



Making Every Contact Count

Communication Skills (OARS)

OARS is a skill-based model of interactions adapted from a client-centred approach used in Motivational Interviewing. OARS stands for:

- **O = Open Ended Questions**
- **A = Affirmations**
- **R = Reflections**
- **S = Summaries**

Three reasons for using this skill are:

1. To acknowledge the person and demonstrate respect which establishes rapport and safety.
2. To help the person explore and gain information and insight.
3. To challenge the person to view his or her situation differently or to take alternative action in their decisions.

Using OARS will help to establish an atmosphere of acceptance and trust and aid the person in exploring their hopes and fears.

	Description	Example
Open Discovery / Open questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the key to encouraging the person to do most of the talking • Cannot be answered with a brief response or a yes or no answer • Invite a two-way conversation • Open discovery questions begin with words such as “how” or “what” or phrases such as “tell me more about...” • Avoid beginning questions with “why” as that can put person on the defensive 	<p><i>“What would you most like to change in terms of your health?”</i></p> <p><i>“What will be helpful to you to support you to change?”</i></p> <p><i>“How do you plan to increase your physical activity?”</i></p> <p><i>“Tell me more about your levels of smoking?”</i></p>
Affirmations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can empower a person by helping them recognise their strengths and see themselves more positively. • By offering positive affirmations, you build a person’s confidence • May be a compliment or statement of appreciation and understanding 	<p><i>“I appreciate that you are willing to talk about this”</i></p> <p><i>“That’s a good idea.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s really positive that you are looking into making changes”</i></p>

		<p><i>"It must have taken a lot of motivation for you to achieve that goal"</i></p>
Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective listening helps make sure that you understand what the person is telling you • You can reflect what is written in a chart, what is said or what you observe • It helps the person hear what she or he said and clarifies any misunderstanding • It may be helpful to remember to use a reflection after the person answers a question. 	<p><i>"You have said that you would like to make changes to your diet, what type of support do you feel you need?"</i></p> <p><i>"It sounds like it's quite difficult for you to go to the gym, are there any other ways to be more active that feel easier to start with?"</i></p>
Summarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a form of reflective listening • Can be used throughout an interaction to transition from topic to topic • Can be used at the end of an interaction to review what was discussed • Ends with an invitation for the person to respond (What did I miss? What else would be helpful today? What other questions do you have?) <p>Pull together the information you gathered in your conversation by summarising:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The unhealthy behaviours 2. Potential solutions 3. Person's strengths 4. Any feelings and emotions expressed 	<p><i>"It sounds like you are aware of health issues associated with your smoking and you've decided to make some changes to address this. You seem really motivated and you have already started cutting down and explored the support that is available to make quitting a reality. What other questions do you have about quitting?"</i></p> <p><i>"It has been good to hear your thoughts about your BMI and your concerns about how this could impact on your health. It sounds like you have a really clear understanding of the health benefits of losing some weight and you have already managed to lose weight in the past so know what is involved and you are obviously motivated to make changes to your diet. What else do you need to know about local opportunities?"</i></p>

