

Healthcare

Effective body language in a healthcare setting

Content and alignment

Body language includes body position, eye contact, facial expression, gesture. Using body language effectively is critical in an elder care residential home or a home care setting, where the client may have limited vision, hearing, movement, or a degree of cognitive impairment. The area is one that some may implicitly understand. However, it is likely that some learners will have given little consideration to how their body language comes across at work and the impact this has on communication. The sequence is suitable for all employees working in this sector but particularly for those who do not feel confident with their interactions with clients. It is worth focusing on because more awareness can lead to instant improvement in interaction.

The content aligns with the [Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy](#). It is focused on the *Speak to Communicate* strand, in particular the *Using Strategies to Communicate* and the *Interactive Listening and Speaking* progressions. It also makes reference to [Teaching Adults to Listen and Speak to Communicate: Using the Learning Progressions](#)

Speak: Using Strategies to Communicate progression	Interactive Listening and Speaking progression
Most adults will be able to:	Most adults will be able to:
select and communicate information, ideas and thoughts, using appropriate words and phrases with some fluency on very familiar topics monitor and modify speech to improve the clarity and effectiveness of the communication.	respond to and use skills and appropriate language to manage simple interactions and negotiate meaning respond to and use some non-verbal methods to monitor the effectiveness of interactive communication have an awareness of the conventions for taking part in interactions in familiar social and cultural settings, for example, during telephone conversations.
select and communicate information, ideas and thoughts, using appropriate vocabulary, expressions and grammar fluently and coherently on less familiar topics use appropriate gestures, tone, pace and intonation to improve communication.	respond to and use more sophisticated skills and appropriate language to monitor and improve the effectiveness of interactions respond to and use variations in tone of voice, intonation and stress (for example, the stress placed on specific words or sentences) recognise and use the vocabulary and other language features that mark the register appropriate to the topic, audience and context.

Fig 1. Speak to Communicate Learning Progressions

Intent

The intent of this resource is to provide tutors with a teaching and learning sequence that will help learners raise their awareness of how to manage their body language through discussion of cultural norms, observation and activities. New Zealand healthcare workplaces are multi-cultural places so learners have lots to draw on for these tasks, such as the observations they will have made while working with people from different cultures. This resource is not designed to replace existing programme approaches, but to provide tutors with additional learning content.

Sequence

There are four parts to this sequence. Learners will:

1. consider the effect of body language on communication
2. explore cultural aspects of body language through a discussion
3. notice body language in use
4. plan body language for different workplace settings.

1. *Consider the effect of body language in communication*

This short game activity is a great way to get learners thinking about body language. The set-up is very important as well as keeping the pace up.

Before: Prepare enough copies of the cut-ups from [Healthcare: Body language and communication](#) so that each learner can have a card. Divide learners into small groups of three or four.

Brainstorm some common small talk topics and record these on the whiteboard. (E.g., rugby, the weather, family, what's on TV).

Tell learners that they are going to make small talk in their groups and can talk about any of the topics. Tell them that, while they are talking, you will pull out one person per group and give them a secret instruction. They need to re-join the group and the conversation but follow the instruction. Check they understand they must not tell anyone what their instruction was.

During: Learners talk about the small talk topics for about a minute. Then pull out one member from each group. Make sure the others keep the conversation going. Give the learners you have pulled out one of the cards and check they understand what they need to do. They go back in and continue the conversation but will act out their instructions. Repeat for the other learners so everyone gets a chance to act out the instruction on their card.

After: When everyone has acted out their role, stop the activity. Tell learners to try and guess what everyone's instructions were. Learners then talk in their groups about the effect of their actions on the conversation.

Key learning point:

Body language has a massive impact on the quality of communication. It is something that can be controlled and this will bring instant gains.

2. *Explore cultural aspects of body language through a discussion*

This discussion is a chance for learners to talk about their culture and some of the aspects of body language. It is usually a great start for a discussion that ends up with learners saying "I never thought about this before."

Step 1: Learners read the discussion questions in [Healthcare: Body language and culture discussion](#). Tell them to prepare for the discussion.

Step 2: Learners have the discussion in small groups.

Step 3: Have a feedback session to provide learners with an opportunity to share their group’s findings with the whole group. Try and get people to give specific examples, e.g., *Turkish men kiss when they greet*, *Some Pacific people will not make eye contact with people who are older than them*. Ask follow-up questions like: “What will be the effect of this?”

