Diploma in Funeral Arranging and Administration

Module 1	Unit 3	Communicating with Clients within the Funeral Service.

Purpose and Aim of the Unit:	The purpose of the unit is to develop the learners' ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with clients. Specifically, the unit aims to enable learners to understand industry protocols central to communicating with bereaved clients within the funeral service.

This unit has 4 learning outcomes.

LEARNING OUTCOMES	
The learner will:	
1.	Know appropriate communication techniques to use with clients within the funeral service.
2	Know factors to consider when communicating with clients within the funeral service.
3	Know the skills necessary to respond appropriately to the bereaved.
4	Know how to communicate with clients who may have additional/special needs.

Introduction

Client Care which rises above being "good enough" to become Good and then Excellent depends to a large extent on excellence in your **Communication**.

It is important to realise that communication is a two-way process the hearer may often not "receive" the message that the speaker thinks is being given. This may be for a variety of reasons: In the early days of bereavement, the bereaved may be so overwhelmed by sorrow, that they quite literally do not hear what is said to them - rather as one can become so absorbed in a book or some other occupation that the outside world temporarily does not exist.

Their grief may make them impatient with the detail of planning the funeral, so that all they want is to "get it over with", which may make it difficult for them to listen. This can lead to problems later, if the funeral does not go as they had expected, or if the account is different from their expectations.

There may be a host of barriers to listening (in both parties) and one of these may be conflict about how the funeral should be arranged.

Learning Outcome 1.

Know appropriate communication techniques to use with clients within the funeral service.

Essential Qualities

Extensive research over the years has been carried out in which qualities are needed for an interaction to be perceived as helpful. The list is quite long, but there are three qualities that, if they are not present will mean that the person on the receiving end will not perceive the exchange as positive or helpful.

The three qualities which research shows as being essential are:

1. **Sincerity**

Sometimes called Genuineness or Congruence - If we are not sincere in our wish to help, anything we offer will be seen as "phoney" - as the old joke has it, "You can't fake sincerity."

The funeral director will have great familiarity with death, but good client care will depend on the genuine ability to convey to the bereaved an understanding that their grief is unique.

2. **Acceptance**

Sometimes called unconditional positive regard, non-possessive warmth or respect.

Occasionally, this quality is thought to mean that we must agree with what the other person is saying, thinking or feeling, but this is not its meaning as an essential helping quality.

Its meaning is more to do with accepting that what the person thinks or feels (however odd or even bizarre it seems to us) is real for them. This is especially true of grief, where the power of the emotions can often result in people doing and saying things which in retrospect will surprise them and which they may regret.

The communication task of the sensitive Funeral Arranger/ Director is to show respect, acknowledging that it is the event of the death that may cause unusual behaviours and withholding any sense of criticism.

Too often bereaved people get commended for being "good" - i.e. not crying; not showing emotion etc. For some people this may be important, but we need to convey acceptance and be impartial for all reactions, especially if there are cultural norms involved.

3. **Empathy**

This rather over-worked word is the third essential quality. It differs from sympathy, in that it involves feeling with the other person, rather than feeling for them, which would be sympathy.

On the other hand, it does not mean losing our own "footing" so to speak. Carl Rogers, who introduced the term into helping, described it in this way: *"The ability to experience another person's world as if it were one's own, without losing the 'as if'."*

A Funeral Arranger / Director who can, so to speak, keep one foot in the grieving person's world, and one foot in his or her own is giving a gift to the bereaved.

Extreme emotional situations are often a natural reaction to grief. Clients can be experiencing feelings such as anger, despair, guilt and frustration and the non-verbal response to these emotions is critical.

There must be great sensitivity of communication with all clients and especially with parents and other member of the family who may contact you initially following the loss of a baby or child. Time must be given to them, in order that they are able to absorb the information you need to help them to understand in order to discuss their options for the funeral service. Likewise, time must be given after the initial funeral arrangements for the parents and family to discuss their choices. It may take some time for the parents to decide on burial or cremation.

Funeral Arrangers / Directors need to communicate that they are offering a friendly, caring, helpful and yet professional service. At the same time they must stay in control, in some respects, be professionally distant and yet be caring and understanding.

The non-verbal messages transmitted to clients are most important. These messages are not interpreted individually but happen all at the same time. The reading of, and response to, these messages is a natural reaction, but an awareness of their power will help to develop and control communication skills.

The key to finding the balance between professional formal control and caring and understanding is the skill of active listening. Listening is a skill that can be developed and improved. Bereavement counsellors and members of the Samaritans are trained to listen in an intensive development programme.

