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Transformative Communication

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About me

- Clinical and consulting psychologist
- 30 years working in health and mental healthcare
- I work with leaders across healthcare, private business, and elite sports, helping them enhance influence, resilience, performance, and balance.
- I bring a distinctive blend of psychological insight, strategic leadership acumen, and deep commitment to cultivating sustainable success.



Disclosures

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Financial: Robin Arthur received an honorarium for presenting this course. She is the owner of a private practice that provides psychological services and consulting. Non-financial: Robin Arthur has no relevant non-financial disclosures.
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- The applicability and accuracy of the course content may vary by the clinical, geographical, and cultural context; you should evaluate the course accordingly.
- As healthcare is rapidly evolving, new findings may change the validity of the information presented in this course. Providers should always consult the latest research and guidelines from professional associations.
- The interventions discussed in this course may be limited in generalizability, requiring practitioners to consider specific individual and population factors.
- The course may not cover all possible risk factors, diagnostic methods, or treatment options, and complex cases may require additional considerations.
- Healthcare providers should apply cultural competence and sensitivity to ensure effective and respectful care based on their patients' diverse needs.
- Providers should always evaluate the limitations of diagnostic and screening tools, considering their potential for false results as well as any ethical implications.
- It is the responsibility of course participants to critically evaluate the evidence from multiple sources to guide professional practice.

Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

-  Explain the difference between transformative and transactional communication in healthcare and leadership contexts, and describe how communication skills foster trust, collaboration, and psychological safety with patients and colleagues.
-  List 3 common barriers to productive dialogue and describe evidence-based strategies for controlling emotions, offering respect, and validating others in high-stakes conversations.
-  Explain and use the CONNECT model to improve communication effectiveness, including practical methods to validate others.



“If you talk to a man in a language
he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his own language,
that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela

Why Communication Matters in Healthcare

- **Relational communication** drives the quality of allied health supervision and collaboration (Gardner et al., 2023).
- **Trust, clarity, and responsiveness** define effective supervision and reduce burnout (Snowdon et al., 2020).
- **Team communication** is directly linked to patient outcomes and continuity of care (Wiley, 2025).

Communication Defined

Communication

- Exchange of information
- Can be one-way or transactional
- May focus only on tasks or data
- Varies in clarity, tone, and impact

Transformative communication

- Creates connection, trust, and meaning
- Actively shapes perspectives and outcomes
- Balances facts with empathy and respect
- Encourages collaboration, resilience, and growth

Communication Defined

Occurs in multiple forms:

- Verbal (spoken)
- Written (emails, notes, documentation)
- Nonverbal (tone, body language, facial expression)
- Formal vs. Informal
- Interpersonal vs. Mass communication

Foundational Aims of Communication

- Achieving a Desired Outcome (Task/Outcome-Oriented Goal)
 - Task-focused communication increases efficiency and accuracy in healthcare (Leonard, Graham, & Bonacum, 2004).
 - Clear, assertive requests reduce medical errors and delays (The Joint Commission, 2017).
- Be sure to use clear language and stick to the matter at hand, even if someone tries to distract, deter, dismiss you.

Foundational Aims of Communication

- Strengthening the Connection (Relational Goal)
 - Relational communication builds trust and cohesion (Street et al., 2009).
 - Positive team relationships reduce conflict and increase job satisfaction (O'Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008).
- Make sure to be collaborative, not be aggressive, and be friendly.
- You want the other person/people to think positively about you.

Foundational Aims of Communication

- Preserving Your Integrity (Identity Goal)
 - Upholding professional integrity supports resilience and reduces moral distress (Epstein & Hamric, 2009).
 - Respectfully advocating for your perspective maintains credibility and prevents burnout (Shapiro, 2011).
- Remember your values and morals that are important to you.

The Goal is Good Dialogue

- Di-a-logue = Free flow of meaning between people
- Purpose: shared meaning and understanding
- Requires curiosity, respect, and openness
- Goes beyond “winning” → aims for connecting
- Skills are learnable and practice strengthens them

When is Good Dialogue Difficult?

- The issue is important
- Opinions vary
- Strong emotions are involved

Productive Discourse leads to...

