

# Communicating as Part of a Team



## OBJECTIVES

**At the end of this unit, participants will be able to:**

- Recognize effective ways of communicating that lead to understanding and build trust
- Identify common barriers and facilitators to communication within the team
- Develop a plan to strengthen the team at your agency



## INSTRUCTIONS

**Facilitator's note:** The first exercise requires a very experienced facilitator. Participants may be reluctant to discuss contentious issues in a group, or they may be fearful of retaliation from others for raising subjects that could be seen as "off limits." The facilitator will need to reassure participants that they can express themselves so in a safe, trusting environment.

1. Session preparation
  - Before the session begins, write the agenda and objectives for the session on a flip chart sheet, if you are not using the PowerPoint slides. Post for viewing by participants.
  - Also write on a flip chart sheet: C-control, I-influence and A- Accept. Bold the "C", "I" and "A."
  - On the large sticky notes or note cards, draw pictures of elephants, or find and print photos of elephants for the first activity.
  - On another flip chart sheet, write these questions and post for easy viewing. Bold the words, Why, What, Who and When
    - Why are we doing this, or why is this happening?
    - What are we doing about it?
    - Who can resolve this issue?
    - When can we resolve this?
2. Welcome participants and review agenda and objectives.
3. Elephant in the room activity (60 minutes)
  - Explain that for this session, we will be focusing on strategies that support effective communication with members of a team and practice a process for identifying and addressing team challenges. We will discuss "the elephants in the room."

*(continued)*



## Related C3 Roles

Care coordination, case management, system navigation

## Related C3 Skills

Communication skills, interpersonal and relationship-building skills, capacity building skills, professional skills and conduct, service coordination and navigation skills



## Method(s) of Instruction

Individual writing, group activity



## Estimated time

90 minutes



## Key Concepts

Communication skills, conflict resolution, team building, problem solving skills



## Materials

- Computer with internet access and projector (optional)
- Sticky notes or note cards
- Tape (if elephant note cards do not have self-stick adhesive)
- Drawings or photos of elephants
- Flip chart
- Markers
- 4 tennis balls
- Timer (can use a watch or smartphone)

## Handouts

- Ten Ways to Communicate Effectively as a Team

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## INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

- We want to begin this section with thinking about how we communicate as a team when the team must address an obstacle (the elephant in the room).
  - Refer to the flipchart and explain that you will address each elephant using the principles of Control-Influence-Accept (CIA). This means deciding whether they are issues that the participants have Control over, that they can Influence, or that they need to Accept.
  - Hand out the sticky notes or elephant sheets and give participants five minutes to write down one elephant related to their work.
  - They should also write whether their elephant is C, I or A. (Putting their names on the sheet or sticky note is optional.)
  - Collect the elephants, read them aloud one by one, then record them on the relevant flip charts (marked C, I or A).  
**NOTE: If you have a large number of elephants or are limited by time, you may need to vote on which ones to address.**
  - Decide as a group whether the A elephants really are issues that just have to be accepted and agree on whether any of the C or I elephants are actually A elephants. Then, let the A-list elephants go. Basically, just accept them.
  - Tackle C and I elephants in open conversations and try to come up with solutions or action items. Look and review at each elephant through the “4 Ws.”
    - Why are we doing this, or why is this happening?
    - What are we doing about it?
    - Who can resolve this issue?
    - When can we resolve this?
    - End the activity with a short debrief of the process. Ask participants to share one thing about how this process will be helpful in their relationship with their co-workers.
4. Tennis ball activity (30 minutes)
- Say “We are going to create a process aimed at having everyone touch the ball.” If you have a group with more than 12 participants, break into two groups.
  - Toss the ball to someone on the opposite side of the circle from where you are standing.

