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Ageing Well

WP3/ A1 - Activity 2

Module D: Effective Ways to Communicate with the
Elders

HAPPSY

Lesson Plan 1: Barriers to Effective Communication





Lesson Plan 1: Barriers to Effective Communication

Objective:

The experiential activities in this lesson plan aim to improve communication with elderly individuals through a combination of group discussions, individual reflections, collaborative planning, and role-play. These activities are designed to introduce participants to the unique challenges and barriers faced when communicating with the elderly, including physical, psychological, and environmental factors. By gathering firsthand accounts and fostering empathy, participants explore and critically think about these barriers, enhancing their awareness and understanding. The activities encourage the development of practical strategies and effective communication techniques through teamwork and individual insight. Role-play serves as a dynamic tool for practicing these skills helping participants refine their approach to real-life interactions with elderly individuals, ultimately building confidence and competence in adapting communication styles to suit diverse needs.

Duration: 60 minutes in total (including all activities)

Activities:

- Brief group discussion: Barriers to Effective Communication (10 minutes)
- Individual activity: Reflecting on Barriers (10 minutes)
- Develop a Plan: Overcoming Barriers (20 minutes)
- Role-play: Practicing Effective Communication (20 minutes)



Materials needed:

Activity 1

- Whiteboard or flipchart with markers
- Notepads and pens for participants (optional for note-taking)

Activity 2

- Paper or notepad and pen for each participant.

Activity 3

- Flip charts or whiteboards and markers.
- Handouts summarizing key communication strategies (optional).

Activity 4

- Scenario sheets with brief descriptions of various situations (health discussions, providing instructions, casual conversations).

Learning outcomes:

- Understand the unique communication challenges and barriers faced by elderly individuals, including physiological and psychological aspects.
- Gain firsthand insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of communication difficulties with the elderly.



- Develop empathy for the elderly by discussing reasons behind communication barriers.
- Enhance critical thinking skills to identify and strategize ways to overcome these communication challenges.
- Reflect individually on the different types of barriers (physical, psychological, social/environmental) that can impede effective communication with the elderly.
- Categorize and understand the complexities involved in different communication barriers to prepare for real-life interactions.
- Collaboratively create and discuss practical strategies and techniques to enhance communication with the elderly.
- Apply learned communication strategies in controlled scenarios through role-play to practice and refine communicative behavior.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Jack, K., Ridley, C., & Turner, S. (2024). Effective communication with older people. *Nursing older people*, 36(3).

Kemper S, Lalac JC. Addressing the Communication Needs of an Aging Society. In: National Research Council (US) Steering Committee for the Workshop on Technology for Adaptive Aging; Pew RW, Van Hemel SB, editors. *Technology for Adaptive Aging*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2004. 5. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK97337/>



Park, E. K., & Song, M. (2005). Communication barriers perceived by older patients and nurses. *International journal of nursing studies*, 42(2), 159-166.

Sharp Emerson, M. (2021, August 30). 8 Ways You Can Improve Your Communication Skills. Professional and Executive Development, Harvard Division of Continuing Education. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/8-ways-you-can-improve-your-communication-skills/>

Swavely-Verenna, K. (2023, November 23). Elderly Communication Barriers. GRISWOLD. <https://www.griswoldcare.com/blog/elderly-communication-barriers/>

Turzák, T., & Turzáková, J. (2017). Role play as a method of improving communication skills of professionals working with clients in institutionalized care—a literature review. *International Journal on Language, Literature and Culture in Education*, 4(1), 34-42.

Yorkston, K. M., Bourgeois, M. S., & Baylor, C. R. (2010). Communication and aging. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics*, 21(2), 309-319.



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Activity 1: Barriers to Effective Communication

Brief Group Discussion



ACTIVITY 1

Title of the activity: Brief group discussion – Barriers to Effective Communication

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Communication with elderly individuals can often present unique challenges due to a variety of age-related changes. These challenges can stem from physiological factors such as hearing loss, cognitive decline, or speech difficulties, as well as psychological factors including increased susceptibility to loneliness or depression. Understanding these issues is crucial in developing effective communication strategies tailored to the elderly population.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o To introduce the concept of communication challenges and barriers
- o To gather firsthand accounts and perceptions of communication difficulties from the participants.
- o To foster empathy by discussing why these barriers might exist.
- o To encourage critical thinking about how to overcome these challenges in practical scenarios.

Materials Needed:

- o Whiteboard or flipchart with markers
- o Notepads and pens for participants (optional for note-taking)

Duration of the activity: 10 minutes



Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Begin by introducing the topic and briefly explaining why effective communication with the elderly is important, touching on the physiological and psychological aspects that may affect their communication abilities.