- Exposure of multiple viewpoints on a given issue
- Address critical topics/issues in an efficient manner
- Successful/lively meetings

Barriers to productive discourse

- Dominance of one voice → limits diverse perspectives and silences others
- Emotional escalation → shifts focus from problem-solving to conflict
- Lack of respect or listening → erodes trust and discourages participation
- Unclear goals or structure → causes confusion, wasted time, and unresolved issues

Effective Feedback leads to...

- Clear expectations and outcomes
- Accountability
- Employee satisfaction and increased morale

Things That Impair Communication

- Insufficient skills or training
- Unclear purpose or objective
- Emotional overload
- Focus on immediate needs rather than longer needs
- Disruptive or Distracting

Dialogue vs. Debate

Debate

- Goal = Win, persuade, prove a point
- Listening = To reply or refute
- Focus = Positions
- Tone = Defensive, competitive
- Outcome = One side 'wins,' trust weakens

VS

Dialogue

- Goal = Understand, connect, co-create meaning
- Listening = To learn and explore
- Focus = Interests, shared values
- Tone = Curious, respectful
- Outcome = Shared understanding, stronger trust

A Model For Communication

C O N N E C T

Control
Your
Emotions

Offer
Respect

Name the
Facts

Note the
Response

Explain
your
Position

Common
Goals

Test
Assumptions

CONNECT

Control Your Emotions

Control your emotions

- Emotions have evolutionary action tendencies (Frijda, 1986).
- Our interpretation, not just the event, shapes emotions (Gross, 2015; Lazarus, 1991).
- Emotional regulation improves safety and performance in healthcare (Codier, 2015)

What Makes It Hard to Control Emotions?

- Sleep deprivation
Emotions are hardwired survival signals — not good or bad.
Left unchecked, they escalate and drive behavior.
- Illness
Emotions motivate action and communicate meaning.
- Hunger
Only ~7% of meaning is in words — tone & body language do the rest (Mehrabian, 1971).
- Intoxication
Regulation protects clarity, empathy, and trust.

“Putting feelings into words can reduce emotional reactivity.” — Lieberman et al., 2007

Control your Emotions

- Our interpretation of an event shapes our emotional response to it
 - Appraisal theory: Our interpretation, not just events, drives emotions (Lazarus, 1991).
- Each emotion has its own action tendency – an emotion prepares us to behave in a prescribed way
- Often, the action tendency is incompatible with our goals
 - Healthcare outcomes: Nurse leaders with high emotional regulation scores demonstrate fewer safety incidents (Codier, 2015).



Strategies to Control Emotions

Evaluate Your Interpretations

- ❓ Do you know for certain your interpretation is accurate?
- ❓ Is there evidence to support your interpretation?
- ❓ Are there other possible interpretations?

Defy the Action Tendency

- Let your goals determine your behavior
- As a leader, this skill may be your most valuable asset

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.” — Viktor Frankl

CONNECT

Offer Respect

Offer Respect

- This study assessed ultra-realistic simulation as a tool for improving communication and non-technical skills in intermediate-care nurses and allied health providers. The intervention enhanced emotional regulation, teamwork, and clarity under pressure. It supports the inclusion of simulation-based communication training in continuing education for healthcare teams.
- *Adell-Lleixà et al., 2025, Nursing Reports)*

Offer Respect – Core Ingredients

Why Respect Matters

- Improves patient adherence & satisfaction (Sharkiya, 2023)
- Builds team trust & reduces errors (Giménez-Espert, 2023)
- Buffers stress and reduces burnout (Kadović, 2022)

How to Show Respect

- Acknowledge the other person's opinion
- Validate the other person's perspective
- Reaffirm core beliefs: I am likeable, competent, good

“I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university.”
— Albert Einstein

Offer Respect – The Power of Apology

➤ When your behavior is disrespectful
(and it will be at times) → APOLOGIZE

➤ When your behavior is perceived as disrespectful
(even if not intended) → APOLOGIZE

Without apology, explanations of intent may
sound dismissive.

✓ Transformative Communication



“People will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did, but people
will never forget how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

CONNECT

Name the Facts

Name the Facts

- This systematic review analyzed communication practices between hospital allied health professionals (including PTs, OTs, and SLPs) and primary care providers.
- Inconsistent handoffs often led to poor continuity and preventable errors.
- Structured communication models and clear role delineation were recommended to improve patient outcomes and collaboration.
- Sheehan et al., 2021, *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*

Name the Facts

Why Facts Matter

- Facts are neutral and provide common ground
- Evidence-based communication reduces errors (Leonard et al., 2004)
- SBAR improves clarity and safety (Joint Commission, 2017)

How to Name the Facts

- Use “I” statements when communicating
- Examples: “I feel like...”, “I think...”
- “I felt attacked” = fact of your experience, not blame

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.” — W. Edwards Deming

Practice, Practice, Practice....

