

HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Course Objective:

At the end of this course, you will be able to: -

- *Define health communication*
- *Describe the communication process*
- *Describe types and forms of communication*
- *Discuss about effective communication*
- *List the barrier to effective communication*

4.1 DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

To communicate means (dictionary definition) “to impart, pass on or transmit a message, information, etc.; to exchange ideas or information with, be in touch with, to have access, to be connected with,” and communication means “the act of communication, the things communicated, the means of communicating” Essentially communication deals with transmission of information or ideas and sharing and exchanging of information.

Communication is the process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings or impressions in ways that each gains a common or mutual understanding of the meaning and the use of the message.

Evert M. Rogers (1993), defined “communication as the process by which an idea is transferred from a source to a receiver with intent to change his/her behavior.

4.2 WHAT IS HEALTH COMMUNICATION?

Health communication is the art and technique of informing, influencing, and motivating individuals, institutions, and large public audiences about important health issues based on sound scientific and ethical consideration.

When communication is used strategically to disseminate messages related to health, make people aware about diseases, encourage them to adopt healthy practices, sustain positive healthy behavior, empower them to make healthy choices in their life..... This process is called HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Therefore, health communications should be included as one key element in an integrated program designed to address a health problem or to convert health policy to action.

Effective health communication can do....

1) For individuals:

- ☐ *Raise awareness of health risks and solutions*
- ☐ *Provide the motivation and skills needed to reduce those risk*
- ☐ *Help them find support from other people in similar situations*
- ☐ *Affect or reinforce attitudes*

2) For community:

- ☐ *Influence public agenda, advocate for policies and programs,*
- ☐ *Promote positive changes in the socioeconomic and physical environments*
- ☐ *Improve the delivery of public health and health care services*
- ☐ *Encourage social norms that benefit health and quality of life*

In general health communication interventions can: -

- Help in bringing about desired changes in people's belief and behavior or in their physical and social environment
- Reduce disease promoting behaviour
- Increase health promoting behaviour

4.2.2 Importance of Health Communication

- Increase knowledge and awareness about health issue
- Influence beliefs, attitudes, and social norms
- Prompt action and develop skills
- Increase demand for health services
- Change lifestyle to fit into new environment
- Maintain changed behavior

4.2.2 Relevance to Health Education

It helps to mobilize the community, to implement health education programs & to coordinate with different agencies.

- *The ultimate goal of all health communication is to create behavioral change.*

4.3 PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

1. **Perception:** For communication to be effective the perception of the sender should be as close as possible to the perception of the receiver. The extent of understanding depends on the extent to which the two minds come together.
2. **Sensory involvement:** For effective communication there should be involvement of more than one sensory organ for giving a cumulative effect. The more sensory organs involved in a communication the more is its effectiveness from their cumulative effect.
3. **Face to face:** The more communication takes place face-to-face the more its effectiveness.
4. **Feedback (two-way):** Any communication without two-way process is less effective because of lack of opportunity for concurrent, timely & appropriate feedback.

4.4. Communication Process

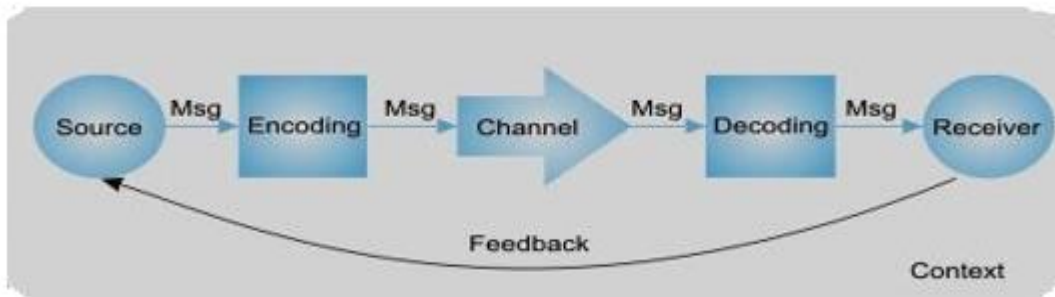
Communication is an essential part of human life. It is attached to almost anything that people do; individuals carry out most of their daily activities through communication.

Communication creates dynamism and interaction with the environment where people live; through communication people learn, create mutual understanding, establish relationships, change or maintain behavior and lead life.

