# Use and develop **systems** that promote **communication**

The aim of this chapter is to assess the level of knowledge, understanding and skills required to develop communication systems for meeting individual outcomes and promoting partnership working. The chapter explores the challenges and barriers to communication and the importance of effective management of information.
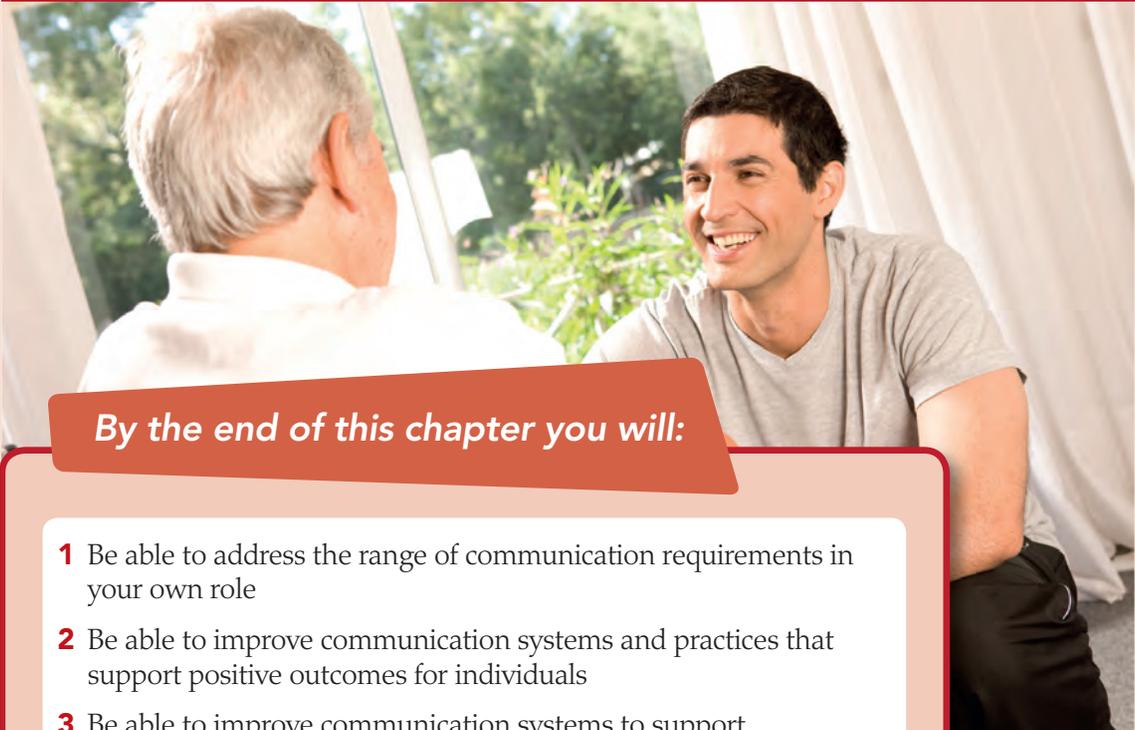
By the end of this chapter you will:

1 Be able to address the range of communication requirements in your own role

2 Be able to improve communication systems and practices that support positive outcomes for individuals

3 Be able to improve communication systems to support partnership working

4 Be able to use systems for effective information management

Be able to address the range of communication requirements in your own role

1.1

What you say, how you say it and how you behave communicates messages. Knowing how to encode and decode messages, and having a sound understanding of the appropriate communication channels available to you, is an essential skill for all professionals in the social care sector.