- The more you use a skill, the easier it gets
- Process becomes automatic
- You model the behavior and process for others
- Good dialogue promotes TRUST!

CONNECT

Note the Response

Note the Response

How to Note the Response

- Ask about the other person's perspective
- Listen actively → paraphrase/summarize
- Validate perspective: 'That makes sense...', 'I understand where you're coming from...'
- Don't challenge their perspective by arguing or questioning

Clinical Example:

- PT: 'I feel like therapy is always pushed to the end of the day.'
- Response 1 (defensive): 'That's just how schedules work.' → dismissive
- Response 2 (noting response): 'I hear your concern - therapy delays impact outcomes.' → validating

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." — Stephen Covey

Note the Response

- A review of telehealth training for allied health professionals revealed that while technological proficiency is emphasized, communication skills are less frequently taught.
- The authors highlight that empathy, listening, and validation in virtual sessions drive patient engagement and satisfaction. Telehealth training should explicitly incorporate interpersonal communication modules.
- Anil et al., 2025, *Journal of Allied Health Informatics*

Definition of Validation

Validation means recognizing that another person's thoughts, emotions, or actions are understandable in their context - even if you see things differently.

Example: A nurse says, 'I feel like no one listens during rounds.' → Response: 'It makes sense you'd feel unheard with so many voices in the room.'

What is Validation?

Definition of Validation

- Find the kernel of truth in the other person's perspective
- Acknowledge emotions, thoughts, and feelings as understandable
- Validation ≠ agreement

Clinical Scenario:

- Family member: 'You're not doing enough for my loved one!'
- Defensive reply: 'That's not true — we're doing everything.'
- Validating reply: 'I can see how terrifying this is for you. It makes sense you'd want every possible treatment.'

"Validation is the recognition that your internal experience is understandable and makes sense, given the circumstances." — Marsha Linehan, PhD

Importance of Validation

Validation is essential for strong relationships - without it, trust and collaboration quickly break down.

As Marsha Linehan put it: 'Validation is the oxygen for relationships.'

Healthcare Example: Teams that validate each other's perspectives build psychological safety and reduce burnout.

Importance of Validation

Why Validation Matters

- Improves relationships by showing listening & understanding
- Facilitates problem solving, closeness, and support
- Reduces pressure to 'prove who is right'
- Decreases negative reactivity and anger

Clinical Scenario:

- Occupational Therapist: 'I feel overwhelmed by the constant schedule changes.'
- Invalidation: 'Everyone is busy — that's just part of the job.' → dismissive
- Validation: 'I hear how stressful these changes are. It makes sense it feels overwhelming.' → builds trust

"Validation is the oxygen for relationships." — Marsha Linehan

Evidence Snapshot: Why Validation Matters

- Validation reduces emotional arousal and conflict (Linehan, 1993).
- Active listening and validation improve patient satisfaction and adherence (Sharkiya, 2023).
- Healthcare teams with validating communication report stronger collaboration and fewer errors (O'Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008).
- Validation fosters psychological safety, a predictor of team effectiveness (Edmondson, 1999).

CONNECT Reminder: Validation is not just kindness — it is an evidence-based strategy for better patient care and stronger teams.

How to Validate in Practice



Step 1:

Tune In Fully

- Give undivided attention
- Listen beyond words (tone, body, emotion)



Step 2:

Mirror Understanding

- Paraphrase what you heard
- Check accuracy and show 'I get it'

Colleague:

"I can't keep up with all the admits."

→ Response: "You're feeling overwhelmed with the admissions pace."

Patient:

"No one cares about my pain."

→ Response: "It sounds like you feel your concerns aren't being taken seriously."

Therapist:

"My caseload doubled this week."

→ Response: "You're stressed because your workload has increased so much."

2-Step Validation Framework



Step 1:

Tune In Fully

Give undivided attention, listen beyond words (tone, body, emotion).

