



Health and Community Services
COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Communication Skills and Complaints

Presented by:

Welcome to the training

Housekeeping issues

Introductions

- Talk with someone you don't know and ask them to tell you three things they are prepared to share with the group
- The partners will then introduce the person

Purpose of training



Program Outline

Complaints

Customer Service

Active listening

Bringing it all together

Why do people complain?

Most common reason is they don't want it to happen to anyone else

What does a complaint look like?

Recognising a complaint provides the opportunity to resolve the concern at the earliest point possible to prevent escalation

Complaints may present as:

- A comment
- A request
- An expression of dissatisfaction
- A complaint (in the sense that it is a more formal expression of dissatisfaction)

Managing complaints

What might make someone say:
“complaints are good”?

Positive Complaints Culture

An organisation with a positive complaints culture is an organisation that genuinely welcomes complaints and uses what is learned from them to improve services

Positive Complaints Culture

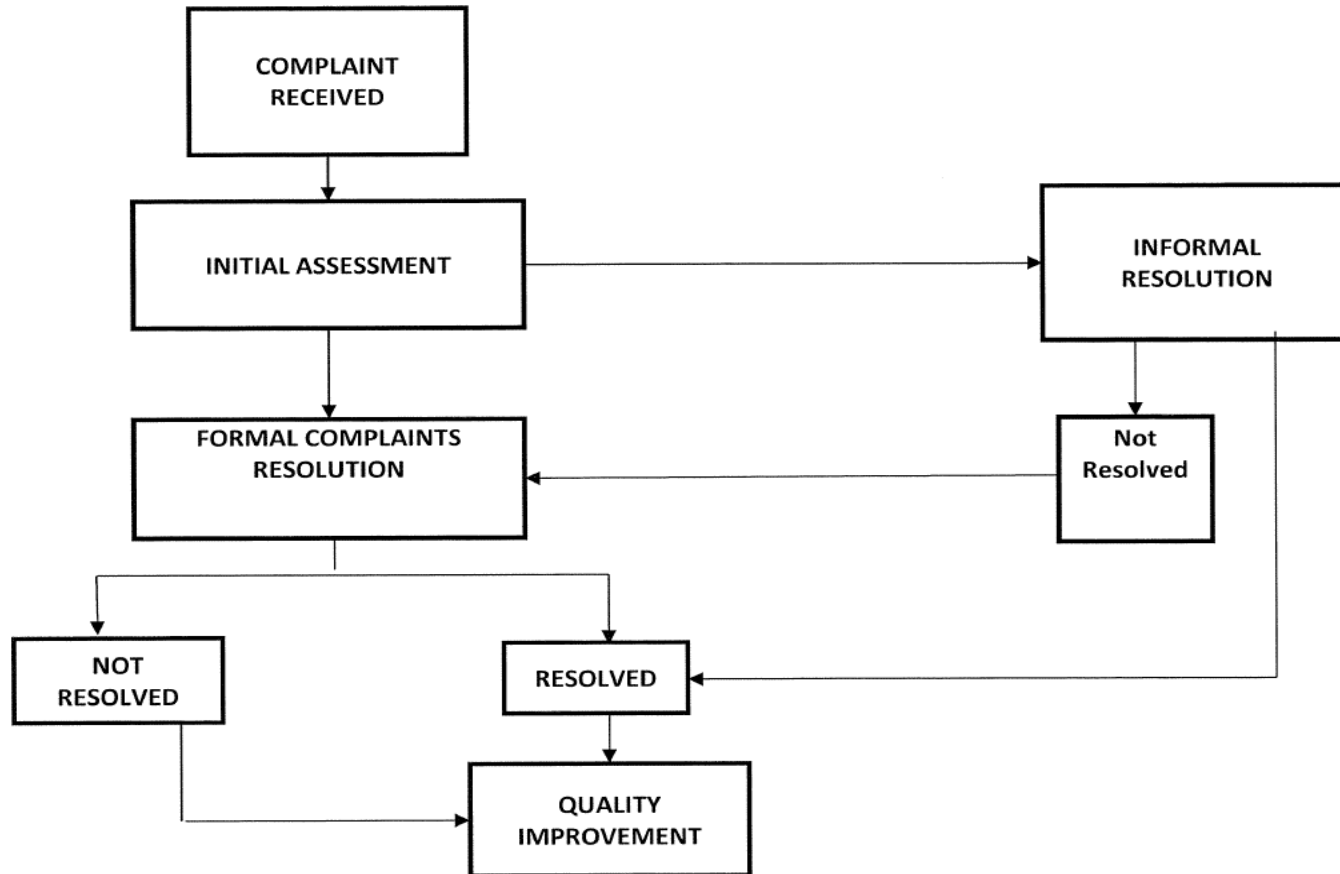
For service users:

- People know they have a right to and know how to make a complaint
- Complaints are taken seriously and all feedback is welcome

For service providers:

- Complaints provide an opportunity for quality improvement
- Complaints are dealt with in a fair, confidential and person centred manner

Complaints Resolution Process



Informal resolution

Resolving simple complaints where no real harm has occurred:

- Know your organisation's complaint policy
- Do you have authority to resolve the issue?

Informal resolution continued

Resolving simple complaints where no real harm has occurred:

- Talk with the person making the complaint to clarify his or her concerns
- Find out what the person is hoping to achieve by making a complaint
- Consider whether the issue can be immediately resolved (keeping in mind your organisation's policy and procedures)
- Do you need to take records?

Not taking complaints personally

- When a service user makes a complaint, remember the complaint is about their experience
- The moment you become defensive, you have stopped listening to the other person
- Taking a deep breath is a useful way of taking a moment to think clearly before responding to any concern that is being raised

Not taking complaints personally continued

- If you are reacting to the complaint being made, it may be an emotional reaction to something that has happened to you previously
- Staff are required to act in a professional, courteous and respectful manner at all times

Customer Service Skills

Think of a time when you had poor service – what happened?

Think of an example of good customer service – how was it demonstrated?

What are the elements of good customer service?

When should you be using these skills in your workplace?

Customer Service Skills

Patience

Ability to listen

Focus – on the person

Smile

Eye contact

Empathy

Politeness

Willingness

Use positive language

Remain calm

Demonstrate respect

Genuineness

The overarching value of good customer service is RESPECT

Do you agree?

How do you demonstrate respect?

What if you don't respect your client/patient?

What is active listening?

- Active listening refers to the skills involved in ensuring that you can understand what the person talking to you is saying
- It's the difference between hearing and listening
- It's about being actively involved and focussing on the person speaking

Why do we want to actively listen?

