

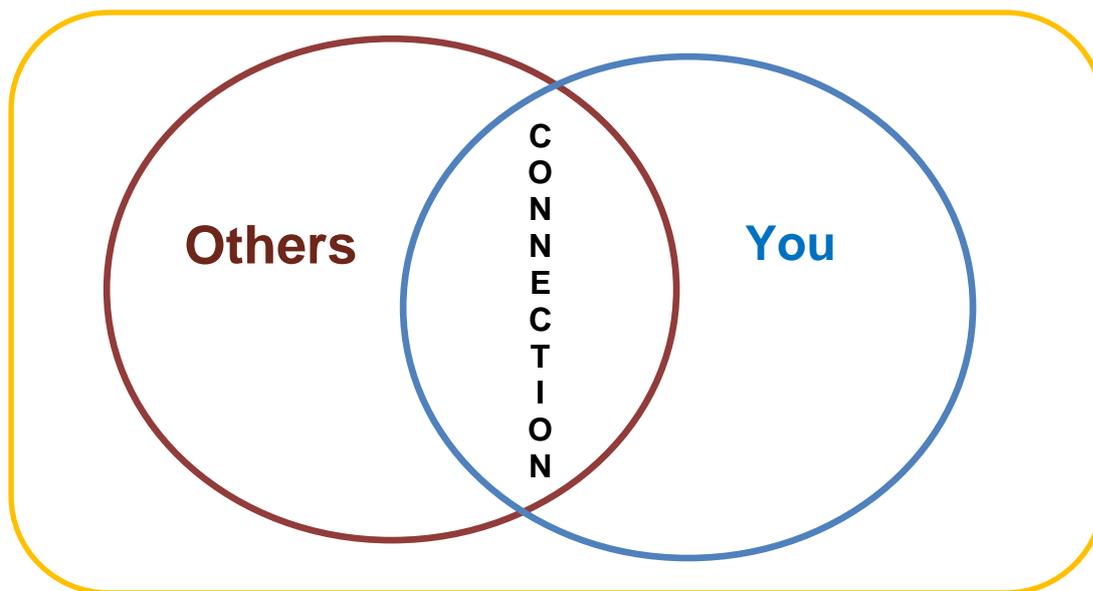
Effective communication

As carers, we are likely to have contact with and communicate with a variety of people. This may range from family, friends, community members and professionals. In all situations, it is good for us to be clear and constructive communicators. This increases the chance others understand what is happening for us and what we want from them.

There are also increasing opportunities for carers to have more flexibility to create the supports that they want. There is a real advantage in being able to effectively express what you want and how you want it, so supports and services are able to fit in with your preferences.

From time to time, there will also be the need for individuals and families to effectively present their point of view when there are differences of opinion. This resource is intended to assist developing your communication and negotiation skills.

A. Building a connection



Building a connection is about making the person feel relaxed and free to talk, and comes from a combination of what you say, how you say it, and what you are doing when you say it.

At the start of a conversation you may need to:

- Introduce yourself
- Say why you are there
- Explain why you wish to speak with/listen to this person.

It can be really useful – even if you are worried about something or angry – to be open and calm. How we start a conversation can determine how open the other people are to what we want to talk about. It is often a good idea NOT to jump into

what we are wanting straight away – but, to take the time to show we are open and interested in connecting with (and respecting) the other person first.

B. Starting the conversation

Once we have “connected” with the other person, we can either:

- Explain what we are wanting to achieve with the conversation or
- Ask them questions.

What we are wanting to achieve

This can be done by describing in one or two sentences what we are wanting AND the positive result, for you and them, if this happens.

It is important to keep this:

- very brief (ideally, in one sentence)
- constructive (what you are wanting – not what you don’t want!).

Asking questions

There are lots of different types of questions. The type of question we ask will often determine the type of response we get.

If we want to ENCOURAGE a person to express their thoughts and feelings it is helpful for us to ask an **open question**. An open question is one that cannot easily be answered with a yes or no response. These questions can often start with “how”, “what” or “tell me about”,

Examples of open questions

“How can you assist me to achieve ... x ...?” Rather than “*Do you think you can assist?*”

“What are your responses to my suggestions?” Rather than “*Do you agree with what I have said?*”

“Tell me about the options you think I have?” Rather than “*Do you think I can do this?*”

“What are the things I need to know about this?” Rather than “*Can you tell me about ... x ...?*”

Sometimes, it is hard to follow what a person has said. It can be useful to ask them a more **direct question** to focus attention on a specific issue we want clarified. Direct questions are used if you think you have an incomplete or distorted message. Sometimes you may need to briefly ask a direct question in response to what a person has expressed to make sure you have the information you are wanting.

Examples

“You talked about three options. Would you repeat and talk more about the first option for me?”

“I am not sure I have completely understood. Tell me more about ... x ...?”

C. Making sure we are understanding accurately

As the conversation goes on, there can be lots of things said. It can be helpful to regularly check things out. This can be called **perception checking**.

Perception checking is to clarify what has been said so you can:

- Check your own understanding
- Show the other person that you are attempting to follow what they are expressing.

You can perception check by **PARAPHRASING**. This is when we briefly say the important things back to the person. They can either:

- Agree and go on with more detail, or
- Disagree, and restate what they are saying.

Perception checking is not used for interpreting, judging or analysing what has been expressed. It is just used to make sure that we have accurately understood what a person was saying. A lot of confusion and conflict is caused because we have not picked up the right messages. Perception checking makes this much less likely.

D. Being clear on the outcome

When we have been talking and listening for a while, perception checking to make sure we understand accurately, then we can pull out what we think the key themes are. Summarising the discussion helps everyone to be sure about what has been said and agreed. This can be presented to the person and this allows them to:

- Agree
- Clarify
- Go into more depth.

Sometimes, it is useful to go over who is going to do different things as a result of the discussion. This may include when people are expected to do things, other “next steps” and arranging the next time to meet.