Healthcare Example:

Patient says, 'No one cares about my pain.' →

Response: 'It sounds like you feel your concerns aren't being taken seriously.'



Step 2:

Mirror Understanding

Paraphrase or summarize what you heard to show 'I get it.'

Reflection Prompt:

Think of a recent interaction where you could have mirrored back. How might it have changed the outcome?

Levels of Validation

- 1 Presence — simply being attentive.
- 2 Reflection — repeating or paraphrasing.
- 3 Reading between the lines — noticing unspoken emotion.
- 4 Normalizing — showing their feelings make sense.

How to Validate (Continued)

Key Skills:

- Read what's not being said: notice body language, tone, facial expression
- Understand based on context & history: prior experiences, stressors, state of mind/body

Healthcare Examples:

- Colleague: Nurse sighs heavily during rounds.
 - Validation: 'I can tell this feels exhausting for you today.'
- Patient: 'I don't think this rehab will help me.'
 - Validation: 'You've had a hard time with rehab before, so it makes sense you'd feel skeptical this time.'

Evidence: Nonverbal sensitivity and contextual awareness improve empathy, trust, and communication effectiveness (Hall et al., 2009; Shumway & Wampler, 2019).

How to Validate (Continued)

Advanced Strategies:

- Acknowledge the valid: show that thoughts, feelings, and actions make sense given the context
- Show equality: treat others as equals, avoid 'one-up' superiority or 'one-down' pity

Healthcare Examples:

- Colleague: PT frustrated about delayed orders.
 - Validation: 'I see why you're upset — you've been waiting two days to mobilize this patient.'
- Patient: Nervous about starting therapy due to past pain.
 - Validation: 'It makes sense you're anxious — last time was difficult. Let's work through this together.'

Evidence: Validation reduces hierarchy tension and improves teamwork
(Manojlovich & DeCicco, 2007; Reader et al., 2021).

How to Validate in Healthcare

Colleague:

I have to work too many shifts!

→ Response: You sound stressed because you are balancing a lot with work and kids.

Patient:

That man does not hear my concerns. I want a new doctor

→ Response: It sounds like you feel misunderstood. How can I help?

Reflection Prompt:

Think of a patient or colleague you could validate today. What words would you use?

CONNECT

Explain your Position

Explain Your Position

Advanced Strategies:

- Express your perspective — not 'the truth'
- Honor, don't dismiss, the other perspective
- Use respectful framing:
 - 'I' statements
 - 'From my perspective...'
 - 'My concern is...'

Healthcare Examples:

- Colleague: Instead of 'You're not prioritizing discharges correctly.'
 - Better: 'From my perspective, I'm concerned that delayed discharges are impacting patient flow.'
- Patient: Instead of 'You're noncompliant with therapy.'
 - Better: 'I'm worried that missing sessions may slow recovery — what's making it difficult?'

(Schön, 1983; O'Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008).
(Rosenberg, 2015).

Explain the Position

- This scoping review synthesized evidence on interprofessional supervision in allied health settings. Results emphasized psychological safety and mutual respect as vital for effective feedback and team development. Communication frameworks that encourage reflection and empathy were found to reduce burnout and increase learning outcomes.
- McGuinness et al., 2024, *Journal of Interprofessional Care*

CONNECT

Common Goals

Common Goals

Key Principles:

- Respect the goals of both parties
- Acknowledge both perspectives
- Promote collaboration, not competition
- Reduce defensiveness

Healthcare Examples:

- Colleague: Instead of 'You're not following the discharge plan correctly.'
➤ Better: 'We both want the patient discharged safely and on time — how can we align our approach?'
- Patient: Instead of 'You're not cooperating with therapy.'
➤ Better: 'We both want you to regain independence quickly — let's talk about what feels manageable.'

CONNECT

Test Assumptions

Test Your Assumptions

- A cross-sectional survey of 500 health professionals demonstrated that allied health practitioners are open to shared responsibility and joint decision-making. Effective interprofessional collaboration depends on trust, respect, and the willingness to challenge assumptions constructively—principles consistent with the CONNECT model.
- Brandt et al., 2025, *BMC Medical Education*

Negativity Bias

“Negativity bias is the psychological tendency to notice and remember negative experiences more strongly than positive ones. Even when positive and negative events are equal in intensity, the negative ones have a greater impact on our emotions, memory, and decision-making.”

