

Good communication



TIP SHEET

We communicate with people every day – at work, at home and in the community.

How we communicate with others is very important, particularly when we want to convey a specific message to someone or we need to work with other people to achieve a task.

Do other people hear what you want to say? How do you know?

Sometimes people hear a different message to what you were intending. This may be because of the language used or your body language.

It may be the result of the other person's different experiences and associated different meanings. It may also be because you are thinking about something else and not really hearing what the other person is saying.

It's important to communicate effectively at home and at work as misunderstandings can lead to disagreements and strong emotions such as anger and sadness.

These emotions and the accompanying behaviours can then be misinterpreted and escalate the situation and make future interactions more difficult.

In this tip sheet, we outline six key communication strategies to help you communicate clearly and effectively, so that your messages are received as you want them to be heard.

! Six tips for good communication

1. Attend

- Be present. Focus on the person without being distracted by internal or external noises.
- Create a comfortable space to talk.
- Have relaxed, open body posture. This conveys the message that you are available.
- Use a calm, relaxed voice.

2. Practice active listening

- Make eye contact.
- Listen well. Find out what the real issue is, and listen to both sides of the story.
- Listen for more than the information being relayed. Listen for the emotions and for underlying issues.
- Affirm that you are engaged while the person is talking. For example, by saying 'hmm' and 'yes', nodding your head, and using body language.
- Let the person finish what they are saying before responding.

3. Use empathy

- Communicate that you understand their words.
- Think about what is the most important part of what they have said.
- Reflect back, in your own words, what the person has said, and ask them if you have understood them correctly.
- Use sentences such as, 'It sounds like you...', 'It seems you are...', and 'Are you feeling... because...?'

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4. Ask questions

- Clarify the issue, including what, when, how, who and why.
- Is there missing information? Ask questions to find out more.
- Use open questions. These provide an opportunity to give more information. For example, 'Tell me about how this has affected you.'
- Use closed questions only when specific information is needed. For example, 'How long has this been going on for?'

5. Summarise

- Paraphrase what has been said to demonstrate that you understand the issue.
- Be concise.
- Focus on content.
- Ask if your understanding is correct.

6. Manage your emotions

- If you are experiencing high emotions, try and calm yourself down. Try activities such as breathing slowly and deeply, using a meditation or mindfulness app, going for a walk, making a cup of tea, talking to a neutral party, or squeezing a stress ball.
- Take time out from the conversation.
- If the other person is experiencing high emotions, ask what would help them.
- Suggest meeting at a specific time and day when all parties can be present and able to discuss an issue rationally.

More information and resources

If you're experiencing intense feelings about a conversation, the following meditation and mindfulness resources may help you to stay calm.

- **Smiling Mind:** <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>
- **Insight Timer:** <https://insighttimer.com>
- **Beyond Blue:** <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/relaxation-exercises>
- **ReachOut Australia:** <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps>

For more resources on communication, relationships and wellbeing, visit www.rav.org.au/resources

Need support?

If you'd like to talk to a counsellor about your relationships and how you communicate, we're here to help. Visit www.rav.org.au/counselling to find your nearest centre.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.