

Handout: Effective Communication Skills

- **Explain the purpose** of the meeting / visit – say what people can get out of it (e.g. *“To learn how to keep your baby happy and growing well”*).
- **Do not lecture people.** It is often boring and it looks as if you think that they do not know anything.
- **Explain things clearly** by using short sentences and simple language (no ‘NGO speak’).
- Before you advise people, first **use open-ended questions to ASK FOR THEIR OPINIONS** / experience / ideas regarding the given topic (you can take advantage of what they already know / do)
- **LISTEN carefully and actively to what people tell you, show that you are paying attention to what they are saying, and then build upon what people say.**
- **Do your best to understand** why people do not practice the behaviors you promote or why they disagree with something you are saying.
- **Shape what you are saying** to the person’s situation and reality (e.g. do not ask people to use something they cannot afford).
- Avoid using questions that lead people to a certain answer (e.g. instead of *“Do you understand me?”* ask *“Could please someone summarize what I just explained?”*). **Use open-ended questions instead.**
- **Ask open-ended questions to VERIFY whether people understood what was said** (e.g. *“Can you please summarize in your own words what I just said?”*)
- **Engage people** in discussion, demonstrations, exercises, etc. – do not just make them sit passively and listen. Ensure that everyone participates – not just 1-2 active persons.
- **Demonstrate** any promoted skills, if possible.
- **Have accurate knowledge** of the topic you are talking about but admit when you do not know something.
- **Observe people’s expressions** and body language to see how well you are communicating. Respond to what you see.
- **Be authentic:** If you ask people to do something that you should also be doing, make sure that you are already doing it (e.g. washing hands with soap) or taking steps towards doing it.
- **AGREE with people on what ACTION(S) they will take after the meeting**
- Behave in a polite and respectful way.