**COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**Unit Description:**

This unit equips learners in health services support with the competencies necessary to effectively apply communication skills in various contexts. The focus is on communication channels, written, non-verbal, oral, and group communication skills.

**Learning Outcome 1: Apply Communication Channels**

1. **Understanding the Communication Process:**

**Definition**: Communication is the process of exchanging information between individuals or groups.

**Key Components**:

**Sender**: The person who initiates the message.

**Message**: The information, idea, or thought being communicated.

**Channel**: The medium through which the message is sent (e.g., verbal, written, electronic).

**Receiver**: The person or group to whom the message is directed.

**Feedback**: The response from the receiver, indicating whether the message was understood.

**Example**: A nurse instructing a patient on post-surgery care, ensuring that the patient understands through verbal instructions and confirming comprehension through questions.

1. **Principles of Effective Communication:**

**Clarity**: Ensure the message is clear and easy to understand.

**Conciseness**: Keep the message brief and to the point.

**Consistency**: Messages should align with previous communications and expectations.

**Feedback**: Encourage and facilitate feedback to confirm understanding.

**Empathy**: Show understanding and consideration for the receiver's perspective.

**Example**: A health professional explaining a treatment plan clearly and concisely, ensuring the patient understands by asking for feedback and addressing any concerns.

1. **Exploring Communication Channels, Mediums, and Modes:**

**Channels**: Face-to-face, telephone, email, reports, social media.

**Mediums**: Verbal, written, electronic, non-verbal.

**Modes**: Synchronous (real-time) vs. asynchronous (delayed).

**Example**: A hospital may use different communication channels such as in-person meetings (synchronous) or email updates (asynchronous) to share information.

1. **Factors Influencing the Choice of Communication Channels:**

**Nature of the Message**: Urgency, confidentiality, complexity.

**Audience**: Consider the receiver's preferences and accessibility.

**Environment**: Consider the setting—formal vs. informal.

**Resources Available**: Availability of technology, time constraints.

**Example**: A sensitive issue like a patient’s prognosis may be best communicated face-to-face rather than via email.

1. **Identifying Barriers to Effective Communication:**

**Physical Barriers**: Noise, distance, poor technology.

**Psychological Barriers**: Stress, emotions, mistrust.

**Language Barriers**: Differences in language or jargon.

**Cultural Barriers**: Differences in cultural norms and expectations.

**Example**: A healthcare worker from one cultural background may misunderstand non-verbal cues from a patient of another culture, leading to miscommunication.

1. **Communication Flow and Patterns in Organizations:**

**Vertical Communication**: Between different levels of hierarchy (e.g., supervisor to staff).

**Horizontal Communication**: Between peers or colleagues at the same level.

**Diagonal Communication**: Across different departments or units.

**Example**: In a hospital, information may flow vertically from the head nurse to the floor nurses and horizontally among doctors in the same department.

1. **Sourcing Relevant Information:**

**Researching**: Accessing reliable and up-to-date information.

**Organizational Sources**: Using established protocols, guidelines, or databases.

**External Sources**: Journals, online databases, expert consultations.

**Example**: A healthcare professional may use a medical database to find the latest treatment guidelines for a specific condition.

1. **Adhering to Organizational Communication Policies:**

**Confidentiality**: Respecting patient privacy and data protection.

**Professionalism**: Maintaining a professional tone and approach in all communications.

**Compliance**: Following established communication protocols and guidelines.

**Example**: Ensuring that patient records are shared only with authorized personnel and through secure channels.

**Learning Outcome 2: Apply Written Communication Skills**

1. **Different Types of Written Communication:**

**Formal Writing**: Reports, memos, emails, proposals.

**Informal Writing**: Notes, reminders, personal emails.

**Technical Writing**: Manuals, instructions, medical records.

**Example**: Writing a patient discharge summary that is clear, concise, and contains all necessary medical information.

1. **Key Elements of Effective Communication:**

**Purpose**: Clearly state the objective of the communication.

**Audience**: Tailor the message to the reader’s level of understanding.

**Tone**: Match the tone to the context—formal, informal, empathetic.

**Clarity and Precision**: Use simple language, avoid jargon unless necessary.

**Structure**: Organize content logically with headings, bullet points, and paragraphs.

**Example**: Drafting an incident report that is well-structured, with all relevant details and in a neutral, professional tone.

1. **Organizational Requirements for Written Communication:**

**Templates**: Use of standardized forms and templates.

**Documentation Standards**: Adhering to the organization’s documentation guidelines.

**Confidentiality**: Protecting sensitive information in written communication.

**Example**: Following the hospital’s template for documenting patient care in medical records.

**Learning Outcome 3: Apply Non-Verbal Communication Skills**

1. **Effective Use of Body Language and Gestures:**

**Body Language**: Posture, eye contact, facial expressions, hand movements.

**Gestures**: Appropriate use of gestures to reinforce verbal communication.

**Example**: A nurse using a calm tone and open posture to reassure an anxious patient.

1. **Importance of Body Posture in Communication:**

**Open Posture**: Indicates attentiveness, openness, and willingness to engage.

**Closed Posture**: May signal defensiveness, disinterest, or discomfort.

**Example**: Sitting with an open posture and making eye contact when discussing sensitive issues with patients.

1. **Adhering to Workplace Dressing Codes:**

**Professional Appearance**: Dressing appropriately for the healthcare environment.

**Cultural Sensitivity**: Understanding and respecting cultural dress codes.

**Example**: Wearing the correct uniform and ensuring that it is clean and presentable, adhering to the dress code of the healthcare facility.

**Learning Outcome 4: Apply Oral Communication Skills**

1. **Various Oral Communication Pathways:**

**Formal Pathways**: Meetings, briefings, presentations.

**Informal Pathways**: Conversations, informal feedback, peer discussions.

**Example**: Leading a staff meeting to discuss patient care updates.

1. **Techniques for Effective Questioning:**

**Open-Ended Questions**: Encouraging detailed responses.

**Closed-Ended Questions**: Gathering specific information.

**Probing Questions**: Clarifying or expanding on responses.

**Example**: Asking a patient open-ended questions to understand their symptoms fully.

1. **Understanding and Practicing Workplace Etiquette:**

**Respectful Communication**: Being polite, considerate, and professional.

**Timeliness**: Responding promptly to communication.

**Confidentiality**: Maintaining discretion in sensitive conversations.

**Example**: Addressing colleagues respectfully and maintaining patient confidentiality in all interactions.

1. **Active Listening Skills:**

**Focus**: Paying full attention to the speaker.

**Feedback**: Nodding, summarizing, or asking clarifying questions.

**Avoiding Interruptions**: Allowing the speaker to finish before responding.

**Example**: A doctor actively listening to a patient's concerns without interrupting and then summarizing the key points to confirm understanding.

**Learning Outcome 5: Apply Group Communication Skills**

1. **Establishing Rapport in Group Settings:**

**Building Trust**: Showing genuine interest and concern.

**Open Communication**: Encouraging participation and dialogue.

**Example**: Facilitating a team meeting where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts.

1. **Facilitating Issue Resolution:**

**Identifying the Issue**: Understanding the problem from multiple perspectives.

**Mediating Discussions**: Helping parties come to a mutual agreement.

**Example**: Mediating a discussion between two team members to resolve