It’s important to point out to learners that when people are stressed or anxious, they will revert to cultural norms and may find cultural difference threatening. So, if they are uncomfortable, in pain, or confused, body language becomes even more important. Awareness of this is key.

On the [Healthcare: Body language and culture discussion](#) sheet, there is an extension activity suggested. You could do this in your session with learners if they are really interested or set this up as something that learners can do between sessions and report back the following session.

Key learning point:

Body language is highly cultural. What is normal for one person can be very threatening for others. It is important to understand cultural differences here so that you can understand other people’s body language and be aware of your own.

3. Notice body language in use

Learners now get an opportunity to watch a short video clip of a carer talking with a client and see some of the strategies in use. See [Healthcare: Body language in use - worksheet](#) and [Healthcare: Body language in use](#).

Step one: Start by brainstorming body language by asking learners this question: “What are the different aspects of body language? There are 6.”

Learners quickly discuss the question in pairs. Get some feedback and then hand out [Healthcare: Body language in use – worksheet](#). Learners can then check their ideas against the ideas on the sheet.

Step two: Tell learners they are going to watch a carer talking to a client and ask them to look for the carer’s body language. Give each learner one of the aspects of body language on the worksheet to look out for.

Step three: Play the clip: [Healthcare: Body language in use](#)

Step four: Ask learners to mingle and tell other learners what they noticed. Explain that ‘mingle’ means to stand up, move around the room and have a quick chat with other learners. They should explain what the carer did and also the meaning of the body language. E.g., “The carer moved forwards to show she was listening.” As they are mingling, monitor their body language to check they look like they are paying attention to each other. Often learners don’t know what to do with their hands when they are speaking. You can encourage them to use their hands to mark the important parts of their message.

Step five: Get learners seated. Ask them to think individually about the following questions: “What aspect of your body language do you think you could work on? During what situations at work do you feel awkward with your body language?”

Learners discuss these questions in pairs.

p. 26 of Teaching Adults to Listen and Speak to Communicate: Using the Learning Progressions has suggestions about how you can sensitise learners to body language by getting them to watch people at work.



4. **Plan body language for different workplace settings**

The aim of this activity is for learners to plan how they will use their body language in some different workplace scenarios. It uses a drama teaching technique called 'tableau' or 'freeze frames'. The idea is to create a still image that is like a snapshot from a moving scene. You give out some scenarios, learners need to position themselves in the situation described in the scenario, and then one person takes a photo on their cell phone. Afterwards look at the photos and analyse the body language of the people in the scene. You can follow the sequence below:

Preparation: Print one copy of [Healthcare: Workplace scenarios](#) for each group. Cut up the scenarios and shuffle them so that each group has all eight but in a different order.

Step one: Organise learners into small groups of 3 or 4. Make sure each group has at least one person who has a cell phone with a camera on it.

Step two: Hand out the scenarios face down. One person from each group takes the top scenario and then has to organise the group so they are in the correct position for the situation. They should think about their body language, body position and facial expression. When they are in position, one learner takes a photo of the group.

Monitor learners as they are engaged in the activity. Make sure groups understand the scenarios and coach them if they need help.

Step three: When the groups have tried three or four of the scenarios, stop the activity. Learners look at the photos of another group and need to work out the scenarios they depict. They also evaluate whether the group's body language was effective.

Step four: As a final step, you could ask one group to get into a particular position and then other learners could manipulate their body language for an improved 'tableau' photograph.

Key learning point:

Body language is part of your communication toolkit. It can be controlled and used for effect – e.g., to make yourself appear trustworthy, interested, friendly and to make your message appear more urgent or important.

Summary

Being more aware of the links between culture and body language will help learners monitor and improve the effectiveness of their communication. The sequence aims to make body language explicit to learners and encourage them to think about the message their body language conveys. There are four parts to the sequence in which learners:

1. consider the effect of body language on communication
2. explore cultural aspects of body language through a discussion
3. notice body language in use
4. plan body language for different workplace settings.

This sequence works well with the following

resources:

[Healthcare: Body language and communication](#)

[Healthcare: Body language and culture discussion](#)

[Healthcare: Body language in use - worksheet](#)

[Healthcare: Body language in use](#)

[Healthcare: Workplace scenarios](#)