For example, a manager may pass on information about amendments to the organisation's policies, by providing their team with a verbal briefing of the main alterations that require implementation. However, if they were to send the same information to the people who receive support from the organisation, they may consider different channels such as a newsletter and different ways of encoding the information so that it will be understood by the intended audience. The newsletter could be produced in an easy-to-read format, using plain English (without jargon) and visualisation methods such as graphics and pictorial representation.
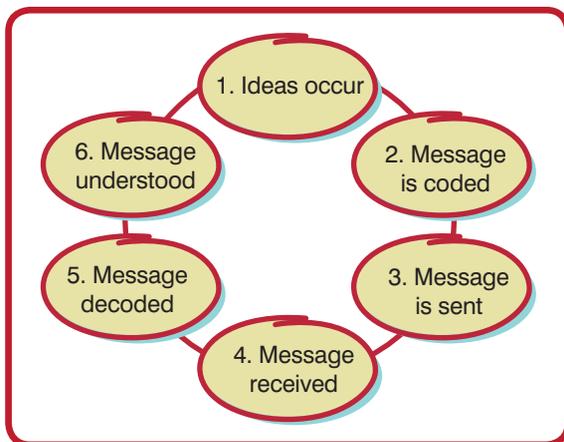
1.1.1 Review the range of groups and individuals whose communication needs must be addressed in their own job role

As a social care professional, you are required to communicate with both individuals and groups of people, whether they are the people you manage directly, senior managers, external agencies, the people your organisation supports or their families. You will do this through several methods including face-to-face meetings, training, consultation, undertaking assessments and planning, writing and delivering reports and networking. You will need a range of communication skills that enable you successfully to:

- listen
- disseminate information
- deliver information
- provide and receive feedback
- use questioning to clarify
- take written notes
- formulate responses
- negotiate, debate, compromise
- make decisions.

Figure 1.1 Argyle's communication cycle clarifies the six stages of information sharing

facilitate

When working with groups, you should consider the dynamics of group communication. Being more aware of how groups respond in certain situations will enable you to manage any barriers that arise.

1. Research a group dynamic theory, for example the theory developed by R. F. Bales and Harvard University Social Relations Laboratory.

2. Consider the dynamics of your team. Observe the communication strategies put into practice during a team meeting.

standards and service-wide performance targets, then you will frequently gather data to communicate back to these external agencies.

■ If you are responsible for communicating a change in organisational policy to a large team, you will need to consider the most effective way to do this, for example via email or a team training session.

Activity

analyse

1. Think about the partnerships you work with. What are their different communication requirements?

1.1.2 Explain how to support effective communication within your own job role

The interactions you have with the people you support are highly dependent on your choice of communication method. People have a variety of support needs and communicate using a number of techniques, and their individuality and diverse backgrounds will also impact on how they choose to communicate. You must be aware of how you interact with the people you are supporting, and ensure that they have the necessary tools to interact with you.

■ Service users need to be able to provide feedback and reviews of the support and services that they purchase, they need to be involved in consultations about changes to services, and have the communication skills necessary to be able to report complaints and abuse.

■ If you are supporting someone within a holistic service delivery model then you need to be able to communicate effectively with a range of other external agencies. For example, if you are responsible for providing and monitoring information for national

You should ensure that your team has the skills to support people's communication needs. They will need to understand verbal and non-verbal communication skills and, where appropriate, receive specialist training in specific models of communication, such as Makaton. Each person you support should have an assessment and a communication plan in place that details how they choose to communicate and make decisions. Depending on the level of support somebody needs, the communication plan will be developed and monitored in partnership with other agencies and professionals, including psychologists, speech and language therapists and advocates.

Figure 1.2 You need to ensure that your team has the appropriate skills to support individuals' communication needs

1.1.3 and 1.1.4 Analyse the barriers and challenges to communication within your own job role and implement a strategy to overcome them

Some styles of communication may not be appropriate to some people because of their cultural differences. For example, they may have communication barriers that are related to their gender, their beliefs or their first language.

Table 1.1 lists a number of different barriers to effective communication and the potential causes.

Activity

1. For each of the communication barriers listed in Table 1.1, provide examples of how you would work to overcome them within your own job role.

