



5 Minutes



**Overcoming
Communication
Barriers**



**Ways to Ask
About Abuse if
Approached**

09 Victim Relations

Communication:

Effective communication starts with a basic principal, **respect**. Each person – the sender of the message and the receiver- brings with him/her characteristics that are unique. Physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects make up who we are. Communication need to demonstrate acceptance of a person’s individual worth combined with good listening skills.

I. Overcoming Communication Barriers Below are some suggestions which may help make communication easier:

- A. Use clear and simple language
- B. Ask open-ended, one-part questions
- C. Be an attentive listener and allow for periods of silence
- D. Allow sufficient time so that there is no time pressure
- E. Use explanations that progress from simple to complex
- F. Allow eye contact, but do not force it
- G. Allow plenty of space to move around: medication may induce restlessness
- H. Keep background noise to a minimum
- I. Sit facing older person to help them identify visual cues

II. Ways to Ask About Abuse if Approached

A. Be Direct

- Ask non-threatening questions
- Respond empathetically

B. Universalize the Question - Many people are hurt physically or in other ways by someone they know. Is this happening to you?

C. Gradual / Exploratory

- How are things going for you?
- What kinds of stresses do you have in your everyday life?
- Is there anyone in your life who is pretty strict, hard to please?
- Do you get blamed a lot?
- Can you disagree? What happens when you don't agree?
- Are there situations in which you felt afraid?
- How often are you called names? How often are your feelings hurt?
- Are you ever threatened with forced sex, pushed, shoved, had your hair pulled or been slapped?
- Have you had things thrown at you?
- Had precious possessions intentionally broken?
- Have your pets, children, grandchildren, other persons close to you been intentionally hurt?
- Are you ever prevented from leaving the house, seeing friends or family?
- Do you feel safe in your home?
- Should I be concerned for your safety?

III. Supportive Ways to Respond to an Abuse Victim

- Allow time for person to speak
- Listen
- Believe what the person says
- Empathize: validate the person's feelings
- Make it clear the abuse was wrong and it was not the person's fault
- Speak directly about the violence
- Ask in what ways you can be helpful
- Respect the person's right to self-determination
- Assure the person there are resources to help and that he or she is not alone
- Discuss a safety plan and offer follow-up contact



**Supportive
Ways to
Respond to an
Abuse Victim**



Don'ts in Communicating With Victims

IV. Don'ts in Communicating with Victims

- **Talk to the victim while others are present:** Confidentiality and privacy are a must and others presence may hinder the information the victim wants to provide – especially if the perpetrator is present.
- **Blame the victim:** Societal attitudes often blame the victim for the situation. This is extremely harmful to the victim and may result in an inability to trust.
- **Tell the victim it is not that bad / minimize the pain:** The shame and fear that they feel is natural.
- **Check out the story with the abuser:** Talking with the abuser may tip them off to a possible evaluation. This not only hinders the evaluation, but may also endanger the victim.
- **Demand that the victim take a certain course of action:** You may offer suggestions, but it is necessary that (s)he is comfortable with the plan of recourse.
- **Think you have failed if you did not fix the situation:** Many abusive situations are indications of patterns of behaviors that have occurred for years. To assume one can always alleviate the situation by making a report or other intervention is unrealistic.



Victim Characteristics

V. Victim Characteristics

- Victim is competent to make decisions and wants help
- Victim is competent to make decisions and doesn't want help
- Victim is incompetent to make decisions and someone else needs to make decisions for that person
- Victim is competent to make decisions, but there are barriers to that person being able to ask or accept help