

# COMMUNICATION (July)

Thursday, December 29, 2016 8:08 PM



# Communication

- ◆ With agency personnel
- ◆ With families, guardians, advocates
- ◆ With the public

Communication is defined as an act of transmitting messages, exchange of information, ideas, or opinions. Furthering communication is the ability to effectively relay what you want the receiver to receive.

When you fail to communicate clearly you leave it up to the person you're interacting with to figure out what you are trying to say. If you don't express your wants, feelings, ideas or observations the person you're talking to may fill in the "gap" making up attitudes and opinions for you. Like it or not, that person will respond to how they interpreted the information – whether or not it is what you said.

## **Interpersonal Communication**

Telephone skills will help you develop the skills needed to project a positive image of the agency on the telephone, properly address callers, provide efficient customer services, increase efficiency while on the telephone, and establish good rapport.

Face-to-Face communication will help staff project a positive image and an understanding of challenging issues.

Communication comes in a variety of forms – written, verbal and non-verbal, spoken, in person, telephone, email, or Postal service. The form it comes in does not matter. The key is to ensure that all staff are trained and know how the communication system works within their agency.

Understanding the barriers to effective communication is also important for the success of the agency and staff.

## **Agency Personnel**

Please see Agency Specific Program specific training for contact information and organizational charts. This will ensure that all individuals will be aware of how the process and system works within the agency, as well as detailed information in the following areas.

### **With Families, Guardians, Advocates**

The amount of participation and involvement from each family, guardian and the person's advocates will vary. It is important for staff to know and understand how to communicate and work in partnership with all persons involved in the consumers lives.

### **With the Public**

Interacting with the public is important to help ensure that the consumer has all the possible choices available to them. It is important that staff know their role in interacting with and responding to the public. Review agency procedures on public communication (ex- if contacted by newspaper, refer them to the Marketing Director).

**Body Language**

Be aware that your tone of voice, your body language, and your attentiveness indicate your interest and concern. People will assume you preoccupied if you are reading a memo, unrelated to your conversation, while on the phone with them. If you are taking notes on your computer while talking with someone, let them know what you are doing.

**Staff should be reminded that they represent the agency they work for, and should therefore always adhere to a high standard of respect and professionalism when communicating with others**

***Supplemental Materials***

- Communications handout (see subsequent pages)

**The following training courses are available at these agencies:**

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Developmental Disabilities Resource Center (DDRC)	Communication Skills
DDRC	Understanding Families
DDRC	Customer Service
DDRC	Documentation
Developmental Pathways	Understanding Families
Developmental Pathways	Customer Service
Developmental Pathways	Documentation

# COMMUNICATION

## Communication Guidelines

We know from studies in communication that what we say or write down in order to communicate constitutes only a small portion of what we convey.

- Be aware that your tone of voice, your body language, and your attentiveness indicate your interest and concern. People will assume you preoccupied if you are reading a memo, unrelated to your conversation, while on the phone with them. If you are taking notes on your computer while talking with someone, let them know what you are doing.
- It is important to devote your full attention to each interaction. If you don't, you may miss a key piece of information or fail to detect misunderstandings when they arise.
- Avoid speculation. While planning for contingencies is a good idea, anticipating future outcomes can put you in an awkward situation if the results do not turn out as you expect.

## Written Communication

Written communication endures as a permanent record of events, issues, and perspectives. Every piece of written communication represents your agency.

- Use standard models for letters, e-mail, contact notes, IDT notes, memoranda and other professional correspondence. Even post-it notes are professional correspondence and need to be written in a business-like manner.
- Maintain a professional tone, even when you know the reader well. Slang and casual phrases can be misinterpreted when read by other readers.
- We often think of e-mail as a more casual form of communication than a formal letter. E-mail is a viable written communication and can be sent off to many unintended readers. E-mail related to customer services becomes part of a customer's permanent file.
- Avoid interpreting information. Clarify and verify your facts, then present factual, accurate information.
- Separate opinion from fact. If you are presenting opinions, identify them as opinions. Clarify *whose* opinion you are describing and how it relates to the issues at hand.
- Provide complete information. Assume that the reader relies solely on your document to understand information. While you may be writing to someone with extensive knowledge of a situation, the written record will often be relied on long after people with detailed knowledge have moved on.
- Think about who will get copies of written correspondence. You want to make certain that everyone who receives a copy meets confidentiality standards. Copy only people who both meet confidentiality standards and have a need to know the information you send.

- Check for ambiguity. If you are not clear about the information you need to convey, get clarification before committing the information in written form. Obtain clarification before committing information to writing.
- When you write something that is complex and potentially confusing or ambiguous, or if your documentation may be used to address a large audience, ask at least one additional person to read your document for clarity.

## **Take Time to A.C.T.**

### **Acknowledge the Customer:**

- Does your body language say hello and welcome?
- Is there good eye contact? Are you smiling?
- Are you doing something you can set aside to help the customer?
- Are you giving them your full attention?
- What is the message you are sending (is it "I am happy to be here and happy to help you"? Or is it "this is a pain and you are a pain"?)

### **Care for the Customer:**

- Know your job
- Know all you need to know about your facility and the services you provide
- Learn to read your customer's body language
- Actions speak louder than words
- Be genuine – let them know you care

### **Thank the Customer:**

- A simple Thank You or Have a Nice Day goes a long way
- Make the customer feel appreciated
- Make the customer feel special and valued