Table 1.1 Barriers to communication

Barrier	Description
Behaviour	This may be the effect of symptoms people are feeling, or because they are unhappy or distressed, or unable to express in any other way that they need support.
Health issues	If people become unwell, lose or gain weight rapidly, appear anxious and have trouble sleeping then these may be signs that they need support.
Language	English will not be the first language of some service users and their families, and they may lack confidence using English, especially when speaking and writing.
Cultural	Cultural differences may include using words in different contexts, as well as speaking with different intonation and tones.
Values and belief systems	People's values and belief systems may impact on the methods they use to communicate. For example, how they receive and interpret a message may be different to its original purpose based on their own beliefs.
Disability	Communication may be impaired by sensory loss and physical disability.
Environmental	Noisy places mean it is difficult for people to be heard, and can be distracting. If the lighting is poor then it will be difficult for people to read or see signs.
Personality	Extroverts will be more confident communicators and may speak before they have digested the information. Introverts are more reserved and shy, preferring to listen and take time to consider a response.
Time	Hurried communication can mean context is lost and people do not have time to understand the information and formulate responses.
Use and abuse of power	People may feel that they are expected to communicate in certain ways due to the powerful influence of others.
Assumptions and stereotypes	If someone has a particular preconceived idea about another person then they may make assumptions about that person's communication abilities and skills.
Anxiety and depression	Personal and health issues can affect communication. For example, if someone is under stress, they may communicate in an aggressive and impatient manner rather than being calm and logical in their approach.
Self-esteem and self-image of others	People who have low self-esteem and poor self-image may find it hard to communicate, perhaps due to low confidence.

1.1.5 Use different means of communication to meet different needs

In your role, you will use verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Non-verbal means including the use of sign and pictorial methods as well as written forms of communication.

Table 1.2 lists some DOs and DON'Ts when communicating verbally.

Table 1.2 Think about the following when communicating verbally

DON'T	DO
cover your mouth when speaking, as some people will be lip-reading to support their understanding	speak clearly and slowly
use inappropriate language	be culturally sensitive and conscious of diversity
use offensive language	use intonation, tone and volume to add expression to your voice and communicate clear messages. Use **paralanguage**.
use overly complex language	ensure the words you use make sense and are meaningful to the person/people you are giving the message to
use **jargon** and **slang**	be mindful of **abbreviations** and **acronyms**

If people don't understand what it is you are saying, they will feel left out of the conversation and not believe that they have anything of value to contribute. They may lose confidence in you and your ability to understand their support needs and aspirations. This kind of miscommunication could mean that you support people incorrectly, which could put you and them at risk of harm.

Activity

reflect

1. Consider how frequently you use slang, jargon and abbreviations in your work. Think of examples of when you have been communicating with your team members, the people you support and other professionals.

In Practice

Grace is talking to Laura, to prepare for Laura's forthcoming review. They sit facing each other. Laura needs time to consider information and formulate a response. She sometimes needs encouragement to respond to a question.

Grace gives Laura eye contact when she is speaking and repeats back sections of the conversation to Laura, sometimes summarising what Laura has said, so that she is clear that she has understood.

Laura: 'I would like a job, but I'm not sure in what and I don't want to go on the bus on my own yet.'

Grace: 'OK, Laura, so you would like to think about different jobs that you could do, and then consider how you will get to and from work without using the bus on your own?'

Laura: 'Yes. I don't like the bus because it's full of noisy children and they push me.'

Grace: 'That doesn't sound very nice at all; I don't like noisy, packed buses either.'

1. The key points for **active listening** are: observing, repeating, summarising, reflecting feelings, and interpreting. Identify the key points of active listening in Laura's and Grace's conversation and consider how this supports effective communication.

Key Term

Active listening is a method of listening that involves understanding the content of a message as well as the intent of the sender and the circumstances under which the message is given.

Non-verbal skills include:

- body language such as facial expressions, posture, the positioning of your body, eye contact and the use of gesture
- signs and pictures, for example **blissymbol**, British sign language, Makaton and Braille
- assisted technology, such as speaking clocks, electronic sound boards and computer software
- use of proximity and touch.

Key Term

Blissymbol is a series of meaning-based symbols and pictures used by people who are unable to communicate verbally. Other sign and pictorial communication methods can be found on the internet.

Words are power; people have the right to communicate their needs and their preferences and to make decisions and choices to improve the quality of their life. Having the means to communicate empowers individuals. It also promotes their rights. Freedom of expression is in itself a human right, and it is essential that people are provided with the opportunities to express their views.