Communicating with Clients over the telephone

Choose your words carefully.

Appreciate that the phone is auditory only. Use common words, and avoid or explain essential acronyms. You may need to repeat key words and clarify information and instructions throughout the conversation.

Have help in your voice.

Set a pleasant tone. Put clients at ease so they can absorb the information. Be as positive as possible, saying “I will” and “I can,” rather than “I won’t” and “I can’t.” Be empathetic to the client’s situation, acknowledging his or her frustration and anger.

If and when you need to say no, state why and offer alternatives.

Take responsibility for the direction of the conversation.

This includes redirecting over talkative callers. For example, you can say, “I do appreciate and understand that you are concerned about _______, and I will ensure that___________but right now we also need to talk about _______.”

Confirm understanding.

Summarise your conversation with actions and next steps. After the phone call is over, follow up with a letter restating what you discussed. Include written materials and a phone number for questions and more information.

How to write a formal business letter

With the advent of email, it is becoming less and less common to write letters, however, for the purposes of working within the funeral service, business letters are appropriate.

It is very important, therefore, that your letters have the desired effect on the reader. In order to achieve this, they should be:

- in the correct format
- concise and to the point
- relevant
- free of any grammatical or spelling mistakes
- polite
- well presented (remember, you are an ambassador acting on behalf of your employer)

The following information will give some general advice on letter writing and includes a sample letter.

There are a number of conventions that should be used when writing a formal or business letter. Furthermore, you try to write as simply and as clearly as possible, and not to make the letter longer than necessary.

Addresses:

1) Your Address
The return address should be written in the top right-hand corner of the letter.

2) The Address of the person you are writing to
The inside address should be written on the left, starting below your address.

Date:

Different people put the date on different sides of the page. You can write this on the right or the left on the line after the address you are writing to. Write the month as a word.

Salutation or greeting:

1) Dear Sir or Madam,
If you do not know the name of the person you are writing to, use this. It is always advisable to try to find out a name.

2) Dear Mr Salmon,
If you know the name, use the title (Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms, Dr, etc.) and the surname only. If you are writing to a woman and do not know if she uses Mrs or Miss, you can use Ms, which is often used by divorced and single women.

Ending a letter:

1) Yours faithfully
If you do not know the name of the person, end the letter this way.

2) Yours sincerely
If you know the name of the person, end the letter this way.

3) Your signature
Sign your name, then print it underneath the signature. If you think the person you are writing to might not know whether you are male or female, put you title in brackets after your name.

First paragraph
The first paragraph should be short and state the purpose of the letter- to make an inquiry, complain, or request something, etc.

The paragraph or paragraphs in the middle of the letter should contain the relevant information behind the writing of the letter. Most letters in English are not very long, so keep the information to the essentials and concentrate on organising it in a clear and logical manner rather than expanding too much.

Last Paragraph
The last paragraph of a formal letter should state what action you expect the recipient to take- to refund, send you information, etc.

EXAMPLE Business Letter Format

Company letterhead

Production Funeral Training Services
20-30 Yorkshire Bridge Road
Briggholmes
Driffield on Sea
DR17 0XX

1 June 2015

Mr NA Education
General Manager
Education Services
PO Box 1000
York Road
Holmesbrigg
Yesterfield
YU09 1AA

Dear Sir,

Reference: BP / AA / 007

I understand from my colleague, Mrs G Administror, who visited your premises last month, you sometimes allow a group of students to visit the training centre and see for themselves how funeral service training techniques operate in a UK environment. Mrs Administrator was most impressed by her own visit, and recommended that I write to you.

Would it be possible for a group of 20 funeral directing students - male and female from NAFD Education, to visit you before the end of the summer?

I realise that you must receive many requests for such visits, and that the time available may already be booked. If it is not, and you are able to help us, I would be most grateful if you could suggest an appropriate date, and time, and advise me of any policies or procedures we will need to be aware of and adhere to on the day.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

A. Another (Mrs)

Production Funeral Training Services

E-mail messaging now exceeds telephone traffic and is the dominant form of business communication.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind regarding professional e-mail conduct:

Be Informal – and Professional. Your colleagues may use between each other commonly accepted abbreviations in email, but when communicating with a client via email, appropriate language and written English should be used. Good practice means everyone in your business should follow a good standard of writing protocol.

Your e-mail message reflects you and your company, so traditional spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules apply – don't forget to check before you press 'send'.

