

## Communication skills

### Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge of the value of basic communication skills as a way:

of helping a person who self-harms or is suicidal feel supported by someone who is focused on their concerns and needs, and who helps them:

feel respected, heard and understood

feel connected to others (and so experience themselves as less isolated and alone)

express themselves and make sense of their experience

reflect on and request the support that they feel is appropriate to their immediate needs

for the listener to gain an accurate sense of a person's concerns and needs

An ability to draw on knowledge that where verbal communication is challenging for a person, other forms of communication (such as drawing, writing or play) are appropriate and may be the main way in which they communicate

an ability to make use of a range of communication strategies where this is indicated

An ability to draw on knowledge that asking about and talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts does not increase the likelihood of suicide attempts, and that it is helpful to communicate openly and frankly

### Application

An ability to deploy communication skills that help to engage a person who self-harms or is suicidal in a collaborative discussion of their circumstances and immediate needs

an ability to make adjustments for people who may have difficulty expressing themselves (e.g. because of a disability)

In order to gain an accurate sense of a person's account, an ability for the listener to be aware of (and to avoid) any 'filters' they may find themselves imposing, for example:

listening in a judgemental way

making assumptions (in advance, or instead, of listening fully)

using labels as explanations

An ability to convey an attentive stance through body language, for example:

sitting close (but not too close) to the person

sitting 'square on' or next to the person (rather than across a desk or table)

adopting an open posture

maintaining an appropriate level of eye contact

An ability to listen attentively to a person by:
actively listening to their verbal account and trying to make sense of their experiences, behaviours and feelings, and the social context in which these arise
listening to the tone and pace of what is said, as well as its content
allowing silences if this appears to help them express themselves at their own pace
attending to non-verbal behaviour such as agitation (as a guide to the areas which are more intensely distressing or as an indicator of 'unspoken' feelings that might be difficult to express verbally)
adopting a pace that 'matches' theirs
An ability to help a person expand on or explore relevant issues by using:
statements (e.g. brief summaries of what has already been said)
questions
non-verbal prompts
An ability to ask both:
'closed' questions (that usually have a specific answer and which are best used to establish factual information)
'open' questions (that require more than a yes/no answer and which encourage discussion)
An ability to judge when questioning is being experienced as helpful and when it is less so (e.g. when a person is feeling 'grilled')
An ability to listen empathically to a person by:
actively trying to understand their perspective and the way they understand their situation
'stepping into their shoes' in order to understand their world
taking on board and recognising their feelings (but taking care not to mirror these feelings in oneself)
An ability to maintain an awareness of one's own perspective or frame of reference in order not to inadvertently impose it
An ability to convey a basic and empathic understanding of what has been said or conveyed, for example by:
paraphrasing what has been said (but not repeating verbatim)
making short summaries that try to connect various aspects of what has been conveyed
using appropriate non-verbal behaviour that 'chimes' with what has been said (e.g. through appropriate facial expressions)
An ability to check a person's understanding by asking them to summarise the discussion and any decisions that have been agreed
An ability to ask a person whether all the issues that they wished to raise have been discussed