Non-Verbal Communication Essay, Research Paper

Spoken and non-verbal communication

Non verbal communication is often called body language because it involves the way we use our bodies and gestures not our spoken word to communicate. Non-verbal communication is 55% more powerful than the spoken word, it is believed by many that 60-80% of our message is communicated through body language and only 7-10% is communicated through the spoken words. It is therefore very important to understand the forms of non-verbal communication and their effects in order to communicate effectively within the care setting.

Many influential psychologists and researchers have written about non-verbal communication and have come up with their own theories on non-verbal communication.

Argyle (1983) “suggests non-verbal behaviours regulate encounters by obtaining feedback that is gaining information from how we respond” . Argyle wrote again about non-verbal communication and in 1988, he states “non-verbal style in which a message is communicated has more effect than the verbal message itself. Our non-verbal behaviour is the more reliable guide to our feelings”

Dr Gabriel Raam states that “body movement can indicate attitudes and feelings K. Our body movement includes the heads, eyes, shoulders, lips, eyebrows, neck, legs, arms, fingers, orientation, hands, and gestures K” . Dr Raam suggest that by paying attention to our body language we can use our bodies to introduce clarity and meaning to our verbal communication. Dr Raam calls non-verbal communication the kinesic code.

E.T. Hall a researcher was the first to use the term proxemics, Hall investigated man’s use of personal space and suggests that man use’s space as a means to communicate his feelings with others. He believes that mans use of space can either impede or promote communication and that man uses different zones of space within different types of communication. Hall also suggests that for a person to feel comfortable within a communication encounter then his or her personal space must be respected. Hall states ” Kthe area that humans control and use must often is their informal space Kan area that human protect from the intrusion of outsiders K” . Thus, Hall believes that we must respect each other personal space in order for effective communication to take place.

G.W. Porter believed that there are four types of non-verbal communication;

1. “physical- facial expressions,tone of voice, sense of tuch,sense of

smell and body motions

2. Aesthetic-this type of communication includes creative

expressions; playing instrumental music, dancing, painting and sculpture.

3. Signs- this type of communication includes the use of signal

flags, slautes,horns and sirens

4. Symbolic-this type of communication involves making the use of

religious, status or ego-building symbols.”

Porter believed that non-verbal communication was vital to effective communication he believed that in order to function effectively we must understand non-verbal cues and interpret them correctly.

Tortoriello, Blott and DeWine also wrote about non-verbal communication and they jointly defined non-verbal communication as ” The exchange of messages primarily through non-linguistic means, including: kinesics (body language), facial expression and eye contact, tactile communication, space and territory, environment, paralanguage and the use of silence and time.”

Lamb also believed that non-verbal communication was vital in order to achieve effective communication. Lamb called his research movement analysis and he investigated the way that we use movement, facial expression, eye contact, tactile communication, personal space, environment, paralanguage and silence and time in order to convey our messages effectively. Lamb states ” Kit is important for you to develop some sensitivity to non-verbal messages. Co-operation improves as we recognise and respond appropriately to non-verbal cues”

Bandura also wrote about non-verbal communication, in 19977 he states”indivdiuals have learnt to behave in particular ways non-verbally usually responding differently in different situations”

Dr. David Givens is also an influential writer on non-verbal communication and he believes that there are about 125 recognisable signals of non-verbal communication. Givens believes that non-verbal communication signals persons true feelings and these may be different to the actual spoken word. Givens states “non-verbal communication is the process of sending and receiving wordless messages K. Non-verbal cues include all the signs and signals-audio, visual, tactile and chemical used by human beings to express themselves apart form manual sing language and speech.” Givens believes that humans use non-verbal communication naturally and that it is firmly grounded in evolutionary development, he further states that “non-verbal communication is culture-free: it applies worldwide. People can go anywhere and understand these signals, even if they don’t know the spoken language.”

Meharian also wrote about the importance of non-verbal communication. He believes that non-verbal communication accounts for the majority of the message that we portray to other he states “verbal cues provide 7% of the meaning of the message, vocal cues 38%, and facial expression 55%. This means that as the receiver of the message, you can rely heavily on the facial expression of the sender because his expressions are a better indicator of the meaning behind the message than words.”

I am now going to look at the different types of non-verbal communication. There are about eight different categories of non-verbal communication and I am going to explain their meanings and importance.

h Paralanguage

This type of non-verbal communication involves the way that we say things and the tone of voice we use to say them, ” Researchers have found that the tone, pitch, quality of voice and rate of speaking convey emotions that can be accurately judged regardless of the content of the message” We can convey a positive message but use a negative tone of voice this will send mixed messages to the person we are communicating with and may make us seem insincere. As carers, we should pay attention to the way we say things and the tone of voice we use to ensure that our messages are conveyed effectively and accurately.

h Eye contact

The eyes are often referred to as the window to the mind; therefore, eye contact has a very important part to play in non-verbal communication. Most people look into the eyes of another to see it they are being sincere in what they are saying, avoidance of eye contact can make a person feel uneasy and may lead to them thinking the person they are communicating with is being insincere. Similarly too much eye contact can make a person feel intimidated and the person may feel that the messenger is being intrusive. We have to balance the amount of eye contact that we maintain with a person and try to evaluate if they are comfortable with the amount of eye contact we are maintaining and adjust the contact accordingly. Dr Raam states “eye contact can maintain, yield, deny and request communication between people. People who use eye contact are viewed as confident, credible and having nothing to hide.”