Step 2: Pose the first question to the class "What challenges have you noticed when communicating with elderly individuals?" Allow the participants to share their experiences freely, making sure to write down key points on the whiteboard or flipchart.

Step 3: Move on to the second question, "Why do you think communication barriers may arise with older adults?" Guide the discussion towards understanding underlying reasons, such as health issues or generational differences in communication styles and values. Also encourage participants to reflect on their own barriers (e.g. stereotypes).

Step 4: Summarize the key points discussed and how these insights can impact the participants' approach to communicating with the elderly. Highlight any common themes or solutions that were mentioned during the discussion.

Tips and recommendations:

- o Make sure to engage quieter participants by asking direct questions or soliciting their opinions to ensure a variety of perspectives.
- o Be aware that this topic could touch on personal or sensitive areas as some participants may have close relationships with elderly individuals who are struggling.
- o Encourage participants to use specific examples when sharing experiences, as this can help in identifying practical solutions to the challenges discussed.



List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Jack, K., Ridley, C., & Turner, S. (2024). Effective communication with older people. *Nursing older people*, 36(3).

Kemper S, Lacal JC. Addressing the Communication Needs of an Aging Society. In: National Research Council (US) Steering Committee for the Workshop on Technology for Adaptive Aging; Pew RW, Van Hemel SB, editors. *Technology for Adaptive Aging*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2004. 5. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK97337/>

Park, E. K., & Song, M. (2005). Communication barriers perceived by older patients and nurses. *International journal of nursing studies*, 42(2), 159-166.

Swavely-Verenna, K. (2023, November 23). Elderly Communication Barriers. GRISWOLD. <https://www.griswoldcare.com/blog/elderly-communication-barriers/>



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Activity 2: Reflecting on barriers- Individual activity



ACTIVITY 2

Title of the activity: Individual activity – Reflecting on barriers

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Communication barriers can significantly impact the effectiveness of interactions between younger individuals and the elderly. These barriers can be physical, such as sensory impairments; psychological, involving cognitive and emotional changes; or social/environmental, relating to the contexts in which interactions take place. Understanding these barriers is critical for developing strategies to facilitate clear, compassionate, and effective communication.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o To facilitate individual reflection on the various barriers that can impede communication with elderly individuals.
- o To enable participants to identify and categorize different types of communication barriers.
- o To enhance participants' awareness and understanding of the complexities involved in communicating with the elderly.
- o To prepare participants for future interactions by considering these barriers in their communication strategies.

Materials Needed:

- o Paper or notepad and pen for each participant.

Duration of the activity: 10 minutes



Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Briefly introduce the activity, explaining the importance of recognizing and understanding different types of communication barriers with elderly individuals. Emphasize that this awareness can improve their interactions.

Step 2: Ask participants to spend 6 minutes in quiet reflection to think about and write down different barriers they believe can affect communication with elderly people. Prompt them to consider categories such as physical (hearing or vision impairment), psychological (cognitive decline, emotional state), and social/environmental (cultural differences, isolation).

Step 3: Instruct participants to jot down their thoughts on each type of barrier, possibly providing examples from their own experiences or hypothetical scenarios.

Step 4: Conclude the activity by reminding participants that these reflections will be useful in understanding and overcoming communication challenges in real-life situations.

Tips and recommendations:

- o Prompt participants to think deeply about how each barrier could affect communication, not just in terms of what the barriers are, but how they might manifest in everyday interactions.
- o You might want to provide a simple template or framework on the paper they are using, such as headings for each type of barrier, to help organize their thoughts.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Yorkston, K. M., Bourgeois, M. S., & Baylor, C. R. (2010). Communication and aging. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics*, 21(2), 309-319.



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Activity 3: Overcoming Barriers- Develop a Plan

Group Activity



ACTIVITY 3

Title of the activity: Develop a Plan – Overcoming Barriers

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Effective communication with the elderly requires overcoming the barriers that hinder the exchange of information and emotions. Active listening, using simple language, being aware of non-verbal cues, and creating a comfortable environment are all critical strategies in enhancing communication. These methods help bridge the gap caused by sensory impairments, cognitive changes, and emotional states that can complicate communication with older adults.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- To enable participants to collaboratively create practical strategies to overcome communication barriers with elderly individuals.
- To identify and discuss various techniques that enhance communication.
- To encourage teamwork in developing effective communication plans.
- To formulate actionable steps that can be implemented in real-world interactions with the elderly.