Keep messages brief and to the point. Just because your writing is grammatically correct does not mean that it has to be long. Nothing is more frustrating than wading through an e-mail message that is twice as long as necessary. Concentrate on one subject per message whenever possible.

Use sentence case. USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOOKS AS IF YOU'RE SHOUTING. Using all lowercase letters looks lazy. For emphasis, use asterisks or bold formatting to emphasize important words. Do not, however, use a lot of colors or graphics embedded in your message, because not everyone uses an e-mail program that can display them.

Don't use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact. Don't forget the value of face-to-face or even voice-to-voice communication, particularly relevant to the funeral service.

Remember that e-mail isn't private. People can lose their jobs for using e-mail inappropriately. E-mail is considered company property and can be retrieved, examined, and used in a court of law. Unless you are using an encryption device (hardware or software), you should assume that e-mail over the Internet is not secure. Remember that e-mail can be forwarded, so unintended audiences may see what you've written. You might also inadvertently send something to the wrong party, so always keep the content professional to avoid embarrassment.

Remember that your tone can't be heard in e-mail. E-mail communication can't convey the nuances of verbal communication. In an attempt to infer tone of voice.

Use a signature that includes contact information. To ensure that people know who you are, include a signature that has your contact information, including your mailing address, business address, and contact telephone number.

Learning Outcome 2

Know factors to consider when communicating with clients within the funeral service.

Good communicators are aware of how their body language will affect their message.

Try standing in front of a full-length mirror and ask yourself how you might look and be perceived by:

- The parents of a child who has died.
- A very elderly bereaved wife
- A young husband
- Bereaved children

The amount of information - as a Funeral Arranger / Funeral Director you have a lot of information to find out and to share in a very short time. With just one phone call or face-to-face meeting, you may need to explain to a client what you need them to do or think about and convey the importance of making timely, yet wise, decisions. Clients, however, may easily become overwhelmed when there is so much to listen to, talk about and to understand.

Words, terms and acronyms - to some, the terms used in the Funeral Service will be like a foreign language. It uses jargon

(industry-specific terms) such as " arranging for removal and transportation of the deceased" When you use unfamiliar words like these, clients may not understand what you are talking about.

Emotions - clients are contacting you at a time of crisis in their life —a time when they are upset, frustrated or possibly frightened. Your job is not only to address their concerns but also to calm them down enough so they can listen, learn and understand.

Distractions - the funeral home environment, as much as words and emotions, factors in communication.

When you meet clients in your office, for example, they may be distracted by the fact they are on unfamiliar territory. Very few will have stepped inside a funeral home before more than once or twice in their own lifetime, and for some possibly never before.

Learning Outcome 3

Know the skills necessary to respond appropriately to the bereaved.

Communication is the imparting or exchange of information, ideas or feelings. It is important to remember that communication is a two-way exchange between a sender and a receiver. Communication is not just a way of imparting facts or information but also of imparting attitudes and feelings. Humans communicate in a number of ways:

- Verbally - through the choice of words used
- Non-verbally e.g. body language
- Listening - the method by which communications are received
- Written - through the use of the written word
- Visual - through the use of graphics and signs

Crucial Skills

There is little point in having these qualities in abundance if the person on the receiving end is not aware of them! The qualities are conveyed and communicated through skills. Skills in communication are what we can actually see; it is through them that we know that the qualities are present. Try to recall a one-to-one exchange that you have had when you have been the "receiver" - perhaps with your doctor, or for some sort of appraisal. What did the other person do or say which made that interaction good or bad? If I had been a fly on the wall, what could I have noted? The points you made may have clustered themselves into:

Attention	The person had a range of skills that confirmed that you were the object of their attention for however long the exchange lasted
Observe	The person seemed to notice how you were – "You look tired today".
Listen	What you had to say was carefully listened to – you feel heard
Respond	Replies to what you had said were appropriate and carefully timed

We can look at these in closer detail.

Attention

There are many ways of showing attention; being ready to listen can be shown by maximising the environment, minimising interruptions and distractions.

If a home visit is called for, the funeral arranger / director may not have much choice about the environment, but it is still possible to suggest that the discussion is important and perhaps a time of quiet will help.

The quality of respect will not be shown if mobile 'phones ring during the interview.

Allowing sufficient time is another way of demonstrating attention - surreptitiously glancing at a watch will not demonstrate genuineness, and will be noticed. It is more respectful to set a time limit at the start and to remind the person that time is drawing to a close e.g. "You'll remember that we agreed that I'd have to leave at …….. but if we need to meet again, we can arrange to do so".

