



# Communication

Dr Sarah Parker

May 2019

Instructing nurses on  
communication is a bit  
like instructing birds on  
flying....

Jean Ann Seago

In **Patient Safety and Quality: An Evidence-Based  
Handbook for Nurses.**



# Aims



What are communication skills?



What makes communication difficult?



How can we prepare for difficult communication?

# What is communication?

*Talking? Listening? Gesture? Understanding? Empathy? Informing?  
Writing? Clarity? Questions? Eye contact? Posture? Emotion?  
Environment? Expressing oneself? Connecting? One way v. Two way?  
More? Silence? “Body language”?*

**Communication** is simply the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another.

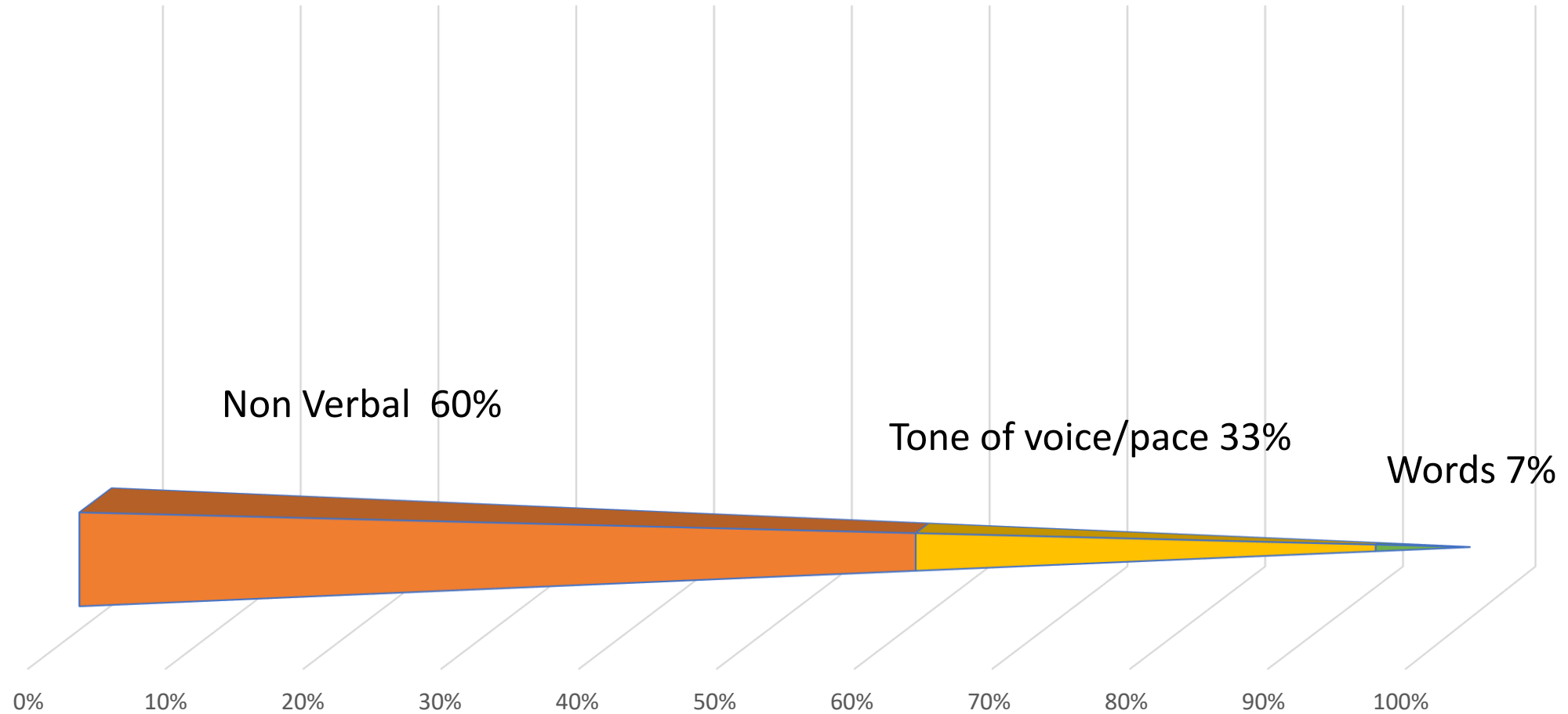
to succeed in conveying one's meaning to others;

to have something in common with another person;

to impart, reveal or demonstrate

(Chamber's Dictionary)

# The make up of communication



# Communication – more than just words

- **Miscommunication with language:**  
<https://youtu.be/pV1P4N9ajg> (40secs -Ronnies)
- **Silence:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgvejMvCCyc>  
(50sec – Samaritans)
- **Non-verbal communication:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvEci5Bjgd4>  
(4min30)



How do we  
communicate  
with people?