Communication process is the whole sequence of transmission and interchange of facts, ideas, feeling, etc. As a process, it is routine and continues forever. It is an ever-ending process, cycle.

Communication process, generally, has six (6) components or elements and these are:

Source (is originator of message), **Message** (an idea that is communicated-something that is considered important for people in the community to know or do), **Channel** (is a physical means by which message travels from a source to a receiver), **Receiver** (is a person or group for whom the communication is intended), and **Feedback** (the mechanism of assessing what has happened on the receiver after communication has occurred). In addition, **Encoding** (selection of specific signs or symbols (codes) to transmit the message) and **decoding** (perceived meaning of the message).



A. Source (sender)

The sender is the originator of the messages. It can be an individual or groups, an institution or organization. The sender (source) should be the one who share similar backgrounds with the receivers. People are more likely to believe and trust person or organizations that share some characteristics with them. The sender decides the idea to be communicated, to whom it should be communicated and the intended impact of the communication.

Characteristics of the source of a message play an important role in the effectiveness of communication. Credibility, attractiveness, likeability, and the power of the communicator have been shown to affect the outcome of communication processes.

Communication fails when the source

- Comes from a different background from that of the receiver/target audience and
- Uses inappropriate message content and appeals.

Qualities of source/sender were:

- Empathetic -putting one-self in the position of others.
- Credibility, particularly, the messengers

Credibility can come from:

- ✓ A person's natural position in the family or community
- ✓ Through their personal qualities or actions — for example, a health care worker and other professionals who are close to the community
- ✓ The extent to which the source of communication shares characteristics such as age, sex, education, religion or experiences with the receiver/audience.

B. Receiver/audience

The person or the group for whom the communication is intended or the person who receive the message.

The first step in planning any communication is to consider the intended audience. A method which is effective with one audience may not succeed with another. Therefore, the communicator always has to consider the culture, age, educational level, visual literacy and media habits of the receiver while designing the message

Factors which should be considered about the audience

- What is the age and educational level of the audience?
- What words do they use in every day conversation?
- Socio-cultural factors
- What is their belief about the topic of communication?

Examples of an audience could be those receiving a message from Health Extension workers who are teaching about family planning. The primary audience would be couples from the community. The secondary audience might be grandparents and other family members, while the tertiary (third) audience are other people in the wider community.

C. Message

Refers to ideas, facts, feeling, that passed from the sender to the receiver. It is the subject matter of communication-something that is considered important for the audience to know or do. The content of the message should be appropriate and attractive to the receiver. The content of the message could be organized in different ways so that it can persuade or convince people. These are called appeals.

Not everyone responds, in the same way. What might persuade you might be quite different from what might persuade another person. For example, what type of appeals might convince persons with little or no schooling; persons with high educational level; children; and health workers.

Types of appeals in health communication

1) Fear arousal appeal

This type of message is conveyed to frighten and arouse people into action by emphasizing the serious outcome from not taking action. Symbols such as dying people, coffins, gravestones or skulls may be used. Fear-arousal appeals might be effective for a person with little or no schooling. Evidence suggests that mild fear can arouse interest, create concern and lead to behaviour change. However, creating too much fear is not appropriate.

2) Humor

The message is conveyed in a funny way such as cartoon. Humor is very good way of attracting interest & attention. It can also serve a useful role to lighten the tension when dealing with serious subjects and it can result in highly effective remembering and learning. However, Humor is also very subjective /may not be funny for everyone

3) Logical / factual appeal

The message is conveyed to convince people by giving facts, figures and information, e.g. facts related to HIV/AIDS; its causes, route of transmission, prevention methods etc. The logical/factual appeal carries weight with a person of high educational level. Information on its own is usually not enough to change behaviours and various appeals must be tried to see what works best.

4) Emotional appeal

The message is transmitted by arousing emotions and feelings rather than giving facts and figures. A poster or leaflet might use this approach by showing smiling babies or wealthy families with a latrine and associating such images to create a positive healthy impression. People with less education will be more convinced by simple emotional appeals from people they trust.

e.g. by showing smiling babies, happy families with few number of children

5) One sided message

Only presents the advantages of taking action & does not mention any possible disadvantages. E.g. Educating the mothers only about benefits of oral contraceptive pill, but not explaining the side-effects or risks associated with the pill.

