

[HANDOUT 3] The good communicator and the bad communicator

A good communicator...

- **Uses the local language or uses a good translator.** This is important because effective communication is impossible if there is not a clear understanding of the message(s) being shared (and the answers being given).
- **Uses clear, uncomplicated language and communicates one message at a time, giving examples where possible.** Avoid scientific terms and humanitarian jargon. Also beware of long, complicated sentences - your audience may become lost and confused.
- **Tries to understand and empathise with people's problems.**
- **Is humble. S/he listens to and answers people's questions before asking for the information that s/he wants.** Remember that we have two ears and only one mouth for a reason. We should listen twice as much as you speak? Find out what people already know about the coronavirus, try to add to their knowledge or answer specific questions. Before sharing information. Find out what rumours and beliefs might hamper the effectiveness of public health measures.
- **Is sincere and honest and is not afraid of saying 'I don't know'.** Be honest/transparent if you do not have answers. Don't make false promises or make up answers to questions if you don't know the correct answer. Try to help identify where the person can get accurate information before sending them to speak to another person/agency.
- **Explains things clearly and gives reasons.** Don't just say 'wash your hands'. Rather, explain, in easy-to-understand language, *why* it is important.
- **Listens to what people are saying, asks for clarifications** if s/he is not sure what they mean and **repeats back what s/he has understood, to check that it is correct.**
- **Is well prepared before visiting the community.** S/he has learned as much as s/he can about the community and is clear about what the objective of the visit is (while also remaining open to the possibility that community members may want to take the opportunity to raise other issues).
- **Coordinates** messages - and visits - across the whole team, and with other organisations – coordinate, coordinate, coordinate.
- **Follows local custom during the interaction** for example, by knowing how different people in the community should be greeted, or considering whether it is appropriate to maintain eye contact with people when talking to them.
- **Keeps calm and expresses views gently.**
- **Shows interest and respect,** for example by not interrupting when people speak and listening to everyone's contributions. Verbal and non-verbal signs (comments such as "I see", or nodding at appropriate times) can also convey that you are paying full attention.
- **Can read nonverbal cues and respond appropriately.** Body movements, body orientation, nuances of the voice, facial expressions or the choice and movement of objects during a conversation (e.g. looking at the mobile phone...) can tell a lot about the effectiveness of an interaction and the mood of the person/people you are talking with (including potential safety and security threats). A good communicator can read these signs and adapt her/his own behavior accordingly, including possibly politely concluding the conversation.
- **Is thankful for the time and advice s/he has been given.** People's time, like yours, is very valuable. Honor their generosity by listening with your full attention.

A bad communicator...

- Doesn't let people talk – just talks *at* them.
- Lectures people and patronises them.
- Dismisses people's questions as silly or stupid.
- Uses technical or scientific language.
- Interrupts people when they are talking.
- Doesn't know what s/he is talking about. Make sure you understand the facts before you go to the community.
- Shouts or becomes angry.
- Makes up answers to questions s/he doesn't know how to respond
- Uses discriminatory terms like 'China virus' or 'victim' or calls someone a 'spreader'.

What else would you add?

Source: Adapted from IFRC (2020)