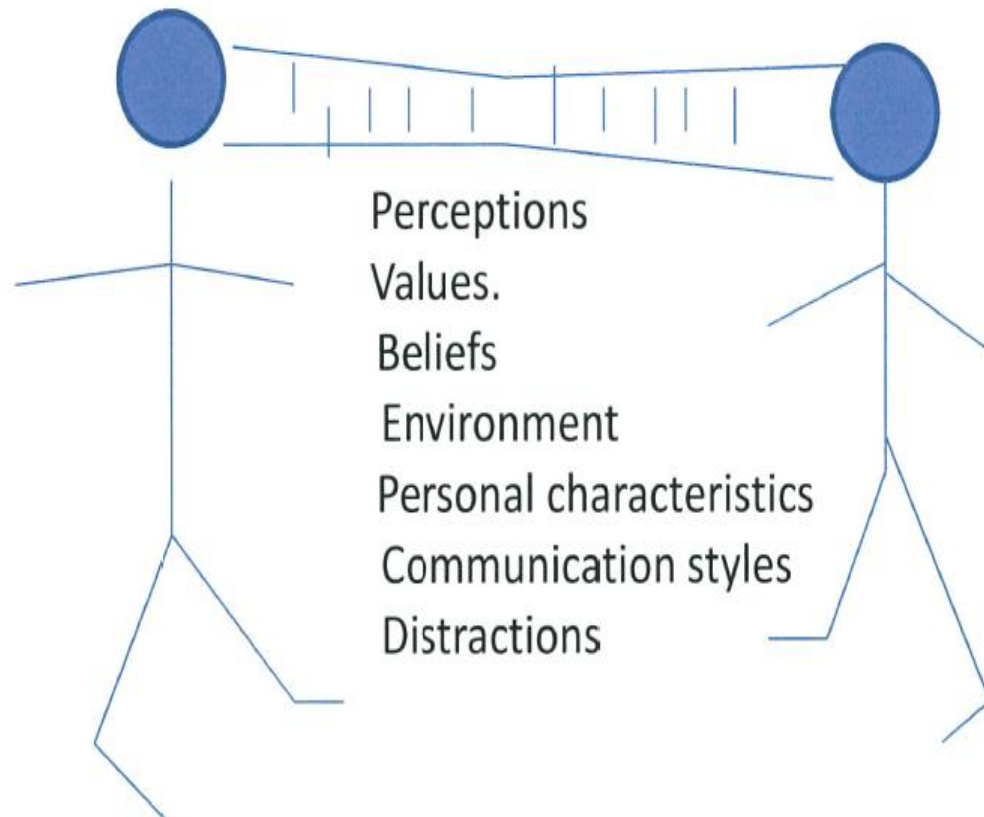
- The person feels heard
- The person feels comfortable talking
- We have the opportunity to know and understand what is being said
- It's good customer service
- It demonstrates respect

Active listening

How do we communicate?

- Verbally
- Non verbally
 - Facial expression
 - Body language
 - Voice (tone of voice, rate of speaking)
- Space
- Touch

Communication between two people



Active Listening – Verbal Communication

- Verbal communication refers to the sharing of information using speech.
- Are there times when misunderstandings can occur (ie the message being sent is not being received)? Examples?

Active Listening

Body language – facial expression

- Why is facial expression important?
- When might it be a problem?

Active Listening – Body language

Factors to consider:

- How you sit
- Where you sit in relation to the other person
- Is what you find comfortable always the same as what another person will find comfortable?
- Open and closed body language

Active Listening – Non Verbal - Voice

- How does tone of voice communicate?
 - Questions vs statements
 - Interest vs lack of interest
- What does rate of speaking indicate?
- What other ways do we communicate by voice without using words?

Active Listening – space

- Think about how close you stand to someone when you are talking to them - does this change between cultures?
- If so – how does it change?
- Does it change depending how well you know the person?
- Or how intimate the relationship?

Active Listening - what skills do we need?

- Questioning
- Paraphrasing
- Reframing

Active Listening Skills – Questions

- What are open ended questions?
- How do we use them to encourage dialogue?
- How does using an open ended question provide the opportunity for the staff member to gain all the information they require about the complaint?
- How does using an open ended question provide the opportunity for the service user to describe their issue or concern?

Open Questions - practice

Please change the following closed questions into open questions:

- Are you feeling good?
- Are you happy with our service?
- I think our customer services officer is very helpful. Do you agree?
- Did you find our complaints process helpful?
- That doctor /your caseworker/your careworker is always polite, isn't she?

Active Listening - Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing refers to restating what you are hearing in your own words.

It is an important skill because:

- The person knows s/he is being heard
- It gives you the opportunity to check that you understand and clarify what you are hearing
- It will usually generate more information from the person you are listening to

Paraphrasing - practice

My sister suffers from bipolar disorder and regularly sees her psychiatrist. I know that she has been 'doctor shopping' and has managed to get prescriptions from different doctors, including prescriptions for Valium and panadeine forte.

It's not good enough, and I want something done about it.

Active Listening - Reframing

What is reframing?