Non-verbal communication will also play an important role

The way we sit, the amount of appropriate eye contact, our facial expression, not shuffling papers, all convey whether or not we are giving full attention. Research seems to prove that first impressions are the ones that last, and this is especially pertinent in funeral directing, where the client is in a very vulnerable state and therefore very impressionable.

Observe

Being able to pick up on the clients' non-verbal language, as well as being aware of our own, is often helpful in gauging the level of emotion, so that what is said and any information given is appropriate to that level. For example, if a client seems agitated, finds it difficult to sustain eye contact or perhaps cannot keep still, it may be a clue that information needs to be repeated.

Listen

We will be looking at some of the barriers to good listening, but the ability to listen actively is an invaluable gift for a funeral arranger / director.

Passive listening will not convey those core qualities. We need to be able to listen on at least two levels - listening to the content is not too difficult, although the number of points that get overlooked can be alarming!

We also need to listen for the feeling behind the words. "I don't want any fuss", can be said in many different ways (try to listen to the many different things it can convey, depending upon how it is said). The sensitive Funeral arranger /director will be listening not only to the words, but to "the music behind the words".

Practical Exercise - have a go!

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic-group/speaking-and-listening

Through active listening the funeral arranger / director could hear something that may be said by a close relative, that gives cause for concern and would cause doubt in a funeral director's mind that what people are saying, and the position and condition of the deceased, are not totally compatible. If anything is thought to be suspicious, it may be worthwhile for the Funeral Arranger to alert the Funeral Director, or the Coroner's Office.

Respond

If we are listening to both content and feeling(s), then we should also respond to both. The skill which best achieves this is reflection. The funeral arranger / director will, of necessity, need to ask questions.

If possible, these should be open questions

How … ? What ….. ? When … ? Why?…….Where?……….

Use of these questions is more likely to ensure that the funeral is what the client wants; whereas closed questions will result in Yes/No answers which tend to leave all the control with the Funeral director, when the aim is to give as much as possible to the client.

Too many questions especially closed questions, can make the client feel interrogated.

The skill of reflection demonstrates empathy.

Example... "When you mentioned…….. you sound / seem …….. …" lets the client know that you not only heard what they said, but that you were sensitive enough to hear how they said it, that is you heard the feeling as well as the content.

The practical details of providing a service will be well known to funeral directors, but there is little doubt that it is the personalised quality of the service that has most significance for the client.

Losing sight of this can result in the funeral not having that meaningful quality which we emphasised earlier. Checking that we communicate the core qualities and are self-aware - not self-conscious, which is an uncomfortable way of being - will ensure that the client remembers the significance that the funeral director lent to an occasion that has the potential for being traumatic. Being self-aware implies taking care of ourselves.

Funeral directing is, by its nature, stressful; working with and for people in a highly emotional state, constantly helping with acute grief, walking that professional tightrope between the practical and the personal will inevitably take its toll. Ensuring that neither "distancing" - that the client will see as indifference - nor "burn out" that leads to stress related illness, happens is a personal responsibility. We do well to remember:

Many helpers, when they themselves are suffering, are incapable of accepting support, or at least of receiving it easily ……… Chances are, if you cannot accept help you cannot really give it.

We owe it to our clients and to ourselves to give ourselves the same care that we offer the clients.

Research has shown that 80% of the communication process is non-verbal. In order to provide consistently good client care, this non-verbal element needs to be examined in more detail and the following positive and negative factors considered. Think about when you are with a client, what is your non-verbal communication saying about you?

Non Verbal Communication

Communication	Positive	Negative
Tone of Voice	Caring with a gentle intonation	Too loud Too quiet Bored intonation
Pace	Confident pace	Hurried
Asking appropriate questions	Open Questions	Closed Questions
Clear and concise speech	Paced	Too fast or too slow
Body Language	**Positive**	**Negative**
Posture	Relaxed, yet upright posture	Fidgeting or impatient tapping
	Open arm gestures	Slumped posture
Personal Space	Allowing personal space	Folded arms Standing or sitting too close
Movement	Gentle head movements	Rapid head movements
Appearance	Smart and clean appearance	Untidy appearance
Gesture	Open arm gestures	Slumped posture
Facial expression	Friendly expression	Bored
Mouth	Gentle, genuine smile	False smile
Eyes	Good eye contact	Looking away or staring

The skills of the Active Listener

- Put the client at ease
- Stop talking and clear the mind of everything except the case in hand
- Do not interrupt
- Relax, be calm, show every willingness to give the client all the time needed
- Listen exactly to what the person is trying to say and not what it is believed should be said
- Look for non-verbal signals and respond to them
- Look at the person and use eye contact
- Use non-verbal signals to show an attentive interest, especially use of your head in a positive manner, open arm gestures and eye contact
- Use appropriate questions to help the client to continue talking
- Summarise what is being said to check understanding - keep it simple. Be genuinely interested
- Be aware of expressing personal opinions. Make a conscious effort to prevent personal opinions affecting any reactions.