Working holistically ensures a person-centred approach. Person-centred services and self-determination are key principles of personalisation, along with human rights, citizenship and choice, and control. To empower people they will need the skills to speak up, and be involved in the design and delivery of their support.

Activity

1. Give examples of when you would use each of the following communication methods in your organisation:

   - personal

   - organisational

   - formal

   - informal

   - promotional

   - informative.

Figure 1.3 In good communication both parties are engaged

Be able to improve communication systems and practices that support positive outcomes for individuals

1.2

1.2.1 and 1.2.2 Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of communication systems and practices

In social care, you keep records to make sure that you support people safely and consistently, and most importantly in ways that they have said they would like to be supported. You need to be aware of the communication needs of the people you support as well as your organisation. This includes:

■ different methods for sharing and storing information

■ personal files and communication plans

■ individual daily diaries

■ staff communication books.

This will enable you to ensure consistency of information and that everyone is aware of their responsibilities in working together to enhance the quality of experience for the people that you support.

Activity

describe

1. List the communication systems you have in your workplace. Who has the responsibility for maintaining and improving these systems?

To monitor the effectiveness of communication systems and practices, you need to consider the purpose of the system and what outcomes it aims to achieve from implementation. For instance, if you were to consider a communication plan devised to support an individual, this plan would be monitored to identify progress and success. For example: is the individual's ability to communicate progressing and are they successfully communicating their needs and wishes?

Figure 1.4 It is important to have clear criteria against which to assess the success of a communication plan

You will need to:

■ establish a baseline for monitoring

■ decide on a framework for recording agreed information

■ agree a review process whereby information can be tracked against the baseline to identify any progression in meeting the outcomes of the communication plan

- consider whether the system successfully maintains confidentiality, complies with legal requirements, such as the Essential Standards for Safety and Quality, and meets with organisational requirements.

You would then use this information as a benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of the system in achieving these outcomes.

Activity

Consider an existing communication system within your workplace, for example team meetings.

1. What is the purpose of these meetings?

2. What outcomes do they aim to achieve?

3. Is confidentiality successfully maintained, and how?

4. Does the meeting comply with legal requirements?

5. Does the system of team meetings meet organisational requirements?

1.2.3 Propose improvements to communication systems and practices to address any shortcomings

You can address any identified areas for improvement in communication systems and practices in a number of ways. You could present your proposals through written reports or discussion, clarifying the areas that you feel require improvement and, where possible, giving evidenced examples.

For example, you may wish to implement a revised format for team meetings, ensuring there is a clear agenda and that, as Chair, you ensure all actions are time-bound and team

members are named as accountable against appropriate outcomes. You would need to consider who can access this information and when this is appropriate. It is therefore essential that records are current, complete and accurate.

Activity

1. If you work across a multi-agency team, and not everyone is present at your team's meeting, how do you ensure that there is shared access to records of decisions?

1.2.4 Lead the implementation of revised communication systems and practices

As manager, your role is to lead revisions to communication systems and practices by:

- communicating with staff on change through team meetings

- involving others, for example by listening to ideas and problems

- problem solving

- being able to compromise

- alleviating anxieties of others

- designating new roles, responsibilities and practices

- action planning that ensures timeframes for action, clarity on individual roles in achieving the outcome and then considering how this will be reviewed.

Activity

1. Consider each of the points above. Identify how you carry these out in relation to your own role.

Be able to improve communication systems and practices that support positive outcomes for individuals

1.3

1.3.1 Use communication systems to promote partnership working

When working in partnership, clear lines of communication will identify lines of reporting, clarify accountability and enhance any decision-making processes. They include:

- electronic databases
- written records, such as emails and faxes
- face-to-face conversations
- handover records
- individual communication diaries
- personal files.

Shared records are utilised through partnership working. They:

- promote effective working practices between professionals, agencies and organisations
- facilitate the well-being of individuals and positive and improved outcomes
- promote partnership working by ensuring that relevant information is observed and monitored by appropriate people.

Shared information between support services, for example day service and home service, is used to record events, observations and incidents, etc., and to ensure consistency of support for the individual.

As manager, you will communicate with external agencies on a number of levels. Your organisation should have a policy for partnership working that considers the sharing of information, correct recording procedures and appropriate referral processes to different professional services.