One sided compared with two sided messages Presenting only one side of an argument may be effective:

- 1) If your audience will not be exposed to different views.
- 2) If our communication is through mass media such as radio, TV, newspaper etc. because the audience may only grasp part of the message or selectively pick up the points that they agree with.

Presenting only one side of an argument may be effective provided your audience will not be exposed to different views at other times. However, if they are likely to hear opposing information, such as the side-effects from a drug, they may be suspicious about taking your advice in the future. It is better to be honest. If communication is through mass media such as radio, TV or newspapers, the audience may only grasp part of the message or selectively pick up the points that they agree with.

6) Two-sided message

A two-sided message presents both the advantages and disadvantages of taking action. It is appropriate if:

- The audiences are used to being exposed to different views
- The audiences are literate
- You are face-to-face with individuals or groups: this makes it easier to present both sides and make sure that the audience understands the issues.

7) Positive appeals

Communications that ask people to do something, e.g. breast feed your child, use a latrine.

8) Negative appeals

Communications that ask people not to do something, e.g. do not bottle feed your child, do not defecate in the bush.

Negative appeals use terms such as 'avoid' or 'don't' to discourage people from performing harmful behaviours. But most health educators agree that it is better to be positive and promote beneficial behaviours instead of relying on negative appeals.

D. Channel

A channel is the physical bridge or the media by which the message travels from a source to a receiver. The commonest types of channel are audio, visual, printed materials or combined audio visual & printed materials.

For an effective communication to happen, the channel should possess the following characteristics:

- It should be familiar both to the communicator and communicatee.
- It should be appropriate to the message.
- It should be available and accessible.

E. Feedback

Feedback is the mechanism of assessing what has happened on the receivers after the communication has occurred. A communication is said to have feedback when the receiver of the message gives his/her responses to the sender of the message. The sender must know how well the messages have been received by the receiver, understood, interpreted, and act up on it. It completes the process of communication.

The effect of feedback is a change in the receiver's knowledge, attitude and practice or behaviour. There is a positive effect when a desired change in knowledge, attitude or practice occurs, and a negative effect when the desired change does not occur.

Additional communication process components

Code: is a group of symbols that can be structured in a way that is meaningful to others. e.g language.

- a) **Encoding**: is the process of conversion of the subject matter into symbol. Encoding process translates ideas, facts, feelings, opinions etc. into symbols, signs, actions, pictures, audio-visuals etc.
- b) **Decoding**: is a mental process by which the stimuli that has been received through the sensory organs are given a proper meaning according to the individual's way of thinking. The receiver converts the symbols, signs, words, pictures etc. received from the sender to get the meaning of the message.

4.6 Communication models

There are two types of simple models of communication known as linear (one-way) and systems (two-way) models.

A) Linear (one –way) model

The flow of information from the sender (source) to the receiver is one-way or unidirectional. The communication is dominated by the “sender's knowledge”. “Information is poured out”. This model does not consider feedback and interaction with the sender. A familiar example is the lecture method in class rooms.

In this type of model, messages from “experts”, “educators”, or people who know more about a specific content are included. It should be noticed that messages from many of the mass media flow in one direction unless mechanisms are set to get feedback from the audience.

Advantages

- Faster
- Orderly

Disadvantages

- Little audience participation
- No feed back
- Does not influence behavior

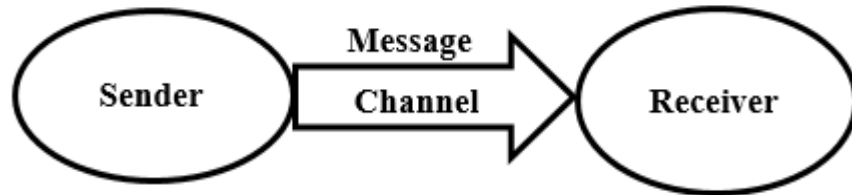


Figure: One-way communication

B) Systems (Two -way)

In recent times, people considered communication as a process. The process is dynamic and the flow is in both directions; information flows from the source to a receiver and back from the receiver to the source. In reality, most communications required to create understanding or change behavior are interactive.

It is more appropriate in problem solving situations.

For example, a health professional counseling a mother for accepting family planning methods, needs to know what the mother feels about the new behavior and about her problems.