Remember, when listening to someone who is actually communicating, the message should be "I care, I respect you and I want to help".

Use of appropriate questions helps the client to continue talking and also communicates the listener's interest and attention. The definition of a question is 'a statement made by one to another to elicit information'.

A question should be phrased so that it obtains the information needed; it should promote a good relationship between the funeral director and the client; it should be expressed as clearly as possible; it should aim to elicit information related to one topic at a time. These points show that there are two types of question, namely:

Open questions that are aimed at receiving a broad amount of information and leave the client with a choice of what he/she wishes to talk about, e.g. "What kind of flower arrangement were you interested in?"

Closed questions which direct the client to a particular subject and can usually be answered with a "Yes" or "No", e.g. "Would you like a service in Church?"

Never use a multiple question, such as, "Would you like roses or carnations and how would you like them arranged?" Such a question asks for too much information all at once and will only confuse the client.

The type of question can be determined by two factors: how the client feels and what the funeral director needs to find out. It will be possible to determine how the client feels by being aware of the non-verbal element of communication. Does the client want to talk about the person who has died? If it is believed the answer is 'yes', and that it might help the client to relax, then an open question should be used. If it is felt that the client is too upset and does not want to discuss their bereavement, a closed question should be used. Questioning is part of the active listening process.

BARRIERS TO GOOD LISTENING

'On-off' listening	
'Red flag' listening	
'Open ears - closed mind' listening	
'Too-deep-for-me' listening	
'Matter-over-mind' listening	
Being 'subject-centred' instead of 'speaker-centred'	
'Fact' listening	
'Fact' listening	
'Pencil' listening	
'Hubbub' listening	

BARRIERS TO GOOD LISTENING

'On-off' listening

This unfortunate habit in listening arises from the fact that most of us think about four times as fast as the average person speaks. Thus, the listener has three-quarters of a minute of spare thinking time for each listening minute. Sometimes we use this extra time to think of our own personal affairs, concerns, or interests and troubles instead of listening.

'Red flag' listening

To some of us some words are like the proverbial red flag to the bull. When we hear them we get upset or irritated and stop listening. These terms vary with individuals. However, to some words like 'should', 'must', 'unfaithful', 'police', 'discipline', 'school', 'management', 'Unions', etc. are signals to which there is an automatic response. When this signal comes in we tune out the speaker.

'Open ears - closed mind' listening
Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the speaker is boring and what is said makes no sense. Often we jump to conclusions that we can predict what he knows or what he will say; thus, we conclude, there is no reason to listen because we will hear nothing new if we do.

'Glassy eyed' listening
Sometimes we look at a person intently and we almost seem to be listening, although our minds may be on other things or on far distant places. We drop back into the comfort of our own thoughts. We get glassy-eyed and often a dreamy expression appears on our faces. We can tell when people look at us in this way. Similarly, they can see the same in us and we're not fooling anyone.

'Too-deep-for-me' listening

When we are listening to ideas that are too complex and complicated there is a danger we will 'shut-off'.

'Matter-over-mind' listening

We do not like to have our pet ideas, prejudices, and points of view overturned. We do not like to have our opinions and judgments challenged. Consequently, when a speaker says something that clashes with what we think, believe, and hold firm then we may unconsciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counter-attack.

Being 'subject-centred' instead of 'speaker-centred'

Sometimes we concentrate on the problem and not the person. Detail and fact about an incident become more important than what people are saying about themselves.