1.3.2 Compare the effectiveness of different communication systems for partnership working

Computerised systems manage large amounts of data and can be effective if used across agencies, provided everyone records data in the same way. There are obvious issues regarding confidentiality, which may mean that some agencies can only have restricted access. In these situations, it is essential that all partners are clear on the reporting mechanisms to manage the information, and that there is an agreed standardisation for completing records across partnerships.

Another potential issue with shared records and limited access is ensuring that all views are equally represented. This raises power issues, for example who has access and who is excluded. Computerised systems do, however, provide faster responses and retrieval of information as well as offering an increased frequency by which information is collected and shared.

Data must be accurately maintained and updated or it will not be useful. Inaccurate information leads to mistakes that could be distressing, for instance sending letters to deceased people.

Activity

reflect

1. Reflect on your own experience of communication systems used for partnership working. Which of these worked well and which did not?

1.3.3 Propose improvements to communication systems for partnership working

Identifying and reporting issues with communication systems and proposing improvements can be undertaken via meetings or in reports. It is important to liaise with external partners through meetings. During meetings, you need to be able to demonstrate skills in:

■ involving and listening to ideas and problems

■ finding solutions

■ being able to compromise

■ alleviating the anxieties of others.

Activity *In Practice*

Rob attends regional multi-disciplinary team meetings for practitioners supporting people with learning disabilities across the county. The meetings are an hour long and are set up to share information across agencies as well as update each other on any organisational changes.

The difficulty for Rob is that often an hour is not long enough to consider and manage all these issues. As a result, there are often no clear actions agreed. Rob feels like the meetings often go round in circles and nothing ever gets resolved.

1. What advice would you give to Rob so that he can propose improvements?

Activity

explain

Identify a system of communication within your own organisation that requires improvement.

1. What are the specific issues and what are the improvements required?

2. How will you propose these improvements?

Be able to use systems for effective information management

1.4.1 Explain legal and ethical tensions between maintaining confidentiality and sharing information

Your duty of care, and your responsibility to safeguard individual privacy, could cause legal and ethical tension. Ethical dilemmas arise frequently throughout the social care sector, particularly when you work so closely and intimately with the people you support. There are a number of areas where, for one reason or another, you will find your own views may be different from those of others.

In certain circumstances you may have to break confidentiality and share information with someone else. You will need to do this when someone is at serious risk of:

- harm to themselves
- harm to others
- exploitation or abuse
- significant financial gain or loss.

All local authorities and providers of social care and support are required to have in place procedures for safeguarding. You will have a duty of care to ensure that the individuals you support and your staff are protected from harm.

Activity

reflect

1. Consider legal and ethical tensions in your own workplace between maintaining confidentiality and sharing information.

The law and standards that rule and guide your practice, and the handling of personal and confidential information, are summarised through a number of key documents:

- The Data Protection Act (1984) states the law on processing data on others.
- The Human Rights Act (1998, Article 8) covers the right to respect for privacy and family life.
- The Freedom of Information Act (2000) gives individuals the right to ask any public body for all the information they have, including any personal information they hold on you.
- Essential Standards for Quality and Safety – Compliance Criteria place a duty on care providers to constantly check the quality of their services. Complaints should be acted on properly and personal records kept accurate, safe and confidential.
- The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) places duties on providers to ensure disabled people are protected from discrimination, for example by ensuring equal access to the same quality and range of services.

- The Equality Act (2010) brings together various legislation on disability, race and gender and extends the focus to encompass age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or beliefs, and sexual orientation.

- Public Interest Disclosure Act (1999) provides the means for people to raise genuine concerns about negligence, dangers to health and safety, crime and miscarriages of justice, regardless of the confidential nature of the information (often referred to as the 'Whistle Blowing Act').

1.4.2 Analyse the essential features of information sharing agreements within and between organisations

The area of confidential record sharing can be complex. It leads to questions such as:

- Who can access records and who is excluded?

- When is it appropriate to share?

- What are the boundaries to an agreement?

When considering information-sharing agreements, you will have to manage your duty of care and the best interest of the people you support. You will also need to respect the rights of the individual to privacy and dignity.