Advantages

- More audience participation
- Learning is more democratic
- Open for feed back
- Influence behavior change

Disadvantages

- Slower (time taking)
- Not orderly

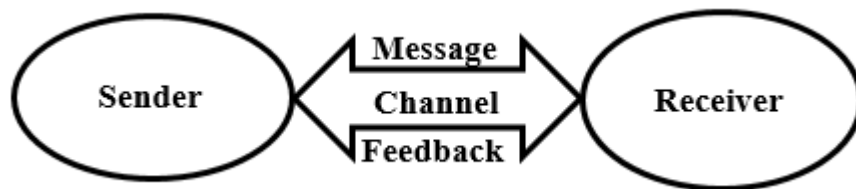


Figure: Two-way communication-two direction flow of information.

4.7 TYPES & FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

There are different ways of classifying communication; including types and forms of communication. The classification can be made on the basis of mode (channel) of communication (as written, verbal and non-verbal communication), and number of communicators involved (as intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication).

4.7.1 Types of Communication

A) Intrapersonal

It takes place inside a person. It is silent talking all of us do in our self, such as thinking, feelings and justification we make for our actions. It is used for clarifying ideas or analyzing a situation and to reflect upon or appreciate something.

Or it shows how people process and understand a message with in. The understanding of people could be affected by a number of factors including previous experience, language, culture, personal need, etc.

B) Interpersonal (face-to-face)

Form of communication involving direct interaction between the source & receiver.

In most instances the decisive criterion for face-to-face communication is communication at the same time & place.

***Example:** counseling to a single client or small group, communication between health care provider and patient, teacher with students, health educator with client, etc.*

Advantages

- Dynamic or bi-directional information exchange: communication takes place in both directions; from the source to the receiver and vice versa
- Have mechanism to assess audiences feed back
- Give chance to raise question & discuss so that the idea is understood at the same time
- Multisensory (channel): Since the communication is active where both the source and the receiver are interacting, the communication could utilize more than two senses such as seeing, hearing and touching, and tasting.

Limitations

- Easily distorted – as we mostly rely on word-of-mouth.
- Needs personal status/ credibility
- Needs professional knowledge & preparation

Making interpersonal communication effective

To make interpersonal communication effective, health professionals should pay attention to the following 5 (five) general points:

- Exchanging ideas with clients (participating clients)
- Realizing the importance of first impression when meeting a person
- Learning to observe the person and driving useful information
- Keeping in mind that the same words mean different things to different persons.
- Paying attention to the body language: non-verbal behaviors tell often more about people's feelings than the words spoken.

C) Mass media communication

Mass media communication is a means of transmitting messages, on an electronic or print media to a large segment of a population. The aim of mass media communication is to create awareness

on a given problem, to transmit knowledge, to set and change norms, and to offer alternatives of behavior.

Mass media have greatest impact at creating awareness for a larger number of people, communicating new ideas to early adopters (opinion leaders), increasing self-awareness and knowledge, which is the first stage to influence feelings of people and then their decision making.

Advantages

- *They can reach many people quickly.*
- *They are accurate and believable e.g. article on a newspaper, or “voice” of highly respected person.*
- *They can provide continuing reminders and reinforcement.*

Limitations

- *One sided /no feedback*
- *Selective perception: Because the audience may only grasp part of the message or selectively pick up the points that they agree with and ignore other*
- *Does not differentiate the target*
- *As mass media are broad cast to the whole population, it is difficult to make the message to fit to the local needs of the community whose problems and needs may be different from the rest of the country.*

4.7.2 Forms of Communication

According to the way of expression there are three types of communication: Verbal/oral communication, Non-verbal communication and Written communication

A. Oral or Verbal communication

It is communication by Word of mouth. In oral communication, speech or talk is the widely adopted tool of communication. The message is received through our ear. May also use mechanical devices such as telephone, radio, etc.

Factors that influence verbal communication are: *using jargon and complex terms, pitch and tone of voice, and gender difference.*

B. Written communication

It involves the exchange of facts, ideas, and opinions through a written instrument /material. Individuals or groups come in touch with each other and share meaning and understanding with each other through written materials such as letters notes, leaflets, reports, handouts, bulletins, newspaper.

