# Communication in Healthcare Settings

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## Icebreakers

Blind Draw

Have students sit back-to-back in pairs. One student receives or creates a simple drawing (like a house, flower, or smiley face) and gives verbal instructions for how to recreate it—without saying what the object is. The other student listens and draws based only on those instructions. When finished, compare drawings and discuss:

* What worked?
* What could have made the communication clearer?
* How is this similar to giving instructions in healthcare?

Active Listening

Divide students into pairs. One student tells a short story—either from personal experience, the news, or a book or movie—while the other listens without interrupting, asking questions, or reacting. After the speaker finishes, the listener retells the story as accurately as possible, sticking to the facts. The original speaker gives feedback:

* Did they remember the key details?
* Did they add or change anything?
* How well did they listen?

Then switch roles and repeat.

Adding Details to Improve Communication

Give verbal instructions to the whole group:

1. Draw a circle on your paper.
2. Put the letter “A” inside the circle.
3. Draw a line through the circle.

Have students hold up their drawings and observe how different they are.

Then, give more specific instructions:

* Fold the paper in half, then in half again.
* Open it to reveal four squares.
* Draw a circle in the upper-left square, filling the space.
* Inside the circle, draw a capital letter A touching the top and bottom of the circle.
* Draw a horizontal line through the middle of the circle.

Hold up the drawings again. Discuss how more detailed, specific communication leads to clearer results—just like in a healthcare setting.

## Example discussion prompts (in-class or online)

Think about your last visit to a clinic, hospital, or pharmacy. Was the visit for you, a family member, a friend? How did the healthcare worker communicate before, during and after your visit? Explain your communication with the healthcare worker(s). What aspects of communication needed improvement? What components of communication were missing to improve communication? Use specific examples to support your opinion from the Components of Communication presentation.

## Videos and links

* **Team Documentation - Improve Efficiency of EHR Documentation American Medical Association** 39 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_50qVNjwlSQ>
* **Electronic Health Records: Past, Present, and Future 3 minutes** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxDb1mqNWrI> historical timeline
* **Must Know secrets for easier EHR Documentation 50 minutes** 7 key ideas to explore  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4DV_mf-Yss>

## **Communication Strategies in Healthcare**

60 minutes, in-person or online, individual, small groups, the group discussion

**Competency**: 8

**Materials**

* Access to online resources or printed content on communication tools
* Presentation or discussion platform (in-person or online)

**Activity Instructions**

1. **Assign & Research**  
   Assign each group or pair one of the following communication strategies:
   * SBAR
   * Call-Out
   * Check-Back
   * Handoff

Students will research:

* + What the strategy stands for and what it means
  + When it is used in a healthcare setting
  + Why it is important for patient and team safety
  + How to implement it clearly and effectively

1. **Teach-Back**  
   Each group will prepare a short presentation or demo (2–5 minutes) that includes:
   * A clear explanation of their assigned strategy
   * A real or made-up example where this communication tool would be helpful or necessary
   * A brief activity, visual, or role-play to engage the class
2. **Class Discussion**  
   After all groups have presented, facilitate a discussion or ask students to reflect on:
   * Which strategy do you think is most useful?
   * Which strategy would be hardest to remember or use in the moment?
   * How could using these tools improve communication in healthcare?

**Optional Extension**

* Have students create a laminated “Quick Guide” to communication strategies as a reference for clinical simulations or internships

## **Psychological** Safety in HC: Essential for Client Safety and Positive Outcomes

45 minutes (23 minutes of videos alone) optional for extension with additional video, 30 and 15 minutes each

**Competencies:** 3 or 4

**Description:** This activity can be done with the entire class in-person or live online. It could be assigned to individuals as well if they were to answer questions or write a summary about each video. It involves watching a series of videos with discussion following each video. Video links and optional discussion questions are included. The videos stem from the work of the Institution of Healthcare Improvement (IHI).

**Directions:** View the series of videos below. Discuss each video as a class or in small groups. Instructors may choose to simply ask students what their thoughts are regarding each video.

**Video 1: What is a Culture of Safety? 2 mn:** <https://youtu.be/hMk404LmKhY?si=jVWDrgd07Y3KrKg0>

**Video 2:** **Why do Errors Happen? How Can we Prevent them (4:50mn):** <https://youtu.be/JL5GTxDzApk?si=M0Cd6i0uoYKMcIdR>

**Video 3: Why is psychological safety important? (2mn):** <https://youtu.be/LF1253YhEc8?si=RIHV_UOQqHHje57E>

**Video 4: Three ways to create psychological safety in HC (4mn):** <https://youtu.be/jbLjdFqrUNs?si=10SQ0ldPm5ajQAdE>

**Closing videos that show the benefits of psychological safety in action:**

* Annie’s story (5.5mn) – when nurse is punished for error: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeldVu-3DpM>
* Dealing with errors in a just culture (6mn): <https://youtu.be/3nRN3OflDLQ>

**Additional optional videos that summarize the importance of psychological safety among the healthcare team for patient safety and outcomes:**

• Amy Edmonson on psychological safety (30mn): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPKYwc_MICs&feature=emb_rel_pause>

• Amy Psych Safety (15 mn) – shorter version of the above: <https://vimeo.com/305573378>

## The Platinum Rule: What’s Your Communication Style?

60 minutes, in-person, online, individual then small groups, then large group  
Competency: 1

**Recommended Resources**

* [Tony Alessandra's 2-minute video on The Platinum Rule](https://youtu.be/pdm7jtNXORQ?si=2iU_IPTwOadQv1lB)
* [Communication Style Quiz](https://visme.co/blog/the-4-communication-styles-quiz/) (online or paper version)

