)
- What helps you feel most like yourself?
- Would you prefer quiet time or social interaction right now?
- What are some of your favourite memories or stories?

Addressing Concerns that can be hard to approach

Gentle approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing

- How has your sleep been lately? (Sleep affects everything we do and how we function)
- What's been giving you energy or motivation recently?
- Are there activities that help you feel calm or grounded?
- Is there anything that's been feeling overwhelming that I can help with right now?
- What helps you when you're having a tough time?

When Someone Seems Distressed

- "I'm here if you'd like to talk, but no pressure at all"
- "Would it help to have some company, or would you prefer space?"
- "Is there anything that might help you feel more comfortable?"
- "You don't have to share anything, but I'm here to listen if you want"
- "What usually helps when you're feeling this way?"

When Communication is Difficult

- Am I understanding you correctly? (Repeat what they said to show you heard them)
- Can you show me what you mean?
- Will it help if I explain this differently? (Changing angles can be beneficial)
- Let's take our time, there's no rush.
- What would make this easier for you?

Creating a connection with the person you support

Learning About the Person

- "What was your favourite job/hobby when you were younger?"
- "Tell me about your family"
- "What places have been special to you?"
- "What achievements are you most proud of?"
- "What values are most important to you?"

Showing Interest and Respect

- "That sounds really interesting - can you tell me more?"
- "What was that experience like for you?"
- "I'd love to hear your thoughts on this"
- "Your experience with this sounds valuable"
- "Thank you for sharing that with me"

More Information

For more information on boundaries and assertive communication, please see our page

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