C. Non-verbal communication

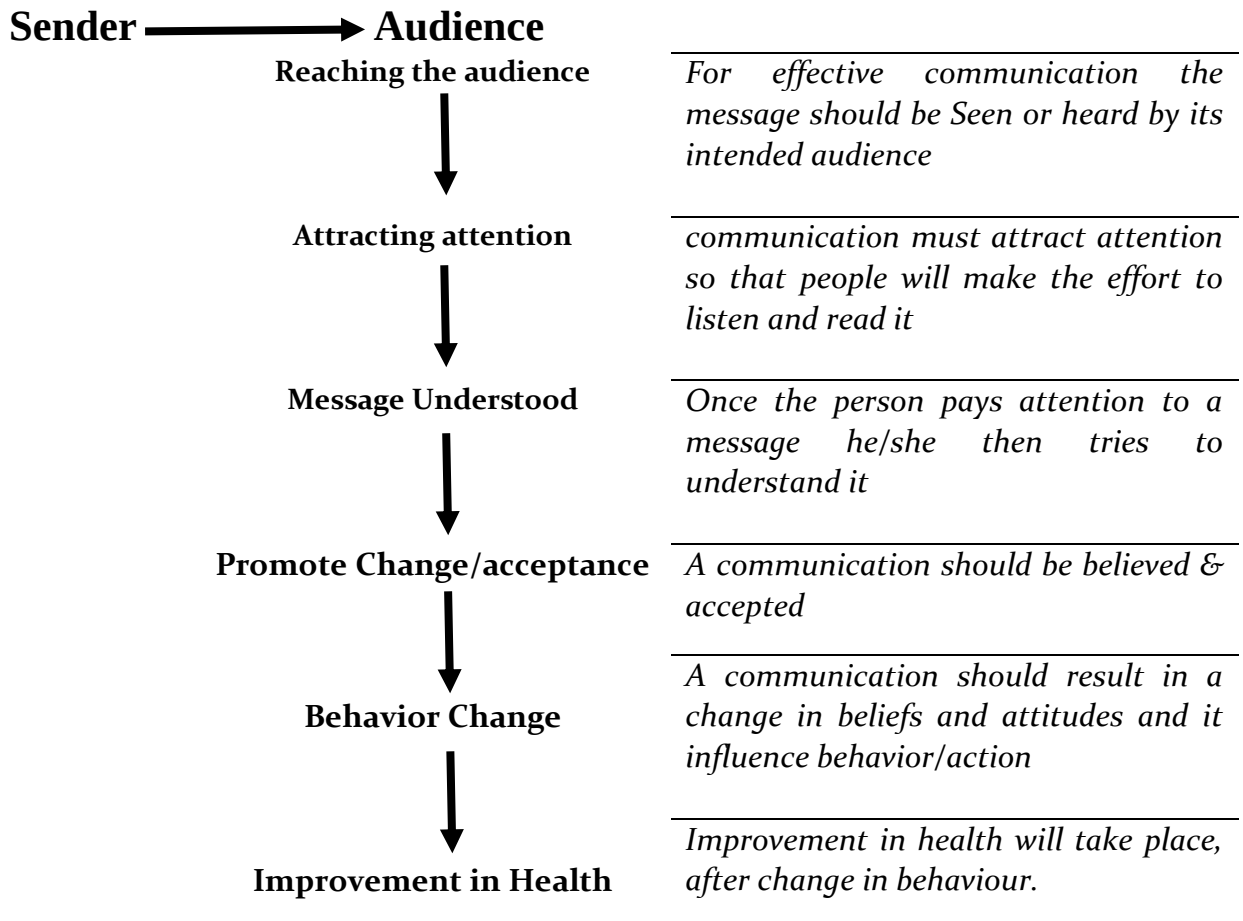
A communication that occur without a word at all. Much communication also takes place through non-verbal communication.

The main function is to give clues about what is being said. This may be, the gestures we use (hand movements, raising eyebrows, shape of mouth, smiling, head nodding), how we look at people, how we are seated, and our clothes can all have an impact on the way people interpret what we say.

Non- verbal communication can be interpreted in different ways according to the culture of the community. For example, in western culture much importance is given to looking people straight at some one's eye. In other cultures, looking at some ones' eye can be considered rude and showing lack of respect.

4.9 STAGES OF HEALTH COMMUNICATION

In health education and health promotion you communicate for a special purpose — to promote improvement or change in health through the modification of the factors that influence behaviour. To achieve these objectives, successful communication must pass through several stages:



Approaches to Communication

The common communication approaches include:

- **Informing** (introducing and making a “new idea” familiar),
- **Educating** (explaining about the strength or weakness of a “new idea”),
- **Persuading** (the receiver is persuaded to accept “new idea”), and
- **Entertainment** (attracting the attention of the audience to a “new idea”)

4.10 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication occurs when there is shared meaning. The message that is sent is the same with what is received. There must be mutual understanding between the sender and the receiver for the transmission of ideas or information to be successful.

