Four Types of Communication

Communication comes in four basic types. Below, we will look at the different types in depth.

Verbal Communication This mode of communication relies on words to convey a message. This is the standard method of communicating that most of us use on a day-to-day basis, though we rarely use it without augmenting it with one of the other communication types. Other cues people use while communicating verbally include, tone, gestures, and body language. Verbal communication helps in expressing thoughts, emotions and sentiments. A phone conversation, chat with a friend, an announcement made, or a speech delivered are all verbal forms of communication. For most of us, it comes with ease. As children, we learned verbal communication through the sounds around us. We soon develop and start understanding the language which helps us to communicate verbally as we grow older. Verbal communication is further divided into four subcategories:

1. Intrapersonal Communication This form of communication is extremely private and restricted to ourselves. It includes the silent conversations we have with ourselves, wherein we juggle roles between the sender and receiver who are processing our thoughts and actions. This process of communication when analyzed can either be conveyed verbally to someone or stay confined as thoughts.

2. Interpersonal Communication This form of communication takes place between two individuals and is thus a one-on-one conversation. Here, the two individuals involved will swap their roles of sender and receiver in order to communicate in a clearer manner.

3. Small Group Communication This type of communication can take place only when there are more than two people involved. Here the number of people will be small enough to allow each participant to interact and converse with the rest. Press conferences, board meetings, and team meetings are examples of group communication. Unless a specific issue is being discussed, small group discussions can become chaotic and difficult to interpret by everybody. This lag in understanding information completely can result in miscommunication.

4. Public Communication This type of communication takes place when one individual addresses a large gathering of people. Election campaigns and public speeches are example of this type of communication. In such cases, there is usually a single sender of information and several receivers who are being addressed.

Non Verbal Communication Non-verbal communication is a process of communication without using words or sounds. Non-verbal communication uses gestures, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, clothing, tone of voice, and other cues to convey a message. Like verbal communication, this method of communicating is rarely used alone. Non-verbal communication could be considered like a spice we use when communicating to add a little flavor. You might raise your eyebrows emphatically when speaking to help make a point, or shake your finger at your child when you're angry. These are all non-verbal cues that help convey a message.

Written Communication Written communication is the medium through which the message of the sender is conveyed with the help of written words. Letters, personal journals, e-mails, reports, articles, and memos are some forms of written communication. Unlike some other forms of communication, written messages can be edited and rectified before they are sent to the receiver, thereby making written communication an indispensable part of informal and formal communication. This form of communication encapsulates features of visual communication as well, especially when the messages are conveyed through electronic devices such as laptops, phones, and visual presentations that involve the use of text or words.

Visual Communication This form of communication involves the visual display of information, wherein the message is understood or expressed with the help of visual aids. For example, topography, photography, signs, symbols, maps, colors, posters, banners and designs help the viewer understand the message visually. Movies and plays, television shows and video clips are all electronic form of visual communication. Visual communication also involves the transfer of information in the form of text, which is received through an electronic medium such as a computer, phone, etc. Icons and emoticons are a form of visual communication. When these icons are used in a public place, phone or computer, they instruct the user about their meaning and usage. One of the greatest examples of visual communication is the internet, which communicates with the masses using a combination of text, design, links, images, and color. All of these visual features require us to view the screen in order to understand the message being conveyed. Media communication is developing at a meteoric rate in order to ensure clarity and to eliminate any ambiguity. The aforementioned four types of communication have played a vital role and continue to do so, in bridging the gap between people, commerce, education, health care, and entertainment. There are many reasons why interpersonal communications may fail. In many communications, the message may not be received exactly the way the sender intended and hence it is important that the

Communication Barriers

There are many reasons why interpersonal communications may fail. In many communications, the message may not be received exactly the way the sender intended and hence it is important that the communicator seeks feedback to check that their message is clearly understood. The skills of Active Listening, Clarification and Reflection, which we will discuss shortly, may help but the skilled communicator also needs to be aware of the barriers to effective communication. There exist many barriers to communication and these may occur at any stage in the communication process. Barriers may lead to your message becoming distorted and you therefore risk wasting both time and/or money by causing confusion and misunderstanding. Effective communication involves overcoming these barriers and conveying a clear and concise message.

