

Communication Barriers Exercise

(From Sense Scotland's Making Sense of Communication training)

Time allocation: Around 20 minutes depending on the size of your group

Resources: Printed sample statements

This exercise is best done with a group, but it can be amended to be done with just one person and the communication mentor, who should play the part of Partner A or B.

- 1) Ask people to split into pairs with one becoming Partner A and one becoming Partner B. Give each person a piece of paper with a message on it. (See below for the messages to give them – you should write these out beforehand). They shouldn't look at this message at this time. Instead, tell them to have a discussion about anything at all that comes to mind. As the discussion unfolds, tell them you will shout out instructions for A and B at various points.
- 2) After a few minutes discussion, ask Partner A to stand up. Tell them to keep their discussions going.
- 3) After a few more minutes tell Partner B to turn their head away from A.
- 4) Then tell A to sit back down but close their eyes.
- 5) Tell A to also turn their head away from B.
- 6) Tell them to turn back-to-back with each other and keep their conversation going.
- 7) Then shout out to STOP the conversation.
- 8) Ask Partner A to look at their message. Without using any speech or recognised sign language, they should pass their message to B. (If you have not written out any messages, then just ask partners to tell each other what they did last night, or what they had for dinner etc).
- 9) Ask Partner B to look at their message. Without using any speech or recognised sign language, and while sitting on their hands, they should pass their message to A.
- 10) Then have some general feedback on the exercise, concentrating first on the messages. Who managed to pass their message on? How did you do this? How did the other guess what was meant? Were any messages easier than others? Why is this? What's make it sometimes easy and sometimes difficult?
- 11) Then discuss the earlier part of the exercise. What was easy? When did communication become difficult? Why was this? What barriers get in the way? What would make this easier?

Messages to pass to your partner (These can be amended to fit particular venues and situations – i.e. make some of the statements specific to the location where training is taking place).

It's cold in here

It's really hot in here

What did you have for dinner last night?

My favourite meal is Chilli con Carne.

I like Coronation Street

Do you have any children?

I am completely bored in here.

I hope it's lunch soon.

I hope we get spaghetti for lunch.

That's really nice wallpaper in here.

What a horrible colour of carpet.

You've got nice shoes.

I like watching TV.

I enjoy going to the cinema.

General themes that might emerge from this exercise:

- 1) It is important to have a response – without eye contact or another way of knowing that your partner is listening to you, it can make you feel very frustrated – how might this relate to the people you support?
- 2) Background noise makes communication very difficult.
- 3) Different levels (e.g. standing and sitting) creates problems and barriers.
- 4) Concrete objects that in the here and now are easier to talk about than something removed from the situation. (For example, you can point to a TV in the room if one is there, but you'll be less likely to point to Chilli con Carne).
- 5) Feelings are easy to talk about if we can re-create a facial expression or body movement to indicate what's in our mind. More subtle emotions are difficult to portray without words.
- 6) The importance of seeing communication as a partnership.

For each point that is made by participants, challenge people to consider what this means for the people they support and the communication partnerships that exist between them. What, for example, does it tell us about signifiers and objects of reference? If somebody they are supporting wishes to talk about an activity they have done together, would they have a way of doing this?

Sample statements

The following are some message statements that you can print and cut into strips to be used with the final part of the communication barriers exercise.

My favourite film is Bambi

Yesterday, I had a big fight with my friend.

I am cold.

I don't like the colour of the walls in here.

I had chilli for tea last night

I like your shoes, where did you get them?

I am looking forward to lunch, what time are we eating?

I am having pasta for my tea tonight

Did you watch the tennis at the weekend?

I don't feel very well, it is too hot in here.

I am hungry, could I have an apple please?

I watched a great film last night.

I am going to a friends wedding next weekend in London.

Where is the nearest shop to here?

Do you know when the next bus to
Edinburgh is?

Could you help me read this please?

My favourite book is *The Catcher in the
Rye*.

Did you see the football last night?

What time is the meeting and where is it
held?