

## Partners in Quality Care

### Communication Fundamentals

Strong communication skills are an important component in the role of an In-home aide. There are many times when communication will need to occur- while assisting client's, understanding the plan of care, communication with the client/families, along with communication with the agency/schedulers, supervisors, among others. When communication breaks down, information is not exchanged. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines communication as a verbal or written message and a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. Basic principles of communication include verbal and non-verbal communication. We are communicating, even when we are not using words, with our body language, symbols and sounds.

Verbal communication is speaking. In speaking, the tone of your voice and your expression can affect the meaning of the message. Nonverbal communication is the exchange of information without words such as facial expressions, gestures, posture and body language.

Nonverbal communication and body language are important in the communication process. Paralinguistic signals are sounds but not words, such as a sigh or tone. Body language supports or contradicts our words. Cultural variations exist in body language and in the meaning. Kisses, tears, dances, emblems, silence, open displays of emotion and thousands of other symbols can and often do have different meanings in various cultures. Sometimes with verbal and non-verbal communication, the words and actions may not match; someone may say everything is fine but crying at the same time. Two different messages are being sent.

Verbal communication is more than just talking. Effective verbal communication is defined as an exchange of information using words understood by the receiver in a way that conveys professional caring and respect. It is important to be aware of nonverbal communication during the communication process. Nonverbal communication can have a tremendous impact on the communication experience and may be much more powerful than the verbal message itself. It is important to be attentive to nonverbal communication cues used and the messages they provide to clients and their families.

Empathy is an important component of caregiving. According to the Cambridge dictionary empathy is- the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation.

***View the following video and reflect on the often invisible needs of those around us and the difference we can make by creating caring human connections. Click on the link to view the video- [Empathy: The Human Connection to Patient Care.](#)***

- *Take a few moments to reflect on the video and how you might show empathy to your clients and their family, and within the broader society. Think of ways you currently show empathy and are their areas to improve? Ask your agency for additional training on communication and empathy if you would like to learn more.*



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#### Objectives:

- \*Review the importance of good communication
- \*Review the types of communication
- \*Review the importance of listening

#### References:

Source: National Library of Medicine; Nursing Fundamentals: Chapter 2 Communication- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK591817/> - accessed 5/21/2026

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## Communication Fundamentals

The most important part of communicating with clients and families is **listening**. **Not being listened to, or being listened to in an inattentive manner, feels hurtful and unhelpful.** Good listening is essential to clear, effective communication. When people listen with their full attention, they remember and understand more of what is being communicated. Active Listening is listening to someone without interrupting, asking questions to make sure you understand what they are saying, repeating back to the person what you thought you heard them say and what you think they mean, eye contact (also consider cultural differences in which direct eye contact may not be desired) and paying attention without distractions. Listening is essential to the communication process. Good listening involves the use of eyes, ears, and feelings. It takes energy, concentration, and effort to be a good listener. You must decide you want to be a better listener to develop and improve your listening skills. Listening for feeling is also important. Active listening shows a client that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying.

### Key points with active listening:



- Listen to hear what your clients are saying and then respond appropriately. When you do not understand something, ask them to clarify what they mean. Make sure that you are really listening and not thinking about what else you need to do or what you want to say. This means before you start the conversation you determine that you are going to actively listen. It takes energy, concentration, and effort to be a good listener. You must decide you want to be a better listener to develop and improve your listening skills. Listen and learn as in the caption above.
- Show you are present by the way you are listening. Let the client and the family do the talking. By using active listening, you are being present. Just being there and showing that you care is more important than what you say.
- Listen more and speak less to improve communication. Good listening involves the use of eyes, ears, and feelings.
- Listen to hear what your clients are saying and then respond appropriately. When you do not understand something, ask them to clarify what they mean. Make sure that you are really listening and not thinking about what else you need to do or what you want to say.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Ask questions for clarification, if needed, restate what was said to ensure understanding.
- Using closed-ended questions can be a barrier to effective communication. Closed-ended questions tend to limit a client's response to either a yes or no or a nod of the head. By only asking yes/no questions, you may not get a complete or accurate answer. Asking open-ended questions enables the In-home aide to receive more information and have more of a conversation with a client. Open ended questions allow for more information to be obtained and often begin with words such as how, when, how, who, and what. If the client has a specific medical or cognitive condition in which a yes or no response is best, keep that in mind.