The Caldicott Principles provide the following framework for information sharing within and between organisations:

1. Justify the purpose for which the information is needed.

2. Only use personally identifiable information when absolutely necessary.

3. Use the minimum personal identifiable information possible; if feasible use an identifier number rather than a name.

4. Access to the information should be on a strict 'need-to-know' basis.

5. Everyone should be aware of his/her responsibilities to respect clients' confidentiality.

6. Understand and comply with the law. The most relevant legislation is the Data Protection Act 1998, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Activity

analyse

1. Consider information agreements and boundaries your organisation has with others. Identify the essential features of these and how having them impacts on the quality and consistency of information sharing.

1.4.3 Demonstrate use of information management systems that meet legal and ethical requirements

Information management systems must meet legal and ethical requirements, and you should ensure that confidentiality of all communications is maintained at all times. You should have policies and procedures in your workplace for secure record keeping, and it is your responsibility to ensure that your team is familiar with these.

Figure 1.5 You will need to make sure that confidentiality of all communications is maintained at all times

Activity

implement

1. How do you ensure records are kept secure and confidential within your workplace? Which legal frameworks do you work within? When do you share information and how do you ensure you only share it on a 'need-to-know' basis?

Activity

analyse

1. What communication systems do you have in your workplace that are specifically designed to maximise opportunities for the individuals you support and to enable them to participate in the design and delivery of their support?

Positively promoting individuals' rights is essential. Where relevant, you need to involve advocacy services to enable individuals to express their views. Other person-centred approaches to your communication systems could include:

■ ensuring that all relevant information is available in accessible formats

■ ensuring that any decisions about support services which affect the lives of people who receive support from them do not happen without solid person-centred consultation processes.

It is vital that people are enabled by accessible communication systems to shape their future experiences of adult social care support and services.

Activity

In Practice

Beryl lives in a home with 24 other elderly residents. She has her own room but shares all other facilities with the other residents. Beryl wants to make a complaint about the cleaning lady who doesn't knock before coming in to clean her room. She asks you to help.

1. What would you do next and then how would you resolve this issue?

Are you ready for assessment?

✔ **Do you know the range of communication requirements and systems in your workplace?**

✔ **Do you know why it is essential to support communication in health and social care?**

✔ **Do you know the legal framework for maintaining confidentiality?**

✔ **Do you know the value of personalisation and the necessity to ensure that the people you support have 'a voice'?**

✔ **Do you know the barriers and challenges to communication systems and how to overcome these?**

✔ Do you know how to monitor the effectiveness of communication systems in your workplace?

✔ Do you know the impact on communication systems of multi-agency working and record sharing?

✔ Do you know how to maintain accurate records that are concise, complete and current?

✔ Do you know how to involve and listen to people, identify problems and create and implement solutions?

✔ Do you know the different communication systems for partnership working?

✔ Do you know the key points relevant to communication systems from the Data Protection Act (1998) and Care Quality Commission's 'Essential Standards for Safety and Quality'?

✔ Do you know the ethical features of information-sharing agreements within and between organisations?

✔ Do you know how to use information management systems that meet legal and ethical requirements?

✔ Do you know the circumstances when information can be shared and the boundaries of information-sharing agreements?

✔ Can you identify groups and individuals within your sphere of work and their different communication needs?

✔ Can you give examples used within your own workplace to explain the range of different communication methods?

✔ Can you analyse the importance of supporting communication in order to empower individuals, promote their rights and support personalisation?

✔ Can you identify how your organisation and you as a practitioner work to maintain confidentiality as part of your communication systems?

✔ Can you list the different types of barriers and challenges that could affect communication systems, identify three examples in your own workplace and suggest ways to overcome these?

✔ Can you lead the implementation of revised communication systems and practices within your own workplace?

✔ Can you use information management systems to meet legal and ethical requirements?

✔ Can you ensure the positive promotion of individual rights through the use of advocacy and person-centred approaches?

Key Term

Personalisation is the process by which state-provided services are adapted to suit the needs and preferences of the service user; in social care this means everyone having choice and control over the services they receive along with greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

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