

## 4. Engagement and communication



### 4.1. Communication skills

Throughout this subdomain, 'person'/'people' refers to children/young people, parents/carers, family members and significant others.



#### Knowledge

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the value of basic communication skills both:
  - to help people feel supported by a practitioner who is focused on their concerns and needs, and that helps them:
    - feel respected, heard and understood
    - feel connected to others (and so experience themselves as less alone)
    - express themselves and makes sense of their experience
    - reflect on and request the support that they feel is appropriate to their immediate needs
  - as a way for the practitioner to gain an accurate sense of the concerns and needs of the person
- An ability to draw on knowledge that if verbal communication is challenging for the person, other forms of communication (e.g. drawing or writing) are appropriate and may be the main way that the person communicates, and:
  - an ability to make use of a range of communication strategies, as needed
- An ability to draw on knowledge that asking and talking about difficult issues does not increase the likelihood of behaviours that put the person at risk (e.g. self-harm), and that it is helpful to communicate openly and with frankness

#### Application

- An ability to use communication skills that help to engage people in a collaborative discussion of their circumstances and immediate needs, and:
  - an ability to make adjustments for people who may have difficulty expressing themselves (e.g. because of a disability)

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- To gain an accurate sense of the person's account, an ability for the practitioner to be aware of (and avoid) any 'filters' they may find themselves imposing, e.g.:

- listening in a judgmental way
- making assumptions (in advance or instead of listening fully)
- using diagnostic labels as explanations

- An ability to convey an attentive stance through body language, e.g.:

- sitting close (but not too close) to the person
- sitting 'square on' or next to the person (rather than across a desk)
- having an open posture
- maintaining an appropriate level of eye contact

- An ability to listen attentively to the person by:

- actively listening to what they say and trying to make sense of their experiences, behaviours and feelings, as well as their social context
- listening to the tone and pace of what is said, as well as its content
- allowing silences if it appears to help the person express themselves at their own pace
- attending to the person's non-verbal behaviour, such as agitation (which can indicate the areas they find more intensely distressing, or unspoken feelings that might be difficult to express verbally)
- adopting a pace that matches theirs

- An ability to help the 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 are best used to establish factual information)
- open questions (that require more than a yes/no answer and encourage discussion)

- An ability to judge when questioning is being experienced as helpful and when less so (e.g. where the person is feeling 'grilled')

- An ability to listen empathically to the person:

- actively trying to understand their perspective and how 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 their feelings)

- An ability to maintain an awareness of your own perspective or frame of reference in order not to inadvertently impose it



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■ An ability to convey a basic and empathic understanding of what has been said or conveyed, e.g. by:

- paraphrasing what has been said (but not 'parroting'/repeating verbatim)
- making short summaries that try to connect different aspects of what has been communicated
- using appropriate non-verbal behaviour that 'chimes' with what has been said (e.g. through appropriate facial expression)

■ An ability to check the person's understanding by asking them to summarise the discussion and/or any decisions that have been agreed

■ An ability to ask the person whether all the issues that they wished to raise have been discussed