## 10 LEVELS OF INTIMACY IN TODAY'S COMMUNICATION

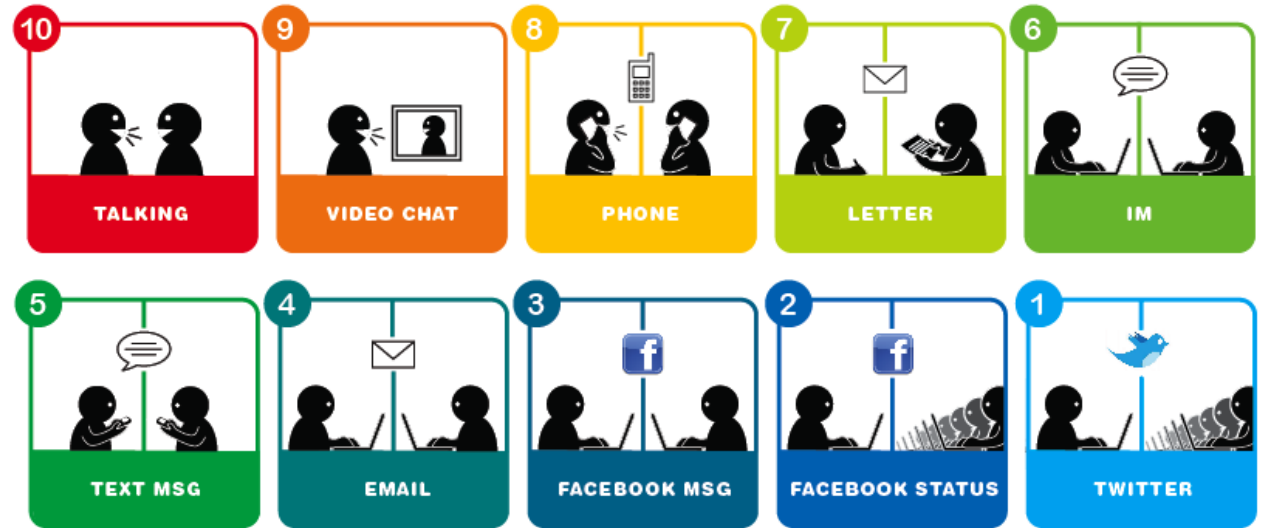


Image from <http://simonmainwaring.com>

- With patients & families to ensure quality and safety of care experience
- With colleagues to develop good teamwork/handover, job satisfaction and avoid burnout

Why is good  
communication  
important?



What makes a  
difficult  
conversation?



# Communication challenges for professionals and for families





# Examples of difficult communications

- Bad news to share – medical? Prognosis?
- Conveying & exploring uncertainty
- Being misunderstood
- Conflict
- Discussing things which are embarrassing/awkward, sad...
- Cultural differences/assumptions
- Starting at a different baseline/having different expectations
- Discussing mistakes/errors/complaints etc
- Talking about death with children/young people
- Checking understanding (without being patronizing)

# Talking about death with children

- Cultural differences in attitudes towards how/when to speak with dying child about death- western norm towards truth telling/autonomy
- Parents torn between doing what is best for their child and safeguarding emotional welfare of whole family
- National study in Sweden – questionnaire to 450 bereaved parents (Jalmsell et al, 2015)
- 33% spoke with their child directly about death
- All those reported that they did so, had no regrets
- Some who didn't speak about it, did have regrets
- Other forms of narrative used included: films, music, fairytales, drawings
- Discussing the death of others (pets/family members/friends etc) or after life
- Practical preparations – gifts to others, funeral choices etc.



# Tools for Communication

Welcome to ACRONYM city  
where one size does not fit all!

- ICE: Ideas/Concerns/Expectations
- SBAR: Situation/Background/Assessment/Recommendation
- SAGE & THYME: Setting/Ask/Gather/Empathy;  
Talk/Help/You/Me/End
- Cardiff 6 point Toolkit (Pearce & Finlay 2007)
- SPIKES protocol (Baile & Buckman 2000)

# Cardiff 6 point toolkit



Comfort



Question Style



Language



Listening/  
Silence



Reflect/  
Acknowledge



Summarise

## Comfort

- Setting up
- Physical space
- Emotional space

## Language

- Non-verbal communication
- Tone of voice
- Pace of speech
- Choice of words – jargon? clear meaning?