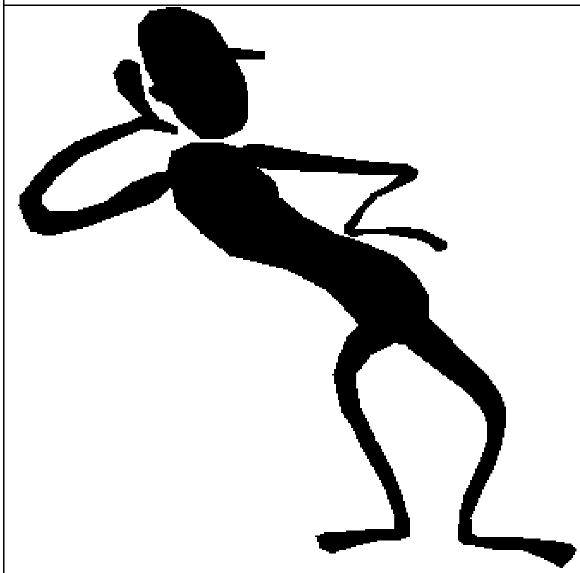
'Fact' listening

Often as we listen to people we try to remember the facts and repeat them over and over again to drive them home. As we do this, frequently the speaker has gone on to new facts and we lose them in the process.

'Pencil' listening

Trying to put down on paper everything the speaker says usually means we are bound to lose some of it because the speaker's words come out faster than we can write them down. Eye contact also becomes more difficult.

Another writer on funeral service, Alan Wolfelt, also offers a list of barriers to the funeral director listening to clients:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">FUNERAL ARRANGER – FUNERAL DIRECTOR PITFALLS</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6"></td><td>Funeral director dominance</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bombarding with questions</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inappropriate self-disclosure</td></tr>
<tr><td>Offering platitudes or false reassurance</td></tr>
<tr><td>Discouraging the expression of emotions or tears</td></tr>
<tr><td>Emotional distancing</td></tr>
</table>

Funeral arranger / director dominance the funeral director thinks he/she knows the answer and the response the person is going to make. Preempting (jumping in before the client has finished their response) is easy due to the frequency of hearing the likely answer. However, this shows impatience. Attempting to influence or coerce the client's intentions or lecturing the client on what the funeral director thinks of the client's requirements also indicates a dominant presence.

Bombarding with questions - Firing too many closed questions (see below) can indicate that the arranger is more interested in the facts than the person.

Inappropriate self-disclosure, talking too much about self and revealing one's own experiences and opinions.

Offering platitudes or false reassurance Using meaningless and inappropriate/insensitive clichés - "You'll get over it" or "Time is a great healer".

Discouraging the expression of emotions or tears Indicating that tears and the pain of grief are inappropriate or show that you are "soft"

Emotional distancing - Avoiding feelings being experienced by the bereaved and solely concerning you with the facts. Being too business-like and not "reaching-out" by showing warmth.

BOOK	***This has been adapted from Wolfelt AD (1990) Interpersonal Skills Training: A Handbook for Funeral Home Staffs Bristol PA (USA): Accelerated Development p117)***

Learning Outcome 4

Know how to communicate with clients who may have additional/special needs.

Effective communication with people with Special Needs

There are many that believe that those with physical or mental impairments should be described as "people with disabilities" rather than "the disabled" and that being referred to as "the disabled" takes away the individual person's identity by associating them with a group of people, all of whom could have differing impairments.

Here are some ways that you can effectively communicate with people with disabilities:

- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible, take time to get to know your client's needs
- Don't use phrases such as "handicapped"
- Be patient, people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Find a good way to communicate, a good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at your client but don't stare. Speak directly to people with disabilities, not to their carer or someone who is with them
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Do not invade someone's personal space – you don't need to stand closer to a person with disabilities than you would to anyone else.
- You should talk to adults with disabilities in the same manner and with the same respect that you show for all adults.
- When speaking with a wheelchair user try to place yourself at their eye-level if possible.

Assisting Clients that have Physical Disability

Physical impairment refers to a broad range of disabilities which include orthopedic, neuromuscular, cardiovascular and pulmonary disorders. People with these disabilities often rely upon assertive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, canes, and artificial limbs to obtain mobility.

Although the cause of the disability may vary, clients with physical disabilities may face the following difficulties:

- Access Issues:
- Inability to gain access to inaccessible building or room.
- Decreased eye-hand coordination.
- Impaired verbal communication.
- Decreased physical stamina and endurance.

Considerations:

If a client uses a wheelchair, conversations at different eye levels are difficult. If a conversation continues for more than a few minutes and if it is possible to do so, sit down, kneel, or squat and share eye level.

A wheelchair is part of your client’s body space. Do not automatically hang or lean on the chair; it is similar to hanging or leaning on the person.

