

Am I receiving you loud & clear?

Cecilia Chiolero, PICAC NT

Communication is such a constant part of our lives that we often take it for granted. But it is not always so straightforward.

Making ourselves understood and understand what has been said can be more complicated than we think.

Communication is a cycle: a piece of information or message goes from the sender through a selected channel to the receiver. It is a continuous and dynamic interaction, both affecting and being affected by many variables.

The message is encoded with words, pictures, gestures, etc. before it is sent; and is also accompanied by other variables such as our life experiences, culture, values, knowledge and background.

Between sender and receiver there may be “noise” or barriers. These may be physical or physiological barriers such as:

- Physical barriers such as a bad telephone connection, noise or lack of privacy.
- Physiological barriers can be physical issues e.g. hearing, eyesight or emotional health, like pain, fatigue, fear, anxiety or stress.

For speakers of English as a secondary language, there are often more issues around understanding and difficulties with unfamiliar accents.

The rules that apply to verbal communication, also affect our non-verbal communication.

Gestures, pace of

conversation, eye contact and facial expressions also influence the reception of our messages. It is known that non-verbal communication is the main element of communication.

When we respect other people's views and cultures, and are ready to adapt our ways of communicating, it helps both sender and receiver.

Tips for improved communication

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use short and simple sentences, using standard English and avoiding jargon.
- Allow time for questions and clarifications.
- Do not provide too much information at the same time.

When to ask for an interpreter

When language is the real main barrier in communication and understanding, and that information MUST be communicated correctly and understood, one must ask for an interpreter.

There are two kinds of interpreters: informal interpreters and professional interpreters.

An informal interpreter is anyone fluent in English and in other languages. It can be a family member, a colleague, or a support worker.

A professional interpreter is a qualified professional, who has high levels of proficiency in at least two languages and who has the training and



experience to interpret with accuracy.

Any situation that requires accurate communication, legal, medical and financial matters requires a professional interpreter (NAATI-accredited interpreters or bilingual health professionals with relevant training and experience).

In urgent situations requiring accurate communication when it is not possible to access an on-site interpreter, telephone interpreting services should be used.

For simple daily living situations, an informal interpreter is sufficient.

Free interpreting services

Government agencies, health professionals (GPs) and aged care service providers can access subsidised interpreting services that are free of charges for the clients.

Let them know and they are obliged to make a booking on your behalf.

Interpreters do not necessarily have to be physically present (onsite), they can also be contacted on by phone (phone interpreting) or through videoconferencing systems (Telehealth).

More information

For more about communication tools and interpreting services, call PICAC NT Manager Cecilia on **08 8941 1004** – office hours (Mondays to Fridays, 9am to 3pm except public holidays), or [contact her online](#).