**Set Up**

* Have students complete the communication style quiz online (click “Let’s Get Started” on the page)
* After identifying their dominant style (Director, Relator, Analyzer, or Socializer), sort students into small groups by style
* Share and review the traits of each style using the video and/or quiz website

**Activity Steps**

1. **Complete the Assessment**  
   Take the online [communication style quiz](https://visme.co/blog/the-4-communication-styles-quiz/) to discover your dominant communication style.
2. **Group by Style**  
   Move into small groups based on your results. Each group will work together to answer the following questions based on your shared communication style:
   * Describe a **good day at work (or school)**. What happens that makes you feel happy, successful, or appreciated?
   * What are some things your **teammates or coworkers could do** to make your day even better?
   * What **drives you crazy** in a team setting? What kinds of communication or behavior frustrate you?
   * How do you **prefer to be communicated with** (face-to-face, email, text, etc.)? What kinds of messages work best in which format?
   * What else should others know about your communication style so they can work well with you?
3. **Share with the Whole Group**  
   Each group presents their answers to the class. Look for patterns, similarities, and differences between the communication styles.
4. **Wrap-Up Discussion**  
   Watch or revisit [Tony Alessandra’s short video](https://youtu.be/pdm7jtNXORQ?si=2iU_IPTwOadQv1lB) about The Platinum Rule.  
   Discuss how understanding different communication styles can help us work better with others in healthcare and beyond.

**Reflection (Optional)**

* What did you learn about your own communication style?
* How can this activity help you in future healthcare settings, where teamwork is essential?
* Is there a communication style you struggle to work with? What could help?

***Communication Style Assessment***

The following assessment will help to identify your primary communication style. For each pair of statements below, select the statement that *most* accurately describes you.

1. A) I’m usually open to getting to know people personally and establishing relationships with

them.

B) I’m not usually open to getting to know people personally and establishing relationships with

them.

1. A) I usually react slowly and deliberately.

B) I usually react quickly and spontaneously.

1. A) I’m usually guarded about other people’s use of my time.

B) I’m usually open to other people's use of my time.

1. A) I usually introduce myself at social gatherings.

B) I usually wait for others to introduce themselves to me at social gatherings.

1. A) I usually focus my conversations on the interests of the people involved, even if that means

straying from the business or subject at hand.

B) I usually focus my conversations on the task, issue, business, or subject at hand.

1. A) I’m usually not assertive, and I can be patient with a slow pace.

B) I’m usually assertive, and at times I can be impatient with a slow pace.

1. A) I usually make decisions based on facts or evidence.

B) I usually make decisions based on feelings, experiences, or relationships.

1. A) I often join in group conversations.

B) I don't often join in group conversations.

1. A) I usually like to work with and through others, providing support when possible.

B) I usually like to work alone or dictate the conditions in terms of how others are involved.

1. A) I usually ask questions or speak hesitantly and indirectly.

B) I usually make empathic statements or directly expressed opinions.

1. A) I usually focus mostly on ideas, concepts, or results.

B) I usually focus mostly on persons, interactions, and feelings.

1. A) I usually use gestures, facial expression, and voice tone to highlight points.

B) I usually don't use gestures, facial expressions, and voice tone to highlight points.

1. A) I usually accept others’ points of view (ideas, feelings, and concerns).

B) I usually don't accept others' points of view (ideas, feelings, and concerns).

1. A) I usually respond to risk and change in a cautious or predictable manner.

B) I usually respond to risk and change in a lively or unpredictable manner.

1. A) I usually prefer to keep personal feelings and thoughts private, sharing only when I wish to

do so

B) I usually find it natural and easy to share and talk about my feelings with others.

1. A) I usually look for new or different experiences and situations.

B) I usually choose known or similar situations and relationships.

1. A) I’m usually responsive to others’ agendas, interests, and concerns.

B) I’m usually directed toward my own agendas, interests, and concerns.

1. A) I usually respond to conflict slowly and indirectly.

B) I usually respond to conflict quickly and directly.

***Scoring Your Platinum Rule Assessment***

**Record your answers on the table below for each set of statements. Place a mark next to the statements that you chose. Add the number of responses in each column.**

**O**  **G D I**

1A \_\_\_\_\_ 1B \_\_\_\_\_ 2B \_\_\_\_\_ 2A \_\_\_\_\_

3B \_\_\_\_\_ 3A \_\_\_\_\_ 4A \_\_\_\_\_ 4B \_\_\_\_\_

5A \_\_\_\_\_ 5B \_\_\_\_\_ 6B \_\_\_\_\_ 6A \_\_\_\_\_

7B \_\_\_\_\_ 7A \_\_\_\_\_ 8A \_\_\_\_\_ 8B \_\_\_\_\_

9A \_\_\_\_\_ 9B \_\_\_\_\_ 10B \_\_\_\_\_ 10A \_\_\_\_\_

11B \_\_\_\_\_ 11A \_\_\_\_\_ 12A \_\_\_\_\_ 12B \_\_\_\_\_

13A \_\_\_\_\_ 13B \_\_\_\_\_ 14B \_\_\_\_\_ 14A \_\_\_\_\_

15B \_\_\_\_\_ 15A \_\_\_\_\_ 16A \_\_\_\_\_ 16B \_\_\_\_\_

17A \_\_\_\_\_ 17B \_\_\_\_\_ 18B \_\_\_\_\_ 18A \_\_\_\_\_

**Total \_O\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_G\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ D\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Next, compare the O and G columns. Which letter had the highest total? \_\_\_\_\_

Compare the D and I columns. Which letter had the highest total? \_\_\_\_\_

If you chose G and D most often, you are likely a ***Director****.*

If you chose O and D most often, you are likely a ***Socializer***.

If you chose O and I most often, you are likely a ***Relator***.

If you chose G and I most often, you are likely a ***Thinker***.