When it appears that your client needs assistance, ask if you can help. Most people will ask for assistance if they need it. Accept a "no thank you" graciously. Accept the fact that a disability exists. By not acknowledging this fact is the same as not acknowledging your client.

People with physical disabilities are not "confined" to wheelchairs. They often transfer over to automobiles and to furniture. Some who use wheelchairs can walk with the aid of canes, braces, crutches or walkers. Using a wheelchair some of the time does not mean an individual is "faking" a disability. It may be a means to conserve energy or move about more quickly.

If a person's speech is difficult to understand, do not hesitate to ask him/her to repeat.

Provide assistance if you are asked. Never come up behind a client who uses a wheelchair and push them. Always ask first while facing the person. Never take the door out of a person's hand to assist them in opening it, they may be using the door for balance. Always ask if you can help first.

Communicating with Clients who are deaf, or hard of hearing.

Ask your client how you can improve communication with them. This can be as simple as moving your chair to face the client directly so he or she can see your lips. Allow extra time in your appointment for the arrangement to make sure that messages are clearly understood.

Get the person's attention.

Face the person before you speak and, as appropriate, touch him or her lightly on the shoulder. This not only gets the person's attention, but also orients him or her to where the sound is coming from.

Articulate clearly and speak in natural tones.

Speak distinctly, not necessarily loudly. Shouting is unpleasant and not helpful; it distorts the lip movements, making lip reading more difficult, and may interfere with a hearing aid's ability to pick up usable sounds. Use a slower rate of speech, but don't exaggerate pronunciation to the point that you distort individual words.

Reduce distracting/ interfering sounds.
Find a quiet environment in which to communicate. It is even more difficult for a person with limited hearing to understand you when there is competing noise, such as the hum from an air conditioning unit.

Make sure that you can be clearly seen.

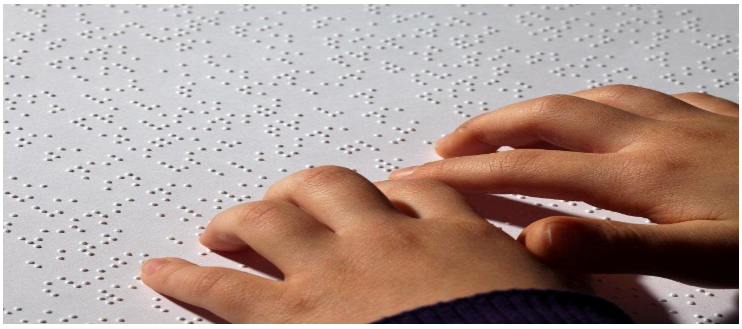
Make sure that the light is adequate and that your face is clearly visible. Do not block your mouth, and make sure you do not talk at the same time as someone else.

Appreciate that it takes significant concentration to read lips or speech.
People lip-read when they look at someone's mouth, and they speech-read when they also look at the other person's gestures, expressions and actions. Sometimes messages are interpreted incorrectly, for pairs of words may sound alike, such as bed and men, or pain and main.

Confirm understanding.
Take time to confirm what clients understand. If the client is unclear, rephrase it, don't repeat it.

Additional Learning

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/factsheets-and-leaflets/communication.aspx



Communicating with Clients who are blind or partially sighted.

Introduce yourself and others.
When you enter the room where there is a blind client, make sure to identify yourself by name. When a client with low vision enters the room, orient him or her by introducing yourself and everyone else who is present. When you are about to leave the room, communicate that information as well.

Ask if the person wants assistance.
The amount of assistance a client desires depends on the situation and his or her comfort in asking.

Ask if a client wants help and, if so, find out how you can best be of assistance. The client may want descriptive or directional information, such as identifying where objects are located within the room, or may ask you to explain any unusual sounds or noises.

The client may also ask to walk with you, putting his or her hand through the crook of your elbow.

Use everyday words.
Give clear and specific information, and use everyday words, not funeral service related jargon. Don't be afraid to use verbs such as see and look, for they are a part of everyday speech.

Provide clear directions.
If your client wishes to visit the chapel of rest to spend time with the deceased, make sure a member of staff is in attendance if the client is alone, to guide and to seat within the room.

Find out how you can be of help, such as offering to give a detailed commentary of the surroundings, and if the client wishes to touch the deceased, ask permission to guide their hand to touch the deceased hands or face.

