Social Work: Communication on placement

Effective communication skills are important for developing quality relationships that promote successful social work outcomes. These relationships can be with carers, colleagues, other professionals or people who use the services. Communication to build relationships in Social Work would require the following skills:

- **Listening**: listen actively to what is being said
- **Observing non-verbal behaviour**: monitor and analyse your own body language (gestures, postures, facial expression) and those of others
- **Reflecting back**: repeat what the carer or service worker had communicated to you so that they know you have heard them and can question you if necessary
- **Paraphrasing**: reword what they have said to confirm if you have understood their situation
- **Summarising**: recap what they have said to confirm that we have understood their concerns and clarify complex and confusing information
- **Asking appropriate questions**: ask questions that are specific to the situation (be sensitive and choose the appropriate time and words)
- **Managing silence**: allow room for silence so that the service user has time to gather their thoughts or reflect on what they had said
- **Challenging**: help the service user to think about their behaviour and attitudes
- **Immediacy**: be fully engaged in the session (physically and emotionally) and not get distracted

**Note:** When working with someone with cognitive difficulties (e.g. an acquired brain injury), you need to ensure that the environment is quiet and without distractions. Communicate in short, simple sentences and avoid abstract meanings.

(Price 2009, pp. 22-24)

**A Social Worker should:**

- be respectful, be able to listen and not judge
- be available and accessible to service users and their families
- be reliable and deliver on promises
- be able to talk about any issue of importance to the service user
- have the level of expertise and be willing to learn
- determine their own agenda and work in partnership with others
- use a wide range of social work approaches that suit individual needs

(Beresford, Adshead & Croft, cited in Price 2009, p. 24)

**Resource adapted from:**