## Question Style

- Just 1 at a time
- Using a variety of styles
- Open questioning – explore
- Hypothetical questions – what if?
- Direct clarification

## Listening/Silence

- Avoid interrupting
- Gives time to think
- Let patient break the silence
- It's harder for you!
- Try short / non-verbal encouragement

## Reflect/Acknowledge

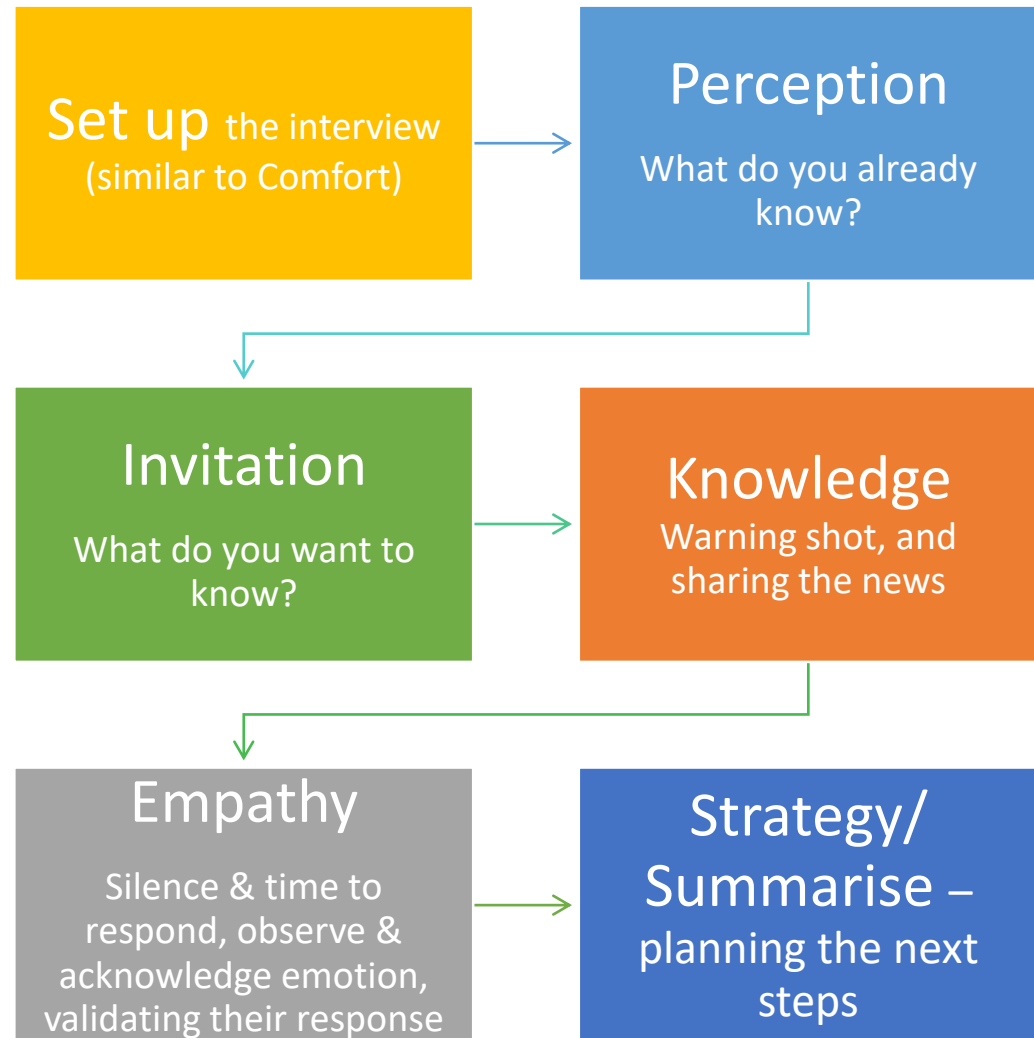
- Use patient's words
- Demonstrates listening
- Explores topics more deeply

## Summarise

- Opportunity to clarify
- Demonstrates understanding
- Can re-orient conversation
- Can make plans or end a conversation



# SPIKES



- RCN website: <https://rcni.com/hosted-content/rcn/first-steps/communication>
- Various generic courses for healthcare professionals & broader communication skills
- [www.paedpallcarewales.com](http://www.paedpallcarewales.com) Audio interview with Anne Goldman on communication, PAC planning resources & training
- Australian resource “Thinking ahead discussion guide” from Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne  
<https://www.rch.org.au/thinkingahead/discussionguide/>
- Cardiff Diploma in Paediatric Palliative Care (or new Short Course: Problem Solving in Paediatric Palliative Care)  
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/professional-development/short-courses/view/problem-solving-in-paediatric-palliative-care>
- **Best of all – PRACTICE YOUR SKILLS**  
**Try out in the scenarios/role play, also on your family or on your colleagues!**

Resources to  
develop  
communication  
skills

# Summary



Communication is about making connections and sharing understanding.



It crosses all settings – both personally and professionally



It is far more than just words!



Just because we do it all the time, it doesn't make it easy.



The power of listening, silence and reflection can create a space to raise things that are hard to say



Various toolkits can give you ideas to develop your own skills



Most importantly – take one new idea and try it out for real