Materials Needed:

- Flip charts or whiteboards and markers.
- Handouts summarizing key communication strategies (optional).

Duration of the activity: 20 minutes



Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Divide participants into small groups of 3-5 participants.

Step 2: Explain the purpose of the activity and provide examples of the strategies they should consider (active listening, using clear and simple language, paying attention to non-verbal cues, creating a comfortable communication environment).

Step 3: Each group works together to develop a plan that includes:

- Active Listening: Techniques for ensuring they are fully present and engaged.
- Using Clear, Simple Language: Specific examples of how to simplify language without patronizing.
- Non-verbal Cues: Methods for reading and responding to non-verbal communication.
- Comfortable Environment: Ways to set up a physical and emotional space conducive to open communication.

Step 4: Groups take turns presenting their strategies to the class, with instructors and peers providing feedback on the viability and creativity of the plans.

Tips and recommendations:

- Let participants know that innovative and creative solutions are welcome, and they should think beyond conventional methods.



- Stress the importance of actionable and realistic plans that can be implemented in various settings, such as at home, in healthcare facilities, or during social interactions.
- Encourage groups to build on the insights gained from previous activities, using personal experiences as case studies.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Sharp Emerson, M. (2021, August 30). 8 Ways You Can Improve Your Communication Skills. Professional and Executive Development, Harvard Division of Continuing Education. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/8-ways-you-can-improve-your-communication-skills>

Handout summarizing key communication strategies



Active listening: *Active listening is the practice of fully concentrating on and engaging with the speaker to understand their message. It involves not just hearing the words being said but also paying attention to tone, emotion, and context.*

Using clear, simple language: *Using clear, simple language means communicating in a way that is easy to understand by avoiding complex words, jargon, or overly technical terms. The goal is to convey the message in the most straightforward and direct way possible to prevent misunderstandings and ensure clarity.*

Paying attention to non-verbal cues: *Paying attention to non-verbal cues involves observing and interpreting body language, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice to gain a deeper understanding of what a person is communicating. Non-verbal cues often reflect emotions and attitudes that may not be fully expressed through words.*

Creating a comfortable communication environment: *Creating a comfortable communication environment means establishing a setting where people feel safe, respected, and open to sharing their thoughts and feelings. This involves eliminating distractions, fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere, and encouraging open dialogue where both parties feel heard and valued.*



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Activity 4: Practicing Effective Communication- Role-Play

Pair Activity



ACTIVITY 4

Title of the activity: Role-Play – Practicing Effective Communication

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Role-play is a powerful educational tool that allows participants to practice skills in a controlled, experiential setting. This method is particularly effective in teaching communication because it provides participants with real-time feedback and the opportunity to reflect on their own communicative behaviour. Role-playing different scenarios, especially with elderly individuals, helps participants understand both verbal and non-verbal dynamics, practice empathy, and apply communication strategies learned in earlier activities.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- To give participants practical experience in navigating both effective and ineffective communication strategies with elderly individuals.
- To illustrate the contrast between effective and ineffective communication methods.
- To reinforce the importance of adapting communication styles to suit the needs of elderly individuals.
- To develop confidence and skills in handling real-life communication scenarios with the elderly.



Materials Needed:

- Scenario sheets with brief descriptions of various situations (health discussions, providing instructions, casual conversations).

Duration of the activity: 20 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Briefly explain the objectives and the importance of role-play in learning effective communication skills. Emphasize the focus on both effective and ineffective communication techniques.

Step 2: Hand out scenario sheets to each pair, ensuring a variety of situations are covered among the groups.

Step 3: Allow pairs a few minutes to read over their scenarios and plan out their role-play. They should decide who will initially play the elderly individual and who will be the communicator.

Step 4: Each pair performs their role-play, first demonstrating ineffective communication, then redoing the scenario using effective communication techniques.

Step 5: Switch Roles (optional, if time allows): Pairs switch roles and repeat the process with either the same or a new scenario to gain perspective from both sides of the interaction.

Step 6: After each role-play, participants share how both the ineffective and effective communication impacted the understanding and emotional state of the 'elderly' participant.



Tips and recommendations:

- After each role-play, encourage participants to reflect on their experience and discuss what they learned from both the role of the communicator and the elderly individual.
- If there are an odd number of participants, use an observer role to provide additional feedback and to engage all participants actively.
- Remind participants to pay attention not just to the words used but also to body language, facial expressions, and tone, which are crucial in effective communication.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Turzák, T., & Turzáková, J. (2017). Role play as a method of improving communication skills of professionals working with clients in institutionalized care—a literature review. *International Journal on Language, Literature and Culture in Education*, 4(1), 34-42.