Effective communication may be defined as:

- Using language that is appropriate to others level of understanding
- Making sure that other receive the intended information or knowledge
- Talking with others in a way that facilitate openness, honesty and cooperation
- Providing feedback

4.10.1 Qualities of communication

- ✦ The communicator should be knowledgeable, positive attitude, skilled and have credibility.
- ✦ The message should be simple (or brief & clear) meaningful, appropriate, relevant, and timely (SMART).
- ✦ The channel should be familiar, appropriate, available & accessible.
- ✦ The receiver should also be responsible with proper attitude to receive the information.

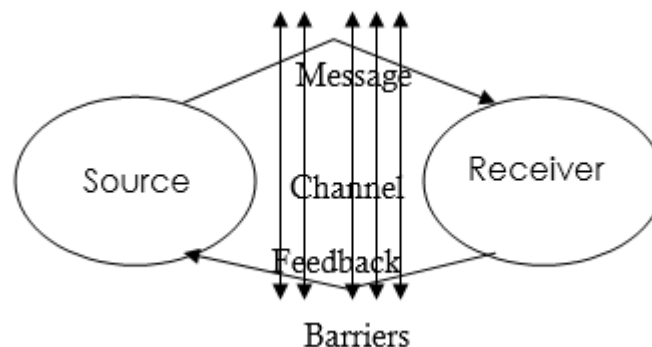
4.10.2 Key points in communicating effectively

- The environment is important for effective communication to take place
- The methods and styles of communication should meet an individual's needs
- Communication should be sensitive to the individuals needs and concerns especially when communicating difficult, sensitive or complex information
- Communications should be supported with appropriate aids
- Culture and language difficulties should be addressed during communication

4.11 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective Communication takes place when the speaker delivers message clearly as well as the listener understands the message. However, Effective communication does not take place when there are obstacles known as COMMUNICATION BARRIERS.

Barriers to communication are the hindrances or difficulties involved in the process of communication which distort the message from being properly understood by the receiver. At any point in the communication process a barrier can occur. Barriers keep us from understanding other's ideas and thoughts.



1) Physical and Environmental barrier

- Difficulties in hearing, seeing
- Unclear speech and visual presentations
- In appropriate physical facilities like noise, invisibility, congestion

2) Intellectual barrier

- The way something is perceived and understood
- The natural ability, home background, schooling, affects the perception/ understanding of the receiver for what he sees & hears.
- The ability of the facilitator/ education/ instructor.

3) Language barrier

- Difference in language, vocabulary and use.
- Different meanings of the same word or sentence

3) Emotional barrier

- Readiness, willingness or eagerness of the receiver
- Emotional status of the educator

5) Cultural and socio-economic barrier

- Customs, beliefs, religion, attitudes, economic and social class differences, language variation.

6) Status of the source

- Status of the source either too high or too low as compared to the audience also affects effectiveness

7) Inconsistencies between verbal & non- verbal communication

- Sometimes, verbal and non-verbal communications will be inconsistent due to deliberate acts or perception differences

Example: facial expression and verbal explanation of an individual to his opponent on his happiness

Note: Generally, barriers could arise from the source, receiver, message and / or channel of communication.

4.12 SEVEN CS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **Command attention:** - Attract and hold the audience's attention. Use colors, images, key words and design elements that make the material stand out so that it is noticed and memorable.
2. **Clarify the message:** - Ensure the material conveys the message clearly, with easy-to-understand words and images
3. **Communicate a benefit:** - Stress how the audience will benefit from adopting the new behavior.
4. **Be consistent:** - Ensure that content within and among materials does not conflict. Repeat messages throughout the materials. Re-use the same words and phrases, as appropriate. Also, re-use the same or related images and styles. This avoids confusion and repetition enhances the impact of the message.
5. **Cater to the heart and head:** - People are swayed by both facts and emotions. Use both to maximize the material's persuasiveness
6. **Create trust:** - Trust and credibility allow and encourage the audience to heed the message.
7. **Call to action:** - Include a clear call to action in materials. Tell audience members precisely what they can do