

## Enhancing Communication Skills

- **Speaking:**
  - Refrain from using words and images that reinforce stereotypes.
  - Address and introduce people equitably. For example, do not refer to a man by his last name and a woman by her first name.
  - Keep your language simple when dealing with people for whom English is not their first language.
  - Learn which words are likely to offend. (*exploring taboo subjects*).
  
- **Asking for information:**
  - Ask people how they wish to be referred to rather than shortening or Anglicizing their names. (*contracting*). Make sure you are pronouncing the names correctly.
  - Volunteer information about yourself as appropriate. Do not expect other people to talk about their backgrounds, culture or lifestyle if you do not talk openly about your own. (*showing vulnerability*).
  
- **Adjusting Your Way of Speaking:**
  - When giving examples involving people, use a variety of names and circumstances.
  - Notice the images or analogies you and other people tend to use. Which ones refer to activities with which people of diverse cultural backgrounds might not be familiar? (*Tuning in to Others*).
  - When talking to someone, adjust yourself to that person's eye and ear/hearing level. (*Tuning in to Others*).
  - Apply the 80/20 rule. 80% of communication breakdown has cultural roots; 20% or less is personal.
  
- **Listening:**
  - Listen attentively to other people's stories for information that may not be expressed directly. (*responding to indirect cues, focused listening*).
  - Listen carefully if you are having difficulty understanding someone; clarify to ensure you heard correctly.
  - Pay attention to your body language. It can communicate a lot about your interest in what another person is saying.
  
- **Problem Solving:**
  - If you are having communication difficulties with another person, stop and assess what interferences or "static" may be getting in the way. (*Tune in to Self and Others, obtain reflective supervision*).
  - Find alternative ways to solve issues. Be open to new and different ideas. (*finding exceptions to the problem, exploring past successes, check for underlying ambivalence, reaching for feelings, acknowledging feelings, articulating feelings*).
  - Learn to work together to arrive at a common understanding of the problem and ways to resolve it. (*finding exceptions to the problem,*

## Enhancing Communication Skills (continued)

- *exploring past successes, check for underlying ambivalence, reaching for feelings, acknowledging feelings, articulating feelings).*
- **Observation:**
  - Observe silence or the absence of it in conversations, group gatherings or meetings. Try to respect silence and not immediately fill the silence with words. (*containment*).
  - Notice the presence or absence of diversity in any group you are in and think how it could be different.
  - Think about how people advance at your agency.
- **Checking/Assessing:**
  - You may decide to pre-test humor on someone who knows the culture or group regarding sensitive topics. (*reaching for feelings*).
  - Check with people who have physical challenges before offering to help (e.g., by opening a door or pushing their wheelchair). (*reaching for feedback*).