Role-Play Scenarios

Scenario 1: Discussing Health Concerns

Ineffective Communication

Context: The setting is a small clinic room where an elderly patient, Mr. Johnson, is sitting with a nurse, Nurse Smith. Mr. Johnson has recently been prescribed new medication for high blood pressure.

Role-play:

- o **Nurse Smith:** (quickly flipping through the chart) “Mr. Johnson, you need to take your antihypertensive medication twice daily and come back for a follow-up in a month. Any questions?”
- o **Mr. Johnson:** (looking confused) “Uh, what’s antihypertensive? How do I take it?”
- o **Nurse Smith:** (hastily) “Just read the prescription bottle, it’s all there. You should know how to use it by now.”

Key Points:

- Nurse Smith uses medical jargon (e.g., "antihypertensive") without explanation.
- She speaks too quickly and fails to engage Mr. Johnson, leaving him confused and without proper instructions.



Effective Communication

Context: The same setting, with Nurse Smith taking a different approach. She sits down beside Mr. Johnson, making eye contact.

Role-play:

- **Nurse Smith:** (slowly) “Mr. Johnson, you have a new medicine for your blood pressure. It’s important for your health. You need to take this medicine every morning and evening.”
- **Mr. Johnson:** (nodding) “Okay, I think I can do that. But what does it do?”
- **Nurse Smith:** “Great question! It helps to lower your blood pressure, which keeps your heart healthy. Can you repeat back what I just said about when to take it?”

Key Points:

- Nurse Smith uses simple language and avoids jargon.
- She speaks slowly and checks for understanding by asking Mr. Johnson to repeat the instructions.
- She engages Mr. Johnson by addressing his questions and concerns.



Scenario 2: Providing Instructions

Ineffective Communication

Context: In a home setting, the caregiver, Sarah, is trying to explain to elderly Mrs. Davis how to use her new walker. Mrs. Davis is unsure and a bit nervous about using it.

Role-play:

- o **Sarah:** (looking at her watch) “Just hold it, and don’t fall. You know how to use it. Let’s move on to the next thing.”
- o **Mrs. Davis:** (looking overwhelmed) “I... I’m not sure I understand. How do I hold it?”

Key Points:

- o Sarah rushes through the instructions and assumes Mrs. Davis already knows how to use the walker.
- o There’s no demonstration or support, leaving Mrs. Davis feeling anxious and confused.



Effective Communication

Context: Sarah is now more patient and engaged, sitting down with Mrs. Davis and holding the walker to demonstrate.

Role-play:

- o **Sarah:** (smiling) “Let’s practice using your walker together. First, hold it like this—stand up straight and make sure it’s in front of you.”
- o **Mrs. Davis:** (tentatively) “Like this?”
- o **Sarah:** “Exactly! Now take a small step forward with your stronger leg, and then bring the walker forward. Let’s do it together slowly. I’m right here to help you.”

Key Points:

- o Sarah demonstrates the use of the walker step-by-step.
- o She uses encouraging language and engages Mrs. Davis in the process.
- o The focus is on reassurance and clarity, fostering a supportive environment.



Scenario 3: Casual Conversations

Ineffective Communication

Context: At a family gathering, Tom, a busy professional, is visiting his grandmother, Mrs. Wilson, who feels lonely and isolated.

Role-play:

- o **Tom:** (rushing in) “Hey, Grandma! I’ve been so busy with work. You wouldn’t believe how hectic it is! I barely have time to eat or sleep.”
- o **Mrs. Wilson:** (looking down) “Oh, that sounds tough, dear. But what about...?”

Key Points:

- o Tom dominates the conversation, focusing solely on his own life.
- o He speaks quickly, showing little interest in Mrs. Wilson’s feelings or experiences.

Effective Communication

Context: In the same setting, Tom now takes a moment to sit down next to Mrs. Wilson, making her feel valued.

Role-play:

- o **Tom:** (gently) “Hi, Grandma! I’d love to hear about your day. What have you been up to lately?”



- o **Mrs. Wilson:** (brightening) “Well, I’ve been working on my garden. The roses are blooming beautifully!”
- o **Tom:** “That sounds wonderful! What colors do you have? I’d love to see pictures!”

Key Points:

- o Tom asks open-ended questions, inviting Mrs. Wilson to share her experiences.
- o He listens actively and engages with her stories, showing genuine interest in her life.
- o This fosters a warm, caring atmosphere that encourages communication.