

Effective Communication Skills



Effective Communication Skills for a Counsellor

Communication skills allow you to understand and be understood by others.

The skills include effectively communicating ideas with others, actively listening in conversations, giving and receiving critical feedback and public speaking.



What are communication skills?

Communication skills are the abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include

- Communicating new ideas
- Feelings

Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathising. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications like email and social media.



Active listening

- Active listening means paying close attention to the person who is speaking to you.
- It would require the counsellor to remove any kind of distractions around them, example mobile phones, laptops
- It also involves preparing the right questions, commenting appropriately and responding with thought.



Adapting your communication style as per the student

- A counsellor might need to change their communication style as per the needs of a child or depending on the situation.
- Using age-appropriate language to create a safe and non-threatening environment for students to express their struggles, challenges and ideas.
- Example: Student from a rural background might prefer their local language, would need written communication on universities and courses rather than a website address.



Approachability

- A counsellor needs to be approachable, and should reflect the traits of honesty and kindness to foster trust and understanding.
- When you're working with students, approach your interactions with a positive attitude, keep an open mind and ask questions to help you understand where they're coming from.
- Small gestures such as asking someone how they're doing, smiling as they speak or offering praise for work well done can help you foster productive relationships with both students and parents.



Giving and receiving feedback

- A counsellor should be able to diplomatically give back feedback and provide constructive inputs.
- Feedback should answer questions, provide solutions or help strengthen the students requirements.



Empathy

Empathy means that you can understand and share the emotions of others. This communication skill is important to understand other people's emotions and select an appropriate response.

For example, if someone is expressing anger or frustration, empathy can help you acknowledge and diffuse their emotion.



Respect

A key aspect of respect is knowing when to initiate communication and respond. In a team or group setting, allowing others to speak without interruption is seen as a necessary communication skill.

Respectfully communicating also means using your time with someone else wisely—staying on topic, asking clear questions and responding fully to any questions you've been asked.



Understanding body language

A great deal of communication happens through nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and eye contact. As a career counsellor when you're listening to a student, you should be paying attention to what they're saying as well as their nonverbal language.

By the same measure, you should be conscious of your body language when you're communicating to ensure you're sending appropriate cues to others.



Don'ts for a counsellor

- Refrain from using pessimistic or negative remarks
- Personal situation and confidential information needs sensitive handling
- Do not take decisions for the child, let the child and parent decide.
- Do not enforce your views, rather use self-directed questions for introspection