- Reframing (in complaints resolution) is a way of re-stating a comment or statement in a way that will help with resolving a problem. It is different from paraphrasing, because the problem is restated in a positive way. It takes lots of practice.
- For example:
 - “I’ve had it with the staff here. I’m sick of trying to talk to them about this – no-one ever listens”
 - “It sounds as if it’s really important to you to get your message about ... across to the staff”

Reframing – let's practise

- They say I have to wait 2 years before I see the dentist. That's ridiculous!
- The nurses were very rude, unhelpful and refused to properly treat my father.
- How dare that psychologist let my son contact his father after I told him that my son didn't want to see him. It's absolutely outrageous and I'll never forgive him.
- If she doesn't apologise, I'll take her to court.
- I'm sick of those doctors. They didn't prepare for the meeting, they lied, they didn't ask whether Audrey wanted more treatment or not. They pressured me to make the decision to stop life support.

Showing empathy

Empathy is understanding and acknowledging another person's feelings.

When people complain you have an opportunity to show empathy.

You might respond by saying:

- I understand why you would feel that way; or
- I would feel like that too if I was in your position

Putting it all together

- A person comes to you with a complaint about your service
- Your task is to understand the details of their complaint and what outcomes are they seeking
- What skills might you require to obtain all the correct information about the complaint?

Before we leave active listening

- What gets in the way of your ability to listen effectively?
- How do such barriers impact on the conversation between the service user and the staff member?

Barriers to effective communication

Barriers include:

- Failure to properly listen to the person's concerns
- Being in a hurry, multi-tasking and/or not paying attention
- Pre-conceived ideas about the person or situation
- Becoming defensive when the service user is describing their concern
- Forming judgements in your own mind as you listen
- Making assumptions without checking the facts

More barriers to consider

- Rehearsing your response while the other person is still talking
- Minimising the issue/s or complaint
- Blaming others or being dismissive
- Being overbearing, threatening or giving orders
- Taking the complaint personally

What have we learnt?

- Open questions invite the person to describe their issue or concern
- Open questions allow for a complaint to be clarified and the outcomes being sought
- Closed questions require a specific response and don't invite dialogue
- Closed questions may be useful in some situations to clarify a particular point

What have we learned (continued)

Reframing

- Changes the tone of the message
- Can be used to move forward – ie focus on future rather than the past
- Helps with those barriers to effective communication – eg defensiveness by softening what is being said

What have we learnt? (continued)

- Focus on what the person is saying to actively listen and clarify the issue
- Respect the person by not interrupting when they're speaking
- Maintain open body language
- Maintain eye contact (where culturally appropriate)
- Use open questions to encourage dialogue
- Check for meaning/ paraphrase what has been said

Application of these skills to complaints

- A complaint is often about a problem with communication
- Many complaints can be avoided if staff have good customer service skills
- By recognising signs of discontent and taking action early, problems can be dealt with before they escalate into complaints

Let's practise what we've learnt

- Each small group will have a case study
- One person will be the service user
- One the staff member
- One person will be the observer to provide feedback
- Then we'll discuss the outcomes in the large group

Tips to remember

- Sometimes more than anything else people want to feel heard – active listening skills help achieve this
- Consider the situation through the other person's eyes and acknowledge their experience and feelings
- Try to provide the customer service experience you would like to receive
- People read 'sugar coated' communications very easily so be genuine and authentic in all conversations
- Acknowledge how the situation has affected the person

More tips to remember

- Validate the emotions the person is expressing
- Demonstrate your willingness to assist the service user
- Avoid taking complaints personally
- Remain as calm as possible at all times
- Be respectful and polite irrespective of the behaviour of the service user. It is possible to be firm without being impolite
- If you feel unable to manage the situation consult with someone more senior or refer the complaint to them

Review of what we've covered today

In small groups go over the material from the workshop:

- Create a list of what has been important for you today
- What were you reminded about or what did you learn today?
- How will you apply this learning at work?
- Where do you require further clarification?
- Individually write down three action points and be prepared to share them with the group

For further information

Health and Community Services Complaints
Commission

Phone: 8999 1969

www.hcsc.nt.gov.au