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How to Communicate Effectively

Communication is the way that people give each other information.

This can be through writing, pictures, speaking or other ways of communicating.

If you communicate well with other members of your group, everyone knows what is going on and people are able to get along.

If your whole group communicates well, everyone should have a say.

Communication is about being able to pass on a message from one person to another person, and have that message understood.

There are many things that might stop people understanding what was meant.

Some of those things might include body language, attitude and knowledge of both people (what they understand about what is being talked about).

Even background noises play a role.

For some people, communication is carried out in different ways – through an Auslan or language interpreter, or through a communication board.



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Because of this, it is important to make sure that you do everything you can to help people communicate well.

Body language

- Think about your body language. What is it saying about how you feel?
- Some people prefer to make direct eye contact. Some do not. It is important to respect their differences.
- Does the other person know you are listening to them? Can they tell that you are interested?
- Personal space is important. Don't be too close or too far away.

Environment (the place where you are)

- Is the environment a good place for communicating? For example, is it a quiet space, with seating that is comfortable and arranged so that everyone can take part in the discussion?
- Does everyone know everything they need to know to take part in the discussion?
- Give chances to check that people understood what was said. One way you can do this is to say it again in a different way.
- Give people the chance to understand by giving them information in different ways. You can use charts, models or activities like role playing. If you use a variety of ways, you can make sure you always include people with a range of disabilities.
- Is the environment accessible? Use an access checklist to make sure everyone can access where you're meeting.



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Confidentiality (keeping information private)

- In support groups, people often share very personal information.
- Group members need to understand that information should be kept private.
- This should be stated clearly in the group guidelines.
- Think about how you can tell your new members about the need for confidentiality and group behaviour – one way is to write a letter of introduction.
- You should also think about how you will deal with the issue if someone breaks a rule about keeping information private.
- New members need to know that their feelings and experiences will be understood and respected.
- If meetings are recorded for minute taking, it is important to only use the recording in the way you have told people you will use it.

Decision making

- Allow everyone to take part in making decisions.
- Some people might take more time to make a decision.
- Make sure they all have a chance to give their ideas and to talk about any concerns.
- Put in place a system to make sure concerns and ideas are acted on.



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- Setting time limits for each member to talk gives everyone a chance to speak.
- Having a policy (rule) book with the way the group does things helps with the way your group makes decisions.

Team work

- Your group is a team and it will work better if people are not competing against each other
- Encourage your team to work together and share ideas. It is important to stop power struggles happening and make sure people are recognised for the work they do.
- Be fair and treat everyone according to their needs.
- We all have different skills and different ways to get things done.
- Diversity – people who are different from each other – makes a team strong and flexible.
- Make sure you put together rules for the way your group will work together.
- Allow time for group members to get together socially. Sometimes you can talk more easily over a cup of coffee or a shared meal.

Boundaries

- Make sure you set clear boundaries so that people know what their roles are
- Members of groups might suffer from burnout if boundaries are not in place



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Emergency

- Put in place a plan so that people know who to contact in an emergency

Access

- Think about the way you are communicating. Is it accessible to people with disability?
- Is your information easily read and understood? This is called 'Plain English' and should be the standard for all your information.
- Is your information in an easily accessible format to people who are blind or vision impaired?
- If you are communicating with people with an intellectual or learning disability, is your information in Easy English, or have you allowed enough time for people to understand your message?
- Do you know where to find an Auslan interpreter?
- Have you asked people who are attending your meetings or events if they have access needs?
- Make sure your venue is accessible and use an access checklist.
- People with disability are the experts in knowing how they prefer to be supported – ask them if you can assist with their support needs.



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Connect Groups: Telephone: (08) 9364 6909 Rural Freecall: 1800 195 575

Email: info@connectgroups.org.au

Web Site: www.connectgroups.org.au

Postal Address: PO Box 1209 Booragoon WA 6154

Street Address: 10 Almondbury Road Booragoon WA 6154

New and Existing Support Group Development, Telephone Information Line,
Information Forums, Facilities and Equipment Hire

On-line Directory of Support Groups and Community Organisations, E-News

People With disabilities WA:

1/37 Hampden Road, Nedlands WA 6009

Telephone (08) 9485 8900 Rural Freecall 1800 193 331

Email: info@pwdwa.org Web: www.pwdwa.org