Additional Learning www.rnibspotthesigns.org.uk/

A few simple things to remember when meeting with clients or family members who are blind or visually impaired:

- When accompanying a blind person in an unfamiliar room, never leave them standing alone in the middle of the floor. Escort them to a seat or place their hand on a "point of reference" such as a wall or table.
- When you are in a client's home, leave their things where they have placed them. If you move their belongings, they may have trouble finding them later on.
- When you meet a blind client, identify yourself. When you're leaving the room, tell them you are leaving. In a group, address your client by name if they are expected to reply.
- Always talk directly to a blind person, not through his /her companion. Blind people can talk for themselves! Speak in a normal tone and volume.
- Don't be over-protective. Most blind people can do things by themselves. If they need assistance, they will ask.
- When approaching a blind person / family member who you suspect needs assistance in getting from one place to another, ask if they need help. If assistance is desired, offer your arm so they can grasp your elbow. This position offers the greatest amount of information and security. Do not take their arm and propel them by the elbow.
- When walking with a blind person, proceed at a normal pace. You may hesitate slightly before stepping up or down; allow time and caution them of any unusual obstructions ahead.

Working Guide Dogs

A guide dog walks on a blind person's left, so you should walk on their right. As tempting as it may be to pet a guide dog, remember that this dog is responsible for guiding a master who cannot see. The dog should never be distracted from that duty.

- In guiding a blind client or family member to a chair, place their hand upon the back of the chair; don't try to push them into it. Their touch will tell them the type, width, and height of the chair as well as which way it is facing.

❖ If you are assisting a blind client or family member into a car when the door is open, guide their hand to the roof just over the door. If the car door is closed, place their hand on the handle. They can close their own door.

❖ When assisting your client throughout the arrangement, take care to explain in detail about the options and choices they need to make.

❖ When creating the estimate of costs during the arrangement, ensure that you talk to your client, and explain what you are doing, and how you are calculating the costs.

Remember, when you do meet a blind client or a mourner, common sense and sensitivity to others are most important of all.

Communicating with Clients who speak English as a second language or come from other Cultures

Find out where the client is along the continuum of language.

When you need to talk about significant information, such as the funeral arrangement, ask the client how they prefer to communicate. If necessary, consider using an interpreter or translated materials to improve understanding. Consider using a professional interpreter to communicate important information. A bilingual/ bicultural interpreter can not only speak in the client's language, but can also present information in ways that are consistent with the person's cultural beliefs and practices.

State your message clearly and simply.
Use everyday words rather than technical ones. It may be necessary to demonstrate or use pictures to get your point across.

Speak clearly and concentrate on the most important message.

Think about what you want to say, and then carefully choose the words to say it. Speak at a slower pace, pausing for two or three seconds after you ask a question or give new information.

Use phrases or short sentences. Include the full form of words, rather than contractions—"I will," for example, rather than "I'll." Do not speak louder just because a client has limited English—this can come across as sounding angry and does nothing to improve communication.

Work with the family decision maker.

In some cultures, the client is not the primary decision maker. Find out who is responsible for making the major decisions, and include this person when discussing the arrangement options.

Verify the client understands.

Do not assume that a nod and a smile mean the message was understood.

To verify, ask the client an open-ended question such as, "How will you...?" rather than a yes/no question such as, "Do you know how to..?" Clarify any misunderstanding by finding new and simple ways to say the same thing.

Proof of Learning – Assessment Criteria

Module 1 Unit 3	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
	The learner can:
1.3.1	Describe communication techniques to use when dealing with clients within the funeral service.
1.3.2a	Identify the factors to consider when communicating with clients within the funeral service:- a) Faceto face
1.3.2b	b) On the telephone
1.3.2c	c) By letter
1.3.2d	d) By email
1.3.3	Describe the skills necessary to respond appropriately to the bereaved.
1.3.4a	Describe how to communicate with clients who may: a) be blind or partially sighted;
1.3.4b	a) be deaf or hard of hearing
1.3.4c	b) be physically disabled
1.3.4d	c) have learning difficulties
1.3.4e	d) speak English as a second language
1.3.4f	e) come from other cultures

Help with your studies

If you find your on written English would benefit from improvement, there are a number of online resources that you may find helpful:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise

www.move-on.org.uk/

Or alternatively, you could contact a local Learn Direct Centre for help. Please visit the LearnDirect website for further details

http://www.learndirect.co.uk/

Further Reading

Wolfelt AD (1990) *Interpersonal Skills Training: A Handbook for Funeral Home* Staffs Bristol PA (USA): Accelerated Development

Dodie Graves - Talking with Bereaved People: An Approach for Structured and Sensitive Communication.