Some common barriers to effective communication include:

- The use of jargon. Over-complicated or unfamiliar terms.
- Emotional barriers and taboos.
- Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver.
- Differences in perception and viewpoint.
- Physical disabilities such as hearing problems or speech difficulties.
- Physical barriers to non-verbal communication.
- Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents.
- Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping. People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions.
- Cultural differences. The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed. For example, the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings.

A skilled communicator must be aware of these barriers and try to reduce their impact by continually checking understanding and by offering appropriate feedback.

Barriers to Communication by Category

- **Language Barriers** Clearly, language and linguistic ability may act as a barrier to communication. However, even when communicating in the same language, the terminology used in a message may act as a barrier if it is not fully understood by the receiver(s). For example, a message that includes a lot of specialist jargon and abbreviations will not be understood by a receiver who is not familiar with the terminology used. As nurses, we are especially prone to making this mistake. We must remember to use language that can be understood by the receiver.

- **Psychological Barriers** The psychological state of the receiver will influence how the message is received. For example, if someone has personal worries and is stressed, they may be preoccupied by personal concerns and not as receptive to the message as if they were not stressed. Stress management is an important personal skill that affects our interpersonal relationships. Anger is another example of a psychological barrier to communication. When we are angry it is easy to say things that we may later regret and also to misinterpret what others are saying. More generally, people with low self-esteem may be less assertive and therefore may not feel comfortable communicating - they may feel shy about saying how they really feel, or read negative sub-texts into messages they hear.

- **Physiological Barriers** Physiological barriers may result from the receiver's physical state. For example, a receiver with reduced hearing may not grasp the entirety of a spoken conversation, especially if there is significant background noise.

- **Physical Barriers** An example of a physical barrier to communication is geographic distance between the sender and receiver(s). Communication is generally easier over shorter distances as more communication channels are available and less technology is required. Although modern technology often serves to reduce the impact of physical barriers, the advantages and disadvantages of each communication channel should be understood so that an appropriate channel can be used to overcome the physical barriers.

- **Attitudinal Barriers** Attitudinal barriers are behaviors or perceptions that prevent people from communicating effectively. Attitudinal barriers to communication may result from personality conflicts, poor management, resistance to change, or a lack of motivation. Effective receivers of messages should attempt to overcome their own attitudinal barriers to facilitate effective communication.

Overcoming Barriers

Most of the above mentioned barriers can be overcome by the skilled communicator. Obviously, bridging gaps in geography and communicating through disabilities are a topic for a different discussion. Below, we will look at some tools that can be used to bridge barriers in everyday communications.

- **Active Listening** Active listening is a skill that can be acquired and developed with practice. However, this skill can be difficult to master and will, therefore, take time and patience. 'Active listening' means, as its name suggests, actively listening. That is fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just 'hearing' the message of the speaker. Active listening involves listening with all senses. As well as giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening - otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener. By providing this 'feedback' the person speaking will usually feel more at ease and therefore communicate more easily, openly and honestly. There are both verbal and non-verbal cues that convey active listening. Non-verbal signs include smiling (if appropriate), making eye contact, nodding at appropriate times, and avoiding distractions. Theses non-verbal cues convey the message that you are interested in what the speaker has to say, and that your attention is fully invested. Offering verbal signs of active listening can also be useful.

Reflecting on something the speaker has said by asking a clarifying question is a terrific way to do this. Paraphrasing involves finding slightly different words to repeat the main idea of the speaker, and is also great way to show active listening.

- **Use Simple Language** It's important to remember the audience that you're speaking to, and use language that can be easily understood. Avoid using medical terminology or jargon when speaking to clients and their families. People are often intimidated by such language, and can be afraid to admit that they don't understand the message being delivered. An important tool to use when speaking is to pause occasionally and ask questions to ensure that your message is being understood as intended. You may also allow the listener to ask questions to clarify any points.

- **Give Constructive Feedback** Remember that feedback was part of the communication chain we looked at on the first page. While the feedback that you give the speaker/sender may occasionally be negative, it is important that it be constructive in nature. The intent of the feedback should be to further the abilities of the speaker. This will strengthen the interpersonal relationship, and enhance future communications.