h Facial expression

Facial expression is a very important part of non-verbal communication. We cannot communicate a message effectively without using facial expression. If we talk to someone on the telephone or over the Internet, we cannot judge effectively the true intentions and sincerity of what a person is communicating. We can ask questions by simply raising an eyelid, show doubt saddness, happiness, fear and many other expressions just by the way we move our eyes, mouth, cheeks and head. A person who has had a stroke may not be able to communicate effectively without the use of facial expressions, a person who cannot speak can speak volumes by the use of facial expression and we must pay attention to this whilst treating such patients, similarly we must pay attention to our own facial expressions in order that we convey the correct message

h Posture

Posture is another very important part of non-verbal communication we can convey many unspoken messages simply by the way we are standing or sitting. Dr Raam has identified six different postural positions, which convey very different messages, these are;

1. “slumped posture = low spirit/bored

2. erect posture = high spirits,energy and confidence

3. lean forward = open and interested

4. lean away = defensive or disinterested

5. crossed arms = defensive

6. uncrossed arms = willingness to listen”

We must pay attention to our posture to convey a positive message when communicating and to ensure that we convey the correct attitude and message the receiver.

h Gesture

Gestures are also very important. Hand movements are probably the most recognised gestures, and can convey very different messages. Clenching a fist is the most understood hand gesture but we also wave our hand to say goodbye or to show anger, we must pay attention whilst communicating to ensure we do not display negative hand gestures. Gestures also include shrugging our shoulders, a shrug of the shoulders can display disinterest in the conversation or a flippant attitude but it can also display and I give up signal. David Givens wrote “men and women unconsciously shrug their shoulder when they find each other attractive. It is an ‘I give up’ signal almost childlike gesture that shows they are harmless.” In their book, Promoting Health Ewles and Simnett state “clenched fists, fidgeting hands (and sometimes tapping feet) reveal stress and tension, whereas still, open hands usually denote a relaxed frame of mind. Mental discomfort such as confusion or worry, is often shown by putting hands to the head and playing with hair, stroking a beard or rubbing the forehead” this shows how important it is to observe other peoples body language so that we can correctly evaluate how they are feeling, we may be treating someone who is in a lot of postoperative pain but who says that they feel fine, by correctly analysing their body language we can offer them the correct treatment.

h Touch

Messages conveyed through touch are among the most profound. Dr. Givens wrote “skin is our oldest sense organ, and when it is touched by someone it carries a strong emotional impact”. Touch can convey more than words can say. A touch when appropriate can convey sincerity and empathy to a message. When to touch can be an extremely difficult area of non-verbal communication because what is appropriate in one situation to one person may be very inappropriate to another, Dr Raam states “Touch is a very powerful communicator especially for establishing a link to a receiver or conveying emotion. However, touching is dangerous because it invades a persons intimate space and may be perceived as unwanted or breaking norms”. We must be aware of the appropriateness of touch within the differing age groups, cultures and sexes of people and react appropriately. We can easily invade someone’s personal space by inappropriate touch and make him or her feel uneasy, similarly a person may feel reassured by a simple touch on the hand. We must use our own judgement and act appropriately when deciding when to touch a client and gage their reactions accurately.

h Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of our use of personal space. We all unconsciously protect an area of personal space around us and us different zones of space when communicating with others these interaction zones are often referred to as our personal bubbles. Hall believed that we use four different types of space;

1. “intimate space – we use this for embracing and whispering (6-8 inches)

2. personal distance -for communication with good friends (1.5-4 feet)

3. social distance – for conversations amongst acquaintances (4-12 feet)

4. public distance – used for public speaking (12 feet or more)”

We must be aware of these zones of personal space and respect them when communicating with a client. If we invade another persons space they may feel intimidated and may become defensive, Hall further states ” should an intruder invade this personal space while also trespassing within territorial boundaries he placed himself in double jeopardy and must compensate for the other’s increased anxiety” Hall refers to territorial boundaries as the space that a person feels is their own such as the seat they always sit in during a college lecture or their place at the dining table. We have all been in situations were we have felt uncomfortable where we are sitting e.g. when visiting relatives and we sit in the fathers chair etc. if we are visiting a persons home in a professional capacity we must be aware that we are invading their personal space and must always ask is it ok to sit here and check that we do not invade their territorial zones.

h Dress/appearance

Dress and appearance are very important to our interpretation of a person, we may assume someone who is not well dressed or dirty is inferior to us or someone who is well dressed is superior to us or is a respectable person, we should not judge people on how they are dressed and should treat them all equally, however we are all guilty of judging a person by what they are wearing. If we were to visit a hospital and see a nurse whose clothes were dirty or creased or who’s hair was unkempt then we feel they are unprofessional or unhygienic, similarly if we saw a nurse in a crisply ironed fresh clean uniform who was well presented we would feel that she was professional, reliable, respectable and capable. Uniforms are a code of dress that separate people into their professional titles, we instantly recognise a policeman, fireman, lollipop person, shop assistant by their uniforms the same applies to nurses’ and doctors. Uniforms infer authority and we often afford people with respect because they are wearing a uniform those who wear a uniform must be careful not to abuse this privilege. In their book Promoting Health, Ewles and Simnett state” Kphysical appearance may be very important to health promoters because of the impression of professional competence, but it may also covey an unwelcome image of authority K” therefore we must be careful to use appropriate dress for the circumstance and to consider the situation and environment we are in whilst dressing after all we would not go to college in evening wear.

Non-verbal communication is vital in all communication encounters. . Ewles and Simnet state “…. Raised awareness of non-verbal communication can help you to improve communication between yourself and the people you work with K. Words, whether verbal or written, are only a small part of communication, and it is important to consider all aspects of communication” .

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