Communication (Skills) and Culture

Communication is integrated into our day to day lives and we take it for granted.

Operates on a number of levels:
- verbal/non-verbal
- intentional/unintentional
- informative about ourselves and our surroundings
- is not complete without the information communicated being received and interpreted.

**Key messages from service users and carers**
- be courteous
- turn up on time
- speak directly to service users, not carers or personal assistants
- don’t use jargon
- ‘open their ears’ and ‘think before they talk’.
- listen and really hear and accept what carers are saying
- explain what is happening and why
- don’t over promise, do what they say they are going to do
- say honestly when they cannot help
- be patient and make enough time to communicate
- recognise the loss of dignity people experience when approaching social services
- don’t assume anything about the service user’s abilities simply because of a disability
- understand the importance of privacy, peace and quiet and carers choice of meeting place
- know that closed questions can be easier for service users with communication difficulties to answer
- check that they have been understood
- find a mode of communication that works
- build trust, empathy and warmth
- work in an organisation that helps them to do all these things.

Empathy, not sympathy:
- the ability to understand the perspective of another
- recognising the emotions of another
- communicating these emotions
- finding a connection (may be resembling something you’ve experienced?)
- avoiding judgement
- empathy is a vital aspect of effective communication in social work

**McKay et al (1995) 12 barriers to listening**:
- Comparing: who is smarter, could I do it that well?
- Mind reading: what are you really thinking and feeling?
- Rehearsing: whole attention is focused on your next communication
- Filtering: only listening for certain things
- Judging: already written them off
- Dreaming: conversation triggers private thoughts
- Identifying: everything comes back to your own experiences