*(continued)*



## Resources

Team Building Exercises—Communication:  
<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/team-building-communication.htm>  
(activity source)

The Tennis Ball Game:  
<https://www.leadersinstitute.com/resources-tennis-ball-game/>

Questions for review from  
<http://www.ventureteambuilding.co.uk/move-tennis-balls/>

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## INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

- Tell that person to pass the ball to someone, and to remember who touches the ball after them.
  - Have the next person pass the ball to someone new, and so on until everyone has had a turn.
  - Say, “Let’s see if we can remember the sequence that the ball traveled in,” and ask them to do this one more time.
  - Then, complicate the process:
  - Say “We never do one thing at a time—we’re always multitasking.” Add in another ball for them to pass around in the same sequence following the first ball.
  - Once they have the process down, hand the three balls to the first person. Remind them of the rule that everyone must touch each ball once and in the same established sequence. Then step out of the circle.
  - Say, “We don’t just multitask—we are usually also working under time pressure. So now we will time you.” Use the timer to find a baseline time for the process. Call “Start” when the first ball leaves the hand of the first person, and “Stop” when the third ball touches the hand of the last person.
  - Time them, call out the time, and record it as the baseline on the flip chart.
  - Incremental improvement:
    - Ask: “Do you think you can do it faster?” Let the group repeat a few times or until they are happy with the progress they have made (and until they are doing it without dropping the balls).
    - Repeat the rule after every round: that everyone must touch each ball once and in the same established sequence.
    - Call out and record their times for each iteration of the process.
  - Challenge:
    - Say “You should be proud of getting your speed down to X seconds. However, every group that has done this exercise has been able to bring it down to less than 3 seconds.”
    - Most groups figure out how to change their positions and routine so they can get the time down to 2–3 seconds.
    - Don’t give any hints!
    - If they are not coming up with any new ideas, Ask: “Should you rethink what you’re doing?”
    - Continue to record their time. If they beat 3 seconds and you still have time, tell them that some groups have done it in less than 1 second!
- 5. Tennis ball activity debrief**
- Ask the group what this activity showed them?
  - Why was it important to plan before attempting the challenge?
  - How did you discuss different ideas? Did everyone have an opportunity to share their ideas?
  - Did you support each other during the challenge?
  - How well do you feel you worked as a team? What could you improve?
  - Did you designate a leader for the challenge? What determines a good leader?
  - Did your plan work? If not, why not? How did you respond to this?
  - How do you ensure that everyone understands the team strategy?
  - What would you do differently next time?
  - Looking back on the challenge, what is the one thing you can take away from it?
- 6. Wrap up**
- Share and review the communications tip sheet. Thank participants for their engagement with the activity.

# Communicating as Part of a Team



## SLIDE 1



## SLIDE 2

Review agenda and objectives. Explain that for this session, we will be focusing on strategies that support effective communication with members of a team and practice a process for identifying and addressing team challenges.

# Ten Ways to Communicate Effectively as a Team

## 1. Speak to others directly in one-on-one interactions

Don't gossip about team members or speak behind their backs. If you have something to say to your colleague, speak to them directly.

## 2. Give clear and concise directions

If team members do not receive clear and concise directions for tasks, it can cause chaos.

## 3. Encourage two-way feedback

It's important for supervisors to be open to feedback, as well as for CHWs to be open to giving and receiving feedback. This keeps the lines of communication open and encourages mutual understanding.

## 4. Always show appreciation—that goes both ways!

It feels good to be appreciated for the work that both CHWs and supervisors are doing. Appreciation can be shown through a team lunch, being recognized in staff meetings, etc.

## 5. Hold weekly team meetings

## 6. Promote collaboration



- 7. Make team members feel they are part of the team; there aren't any big I's or little I's**
- 8. Keep personal bias in check**
- 9. Keep an open door policy**
- 10. Use time wisely—morning check ins over coffee**

## **Resources**

7 Essential Tips for Effective Team Communication

<https://www.proofhub.com/articles/effective-team-communication>

8 Simple and Effective Ways to Improve Team Communication

<https://blog.azendoo.com/8-ways-to-improve-team-communication/>

# Acknowledgements

This curricula draws from and is adapted from other training curricula for peer educators and community health workers, such as the Building Blocks to Peer Success (<https://ciswh.org/resources/HIV-peer-training-toolkit>) and the Community Capacitation Center, Multnomah County Health Department (<https://multco.us/health/community-health/community-capacitation-center>)

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This project is/was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number U69HA30462 "Improving Access to Care: Using Community Health Workers to Improve Linkage and Retention in HIV Care" (\$2,000,000 for federal funding). This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

### Suggested Citation:

Boston University Center for Innovation in Social Work & Health. (2019). A Training Curriculum for Using Community Health Workers to Improve Linkage and Retention in HIV Care. Retrieved from: <https://ciswh.org/chw-curriculum>



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