

Wee tips on the **art of communication**, because sometimes we all need to share and care.



Decide what it is you want to share and how you plan to communicate that, if there are any communication barriers to be addressed, what can you do to help overcome them? If possible, pick a time and place where you can communicate without distractions e.g. reaching out to a friend whose attention maybe focused on their kids at that moment may not be a good idea, arranging a time where you can both connect undisturbed and privately may work better.

Let the person know what your intentions are. Sometimes when communicating how we feel the other person may worry, they need to 'fix it' Rather than focusing on what you are sharing, they are thinking about a solution. Opening up can start with "I don't need you to fix anything or jump in with a solution, I just need someone to be there while I share what I am thinking and feeling, which can help me decide what next." You are setting the scene and letting the person know you want to share and what you ask of them is to be there for you. Let the person know, just how much it meant to you, and you appreciate them offering this time and letting you know, they care.

Be kind if the person receiving the information asks a question, this means they are paying attention. It also may mean they need time to process the information and make sure they are understanding what is being shared. Effective communication happens when both parties respect each other, trust each other, and feel safe to be open and honest about how they feel. Recognising sometimes there can be practical barriers to communication and working together to find a way these can be overcome.

People aren't mind readers, so you need to take responsibility for being understood. Don't worry if you feel what you are sharing is maybe all over the place. Sometimes when we do open up for the first time, we have so much to share it comes in a rush. Just be patient with the person we are communicating with and say "I know this may not seem to make sense, bear with me" Sometimes we need that space of just letting it all pour out so we ourselves can start to make sense of what we are thinking and feeling. This is why its important people know we want them to simply receive what we want to share not solve anything. Sometimes we just need to know we are not alone and someone is paying attention, even when what we are sharing doesn't always make sense, even to ourselves. Find a method of communication that works for you, if there are barriers to communication explore how they can be overcome e.g. writing it down, or using sign language, or an interpreter. Sometimes communication itself can be a challenge, recognising barriers and seeking ways to overcome them, is also part of the art of communication.



How to be there for someone who needs to share what they are thinking and feeling with us.

You are patient. Sometimes when someone has held things in for a long time they don't know where to start or seem to be all over the place. An effective communicator will understand this and will be patient realising it can be hard to share. You won't force the other person to explain, or make them feel they need to hurry up. Creating a safe relaxing space helps you focus on the person and the person who is sharing, feel more comfortable to open up. If time is tight, share that to begin with, but arrange another time as soon as possible where you don't need to rush off e.g. to collect the children from school. People do understand, when we take time to communicate what is happening.

It maybe what you are going through needs more professional support than a good friend or communicator can offer. They may suggest connecting you with someone else. Please don't feel that doesn't mean they don't care; it just means they recognise it may be helpful for you to share with someone else too. Sometimes opening up to a friend or family member, helps us realise what we are going through does need more professional help. Professionals also need to be good communicators and if there are barriers seek ways these can be overcome.

If you are a British Sign Language user www.contactscotland-bsl.org offers a service which enables contact with public bodies and third sector services through Video Relay. If affected by sight loss, please contact www.rnib.org.uk

The person knows you are giving them your full attention with your eye

contact and body language and perhaps occasional gestures of encouragement to continue, the person senses. you are interested and want to learn more.



You are focused on the person whom you are communicating with. You are not

thinking about what you are going to reply, or, have for dinner, what else you need to do at work etc. At this moment your focus is on the other person and what they are sharing, so they know, they have your full attention.



Non-judgemental, an effective communicator knows, this isn't about their views, or what they think this is about. They want to connect with what we have to share, what is important and matters to us.

Practice some relaxation, it's easier to talk about how we feel if we are relaxed, something as simple as a 3min relaxer or some mindful breathing can make all the difference. There are examples of this on COPE Scotland's website www.cope-scotland.org.

Communication can use all our senses including our sense of touch. For someone who is deafblind tactile communication may work best. This is where words are spelt onto the person's hand using set positions and movement. For more information <https://deafblind.org.uk/information-advice/living-with-deafblindness/communication/> and <https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/information-and-advice/communication/tactile-alphabet/> Also visit <https://inclusivecommunication.scot/> This website is hosted by Disability Equality Scotland in partnership with Sense Scotland. It is aimed at anyone with an interest in improving their inclusive communication tools and processes. The Hub aims to promote inclusion and accessibility in its content and structure. This link also offers information on issues to consider during the COVID19 pandemic.

An effective communicator is aware of their emotions. They don't get angry, frustrated, or defensive. Sometimes being there for someone can be challenging, as we feel helpless and want to help but don't know what to do. This is why creating a relaxing space and time matters for both of you. Recognise also, sometimes in sharing someone can become angry, we are seeking to be kind and our feelings matter too. Gently remind the person you want to try and understand and if you haven't you are sorry and explore how the breakdown in communication occurred to find ways to address it. This is sometimes why sharing with a loved one can be more difficult as we worry, they may misunderstand what we are saying and get defensive.

Remember there can be health challenges that impact on communication. Someone going through chemotherapy may find concentration difficult so be mindful and give space for the person to share. Someone perhaps experiencing dementia may also require additional considerations when involved in communication. We are all different, thinking about making a connection, seeking help to do so, or learning new skills, can help us all build a more connected world. Sometimes something very practical like wearing a face mask which means your mouth is still visible, can make a world of difference in connecting to someone who lip reads.

Don't bombard with questions. Effective communicators encourage us to share. They don't bombard us with questions but to show they are paying attention they may prompt us with phrases like "help me understand more about", or, "I sense this has made you feel angry, sad, confused". This helps us feel they are paying attention and they are trying to understand, and it also gives us a chance if they aren't understanding for us to explain e.g. "no I am not angry I am just very frustrated".



Recognise this is the beginning of opening up. It maybe it will take time to work through what is causing you distress. Sometimes things happen which take time to resolve, or, it maybe you need time to come to terms with what is happening. But before any journey to a better place can begin, we need to find a starting point, and that can be as simple as letting someone know, "I am not fine, this is why". Recognising there is an issue, makes it easier to explore what next and this is easier when shared with someone else.



An effective listener is empathic as opposed to sympathetic. Empathy is about understanding the feelings of another and sharing them. It is around a shared connection about what it means to be human. Sympathy can be more around pity and being sorry for someone else's misfortune and many of us don't want someone's pity, we do not want anyone to feel sorry for us, we want to be understood.

Useful Contacts

Sometimes someone needs more support than a compassionate friend and knowing local support and services to help link the person can help you feel more confident to be there for them. Sometimes someone is so despairing they may think of suicide. Attending a suicide first aid workshop can help you be ready willing and able to offer a suicide first aid intervention. There maybe other challenges a person faces in communication e.g. where someone experiences dyslexia. We hope the following links offer some places to visit which can offer more information you may find helpful.

RNIB <https://www.rnib.org.uk/>

RNID <https://rnid.org.uk/>

Inclusive communication <https://inclusivecommunication.scot/>

National Autistic Society <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication>

NHS 24 NHS Language Line <https://www.nhs24.scot/get-in-touch/language-line/>

Samaritans Freephone 116 123

British Dyslexia Association

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/adults/living-with-a-dyslexic-partner>

Zero Suicide Alliance Online Suicide Awareness Training www.zerosuicidealliance.com

If you are deaf and experiencing a crisis text **DEAF to 85258** for free and immediate support

Alzheimer's Society <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/symptoms/tips-for-communicating-dementia>

Hearing link <https://www.hearinglink.org/living/lipreading-communicating/how-to-lipread/>



You matter, your wellbeing matters

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