Test Assumptions

Key Principles:

- Ensure you have ALL the information
- Avoid the 'Either/Or Trap' → strive for 'Both/And'
- Look for creative solutions
- Check your CONNECT-ion (pause, ask, clarify)

Healthcare Examples:

- Colleague: Instead of assuming delay = carelessness →
 - Better: 'I want to check — is there a medication safety issue before discharge?'
- Patient: Instead of assuming nonattendance = lack of motivation →
 - Better: 'Is it cost, scheduling, or something else making it difficult to attend?'

Evidence: Miscommunication is a leading cause of errors (Leonard et al., 2004). 'Both/And' framing reduces conflict (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Psychological safety grows when assumptions are tested (Edmondson, 1999).

Challenging Cases

Common Challenges:

- Unexpected conversation/no time to prepare
- Difficult or sensitive subject matter
- Feedback is upsetting
- Other person is defensive, sensitive, or stubborn

CONNECT Responses:

- Pause & control emotions before reacting
- Honor both perspectives → 'I hear your concern'
- Reframe around the shared patient safety goal
- Test assumptions: Ask clarifying questions

Reflection Prompt: Recall a time a conversation caught you off guard.
How could CONNECT have helped you stay constructive?

Evidence: Structured models reduce stress and improve outcomes in high-stakes conversations (Stone et al., 2010; West et al., 2016; Haig et al., 2006).

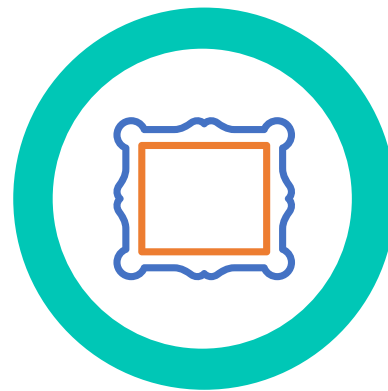
✓ Transformative Communication



Conflict



Automatic
thought



First, step back,
then, reframe



Productive
response

From Conflict to Productive Response

Automatic Thought Examples:

- “The nurse is ignoring my instructions”
- “This patient is noncompliant”
- “That family doesn’t care enough”
- “My colleague never respects me”

Reframe + CONNECT Response:

- Pause & ask: “Is there a patient safety issue I don’t know about?”
- Reframe: “What barriers make it hard for the patient to follow the plan?”
- Offer respect: “This family is under enormous stress — how can I support them?”
- Note response: “I want to understand your perspective before moving forward.”

Evidence: Cognitive reappraisal reduces emotional reactivity (Gross, 2015).
Reframing prevents escalation and builds collaboration (Beck, 2011).
Structured pause-and-reframe improves teamwork (West et al., 2016).

Destructive Responses

Arguing

Belittling

Caving In

Defensiveness

Dismissing others' opinions

Becoming overly dramatic

Exaggerating the problem

Exclusion/leaving people out

Finger-pointing/Blaming

Withdrawing

Gossiping/complaining about someone

Becoming hypercritical

Overpowering

Passive-aggression

Revenge/try to even the score

Sabotage/creating obstacles

Sarcasm

Stonewalling/becoming non-receptive

Productive Responses

Apologizing

Determining the root of the problem

Stepping back to reflect

Taking ownership of your part

Giving time and space

Acknowledging others' feelings

Seeking resolution

Giving reassurance

Finding compromises

Communicating honestly

Separating emotions from facts

Showing flexibility

Revisiting unresolved issues

Communicating respectfully

Introspection/being aware of your feelings and agendas

Listening

Additional Tips for Challenging Cases

Manage the flood of emotions

Assume your fair share of responsibility
(i.e. if you've been avoiding the discussion, own up to it)

Find tricks and strategies that are effective for you

If helpful, remove yourself from the situation

Ask to take a break so you can refocus and manage your emotions

Pull it Together

The CONNECT model equips us to communicate in ways that are calm, clear, and collaborative.

Transformative communication isn't about being perfect. It's about pausing, choosing our words with intention, and shaping conversations that heal rather than harm.

As you move through your work tomorrow, choose one CONNECT step and apply it in a real interaction. Small, intentional changes can transform not only your communication—but the outcomes for patients, families, and teams.”

✓ Transformative Communication

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Exam

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