**We are always communicating!** Good communication is essential in the day-to-day interaction between you and your clients. Discuss language barriers that may exist for your clients with your supervisor. Language interpretation services may be needed and consider any cultural differences in communication.

When providing care to clients', it often requires being in their personal space. It is important to be aware of clients' feelings of psychological discomfort that can occur when invading this space. Additionally, cultural considerations may impact the appropriateness of personal space when providing client care, it is important to continually ask for feedback and check understanding. Always explain what you are going to do and provide as much privacy as possible when providing personal care. Open communication is important to provide care that supports dignity and privacy.

We cannot control other people or situations (external), but we can control how we communicate (internal) such as voice, body language, facial expression, eye contact and behavior towards other.

## Communication Fundamentals

*(Strategies for communicating with clients with Impaired hearing and vision)*

### Impaired Hearing

- Gain the client's attention before speaking (e.g., through touch as appropriate).
- Minimize background noise.
- Position yourself 2-3 feet away from the client.
- Facilitate lip-reading by facing the client directly in a well-lit environment.
- Use gestures, when necessary.
- Listen attentively, allowing the client adequate time to process communication and respond.
- Refrain from shouting at the client.
- Ask the client to suggest strategies for improved communication (e.g., speaking toward better ear and moving to well-lit area).
- Face the client directly, establish eye contact (unless this is a cultural issue), and avoid turning away mid-sentence.
- Simplify language (i.e., do not use slang but do use short, simple sentences), as appropriate.
- Find out the preferred method of communication (e.g., verbal, written, lip-reading, or other) from the plan of care. Notify your supervisor if the client's preferences need to be updated in the plan.
- Assist the client as assigned with their hearing aid or assistive listening device.
- The terms *assistive device* or *assistive technology* can refer to any device that helps a person with hearing loss or a voice, speech, or language disorder communicate. These terms often refer to devices that help a person hear and understand what is being said more clearly or to express thoughts more easily. Notify your supervisor for any training you need to help your client with using assistive devices.

### Impaired Vision

- Identify yourself when entering the client's space.
- Assist the client with eyeglasses or other assistive devices for vision such as a magnifying glass and assist with cleaning and storing as assigned on the plan of care.
- Provide adequate room lighting. Minimize glare (i.e., offer sunglasses or draw window covering).
- Assist the client with obtaining educational materials in large print.
- Apply labels to frequently used items as requested.
- Read pertinent information to the client as needed and requested.
- Notify your supervisor who may need to provide referrals for supportive services.

Clients with communication disorders require additional strategies to ensure effective communication. For example, aphasia is a communication disorder that results from damage to portions of the brain that are responsible for language. **Aphasia** usually occurs suddenly, often following a stroke or head injury, and impairs the client's expression and understanding of language. **Global aphasia** is caused by injuries to multiple language-processing areas of the brain, including those known as Wernicke's and Broca's areas. These brain areas are particularly important for understanding spoken language, accessing vocabulary, using grammar, and producing words and sentences. Individuals with global aphasia may be unable to say even a few words or may repeat the same words or phrases over and over. They may have trouble understanding even simple words and sentences. The most common type of aphasia is **Broca's aphasia**. People with Broca's aphasia often understand speech and know what they want to say but frequently speak in short phrases that are produced with great effort. For example, they may intend to say, "I would like to go to the bathroom," but instead the words, "Bathroom, Go," are expressed. They are often aware of their difficulties and can become easily frustrated. For a person with impaired speech, strategies to help with communication include- adjusting your communication style to meet the needs of the client (e.g., stand in front of the client while speaking, listen attentively, present one idea or thought at a time, speak slowly but avoid shouting, use written communication, or solicit family's assistance in understanding the client's speech). Repeat what the client said to ensure accuracy. Help the client with instructions from a speech therapist as applicable. Report communication concerns regarding your clients to your supervisor.