

Healthcare Interpersonal Skills Curriculum



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About the Author



Krista Wenz has been a licensed paramedic for 34 years. She holds a bachelor's degree in fire safety management and worked 23 years as a firefighter-paramedic for a large metropolitan fire department in California.

Krista has extensive knowledge in emergency medicine, including experience as an adjunct instructor at community and private colleges teaching EMT and paramedic students. She has additional experience working as a mental health technician in a psychiatric ward and emergency crises; drill-instructor and field training officer for multiple agencies; CPR, first-aid, PALS, BLS, and ALS instructor; and EMS captain for a rural fire department.

Now retired from the fire service, Krista is passionate about passing on her knowledge and experience for those interested in entering the healthcare field.

Lesson 1 – Communication

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, participants will learn about the 10 key elements to effective communication in healthcare careers. Participants will then practice their communication skills using the Communication Scenario Cards. The accompanying workbooks are designed for independent study or as a homework assignment.

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Understand the top 10 communication skills for healthcare professionals
- Learn how to improve their communication skills
- Practice their communication skills with others

Lesson at a Glance

Activity	Materials	Preparation	Approximate class time
FOCUS	• <i>Focus on Communication Skills</i> worksheet • <i>Focus on Communication Skills Instructor Resource</i> • <i>Communication Test</i> • <i>Healthcare Interpersonal Skills Student Workbook</i>	1. Print/photocopy the <i>Focus on Communication Skills</i> worksheet (one per participant). 2. Print/photocopy the <i>Communication Test</i> (two per participant, the pre- and post-tests are the same).	10 minutes
LEARN	• <i>Communication</i> slide presentation • Communication Patient-Centered Scenario Card	1. Prepare the <i>Communication</i> slide presentation for viewing. 2. Gather the Communication Patient-Centered Scenario Card.	30 minutes
REVIEW	• Communication Colleague-Centered Scenario Card • <i>Healthcare Interpersonal Skills Student Workbook</i> • <i>Communication Test</i> • <i>Communication Test – Answer Key</i>	1. Gather the Communication Colleague-Centered Scenario Card.	20 minutes

Lesson 1 – Communication

LEARN: Communication Slide Presentation

30 minutes

Purpose:

Participants will receive a thorough introduction to the top 10 communication skills needed for healthcare professionals to communicate with their patients, coworkers, family members, and other healthcare professionals.

Materials:

- *Communication* slide presentation
- Communication Patient-Centered Scenario Card

Facilitation Steps:

Share the following information as you show the slide presentation.

Slide 1: Introduction slide

Slide 2: Goals and Objectives

- Understand the top 10 communication skills for healthcare professionals
- Learn how to improve your communication skills
- Practice your communication skills with others

Slide 3: Top 10 Communication Skills for Healthcare Professionals

1. Verbal
2. Nonverbal
3. Active Listening
4. Written
5. Presentation Skills
6. Patient Education
7. Personal Connections
8. Trust
9. Cultural Awareness
10. Compassion

During this lesson, these skills are primarily identified as necessary when interacting with patients. However, these skills are also used when interacting with supervisors, coworkers, other healthcare professionals, and patients' friends and loved ones.

Slide 4: 1. Verbal Communication

Excellent verbal communication is one of the key components when communicating with others.

Speak clearly, concisely, and appropriately for the person's age and cultural background. You want to avoid using generational slang or words that are not understood by the person you are speaking with.

Tips:

- Encourage patients to speak by asking open-ended questions, such as "Can you tell me a bit more about the pain you have been experiencing?"
- Avoid condescending terms of endearment like 'sweetie' or 'boo.' Many patients will take offense to you using pet names. It is best to ask how they would like to be addressed. Some patients will prefer using their first name or a nickname, while others may prefer a more formal approach, such as Mrs. Jones or Mr. Davis.
- Avoid using technical terminology if they are not in the healthcare field. If you are explaining to a patient that they had a heart attack, it is best to describe it like that. They will understand better than if you tell them they had an acute myocardial infarction.

Lesson 1 – Communication

REVIEW: Practice and Assessment of Communication Skills

20 minutes

Purpose:

Participants will pair up and role-play with scenario cards to practice their understanding of communication skills. Once practice is complete, a post-test will be given

Workbooks can be assigned to participants to be worked on independently or assigned as homework. Participants will complete the two communication activities in the workbook.

Materials:

- Communication Colleague-Centered Scenario Card
- *Communication Test*
- *Communication Test – Answer Key*
- *Healthcare Interpersonal Skills Student Workbooks*

Facilitation Steps:

1. Have participants pair up with the Communication Colleague-Centered Scenario Cards to role-play the main characters, read the card, and answer the key questions while in their role.

The instructor(s) can assess participants' communication skills during their interactions and offer suggestions if necessary.

2. When participants are finished with the scenario cards, instruct them to take a few minutes to complete the post-test.
3. Have participants self-check their answers as you share from the answer key.
4. Have the participants start on the communication scenario questions and activities in their workbooks unless you have assigned them as homework.

Communication Test – Answer Key

Directions: Select the best answer for the following multiple-choice questions.

1. When verbally communicating with and addressing a patient, which of the following is correct?
 - a. call them by the name they want you to use**
 - b. call them a term of endearment, such as sweetie
 - c. call them by their formal name, such as Mrs. Jones
 - d. call them by their nickname
2. What two communication skills are used when actively listening to someone speak?
 - a. patient education and compassion skills
 - b. presentation and patient education skills
 - c. written and nonverbal communication
 - d. verbal and nonverbal communication**
3. There are several ways to use nonverbal communication when speaking with patients. Which of the following is **not** recommended?
 - a. maintaining eye contact
 - b. smiling
 - c. crossing your arms**
 - d. leaning toward the patient
4. Which of the following is the correct answer regarding active listening?
 - a. lean away from the patient without making eye contact
 - b. provide minimal verbal communication**
 - c. interrupt the person when appropriate
 - d. do not nod your head when the person is speaking
5. What is one way to provide effective written communication as a healthcare professional?
 - a. use slang and abbreviations as if you were writing a text
 - b. use technical terms when corresponding with patients
 - c. take notes while speaking with patients and coworkers**
 - d. use shorthand