

Communication Leads To Community 2020



T.E.D.

Ageing Better
in East Lindsey



“Good for Their Age” - How do words and language help or hinder communication?

Social interaction or the ability to relate to others is a basic need of human life that continues to be critical to the well-being of individuals in later life (Carstensen, 1991). Communication plays a large part in these social interactions and the ability to engage effectively in communication has been shown to be an important part of an older adult's life.

Being able to communicate and be understood, respected and responded to in a dignified and person-centred way is fundamental to a person's well-being, and is thus often linked to a person's identity, self-esteem, social support and quality of life (Tolson & Brown Wilson, 2012; Allan & Killick 2014). Those who suffer issues or conditions that affect their ability to effectively communicate have been shown to experience a reduction in the quality of their social relationships, a reduced social network size, reduced participatory rates in social activities, and increased levels of social isolation and loneliness (Palmer, 2016).



TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire

About TED

Talk Eat Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a Programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness through a Test and Learn approach. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund that test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

In this report, we focus on some of the challenges that affect older people in communicating as well as outlining some strategies that could help us to engage with older people. To do so we highlight the importance of communicating with older adults in a way that is clear, dignified, and respectful, utilising a range of verbal and non-verbal methods, while being considerate of any cultural sensitivities or other factors that might influence our interactions (Daly, 2017). To begin with, however, we first define what communication is.

What is communication?

Communication is a dynamic and cyclical process involving the transmission, reception and interpretation of information via: verbal or non-verbal means, including speech; written or graphical representation, including letters and maps; and signs, signals and behaviour (McCabe & Timmins, 2013) allowing people to be heard, understood and accepted, to ask for assistance, or to affect action (Stanton, 2009). Communication can be informal and unstructured for social purposes or more formal, for example, in therapeutic consultations specifically designed to improve the health status and well-being of an individual or group (Williams, 2016).

To break it down further, communication requires a sender and a receiver, a message and interpretations of meaning from both parties. The receiver gives feedback to the sender of the message, both during the message's conveyance and afterward. Feedback signals can be verbal or non-verbal, such as nodding in agreement, sighing or looking away. There is also the context of the message, the environment it is given in and the potential for interference or misinterpretation to occur.



Communication is therefore a complex, multifactorial phenomenon that takes into account the varying communicatory abilities of those involved in the process, the context in which the communication is taking place, and the subject matter being relayed. As le Mey (2006) notes messages are sent, received, and interpreted through sensory, motor and cognitive channels, as well as being affected by psychological and social functions.

Barriers to effective communication

As a person ages they may experience a number of physical and/or social factors that negatively impact on their ability to communicate effectively, or as well as they once did (Daly, 2017 - See table 1). Additionally, the type of information being shared, the person's understanding of a topic, and the communication style of the person delivering the information can all be perceived as barriers. It is therefore important to be aware of these factors as only by taking them into consideration can we begin to challenge them and look for strategies to help.

Key point:

Action on Hearing Loss (2013) estimated that 70% of 70-year olds in the UK, experience hearing loss. A figure that rises to 90% for those over 80 years old. Despite the impact of hearing impairments on quality of life and interpersonal interactions, it can take up to a decade of living with a hearing problem before a person identifies the issue and seeks diagnosis (Davis et al, 2007). As a result, many older people experience social isolation and withdrawal, as well as reduced daily functioning (Hindle et al, 2011) due to hearing impairments.



Table 1. Factors affecting communication with older adults (adapted from Daly, 2017):

Older factors	Communicator factors	Socio-cultural factors	Environmental factors
Hearing impairment (e.g. tinnitus)	Attitudes towards older adults	Power balance	Physical elements (e.g. light, temperature, location)
Visual impairment (e.g. cataracts)	Self-awareness and reflective engagement	Intergenerational differences	Situational factors (e.g. time pressures, organisational constraints)
Cognition (e.g. dementia)		Cultural differences or barriers	
Other (e.g. asphasia)		Ageism and ageist attitudes	

The best methods of communication

As McCabe and Timmins (2013) emphasise “the basis for communication lies in sharing a common existence with others but with each as a unique individual within the mix of human life”. It is therefore important to recognise and respect the other person in any form of communication; a position that is particularly applicable when dealing with older adults as they are often subjected to general and homogenous assumptions. A good way to do this is to firstly acknowledge the person, or persons, in front of you and what they have to say. Older people often feel talked down to or overlooked but by using open ended questions (See table 2 below for examples) and being a good listener, you can help alleviate some of this stress and get people to open up further.

Additionally, when discussing communication with TED members they expressed a number of additional factors to take into consideration that related to what has been recorded in wider research. They expressed that, by placing yourself at the same, face to face level as the person you are communicating with and by maintaining eye contact, you can make the interaction feel more personal. This helps create a positive and trustful atmosphere, enabling people to feel more comfortable when talking, particularly if the subject matter is difficult or distressing. It is also important to remember to speak slowly and clearly, in a language and with terminology they will understand, without becoming or sounding patronising.



Table 2. Sample questions that can spark a conversation:

Growing up	School Life
When and where did you grow up?	Did you enjoy school?
What was it like?	What kind of student were you?
Do you have any siblings?	What are your best memories of school?
What were they like growing up?	What are your worst memories of school?
How would you describe yourself as a child?	Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on you?
Have you changed?	
What were your favourite activities as a child?	
Working Life	Family Life
What did you want to be when you grew up?	Have you ever been married?
What did you do for a living?	How did you meet your partner?
How did you get into that job?	How did you propose?
Did you like your job?	Do you have any children?
What lessons has your work taught you?	What was it like being a parent?
Do you have any favourite work stories?	What do your children do now?

Conclusion

Effective communication is a vital skill in building relationships with (older) people. However, effective communication can be complex and requires conscious, compassionate and competent delivery in order to be ensure people feel valued and understood. If we can do this, it is possible to make a significant change in a person's well-being, by increasing their self-worth and identity. We therefore must become more aware of the limits of our own abilities as communicators, as well as take into consideration other factors that can impede or cause a breakdown in communication.



Reccommendations

Things to try when talking to someone:

- 1 Use the person's name and introduce yourself.
- 2 Position yourself to face them and be at the same level as them.
- 3 Allow for sufficient time for the person to respond – pace the conversation at their speed.
- 4 Ensure non-verbal communication is open and friendly.
- 5 Be a good listener.
- 6 Ask clear and open-ended questions.
- 7 Find quieter spaces for those with hearing impairments.
- 8 Avoid speech that might seem patronising.
- 9 Be aware of a person's cultural beliefs and values.



More Recommendations

Things to avoid:

- 1 Avoid making assumptions about all older people.
- 2 Do not shout at, talk down to, or patronise someone.
- 3 Do not rush your conversation or interrupt the other person.
- 4 Never talk over the person.
- 5 Do not forget that they are a person.



About East Lindsey



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East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities
- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have 1700 registered TED members, 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award, and 516 volunteers have contributed 8,156 hours to the TED programme between April 2018 and December 2019 .

Further information...

To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



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