Open and transparent communication is a vital element of a positive workplace culture.

Good communication helps to create mutual and trusted respect in the workforce, regardless of individual roles and responsibilities, and reduces mistakes from miscommunication. It also provides opportunities for everyone to share their views and ideas, including people who need care and support.

The CQC’s ‘Driving improvement: case studies from nine adult social care services’ guide found that failing organisations tend to have cultures where staff are afraid to speak out, don’t feel they have a voice and are not listened to. They also suggest that involving staff is one of the best ways to drive improvement.
All your communication should be clear and understandable - whether you’re discussing an individual’s care and support needs with them, agreeing appraisal outcomes with staff or writing the business plan. You should avoid using jargon, acronyms and other practices that could exclude people or lead to misunderstandings.

Remember, communication is more than the spoken word so you should consider how people communicate in non-verbal ways, particularly where individuals have difficulties communicating, for example if they’re living with dementia or a learning disability. Assisted living technologies (ALT) are just one example of tools that can support people to communicate in different ways.

Good communication is also essential where teams are widespread, based over several sites or where members are lone workers, such as in domiciliary care and support services.

Leaders can set the example by having an open door policy, being approachable and visible, listening to their staff, praising when things go well and taking responsibility when things don’t. This will set the standard for staff to copy in their interactions with others. However, every individual is personally responsible for the tone, content and style of delivery of the communication.

"Noticeboards, monthly newsletter, daily text comms between myself and the care team manager, periodic team reviews, clear processes, care plan … communication, communication, communication! Open door policy (via text, phone or email) between the team and myself."

Jean’s (individual employer) team

"Workers need to know they can voice concerns, worries and suggestions to me (their employer or line manager) as a collaborative partner without feeling afraid of repercussions or that their contribution won’t be valued."

Nina Osbourne, Individual Employer
Exercise

Zephyr Care is a successful multi-service organisation that employs 550 staff. They offer residential and home care, mainly to older people. Their CEO, Bob, has just retired and Zephyr Care externally recruited to the post. They selected Rose as the new CEO through a thorough recruitment process to ensure that she would bring values, experience, skills and knowledge to the CEO role which aligned with Zephyr’s mission statement and business objectives.

Zephyr Care’s staff pride themselves on having a positive workplace culture and the organisation has a very low staff turnover. However, they’re unsettled and apprehensive about their new CEO. Bob was very popular with staff and was seen as fair and approachable with an ‘open door’ policy. Will Rose be the same kind of manager? Will she want to change things?

Rose is really pleased to be CEO of Zephyr Care - it has a very good reputation for delivering person-centred care and she wants to ensure that the substance behind this reputation is maintained. She realises that there’ll be a certain amount of staff anxiety with somebody new at the helm.

With her years of experience in the sector - she started as a care assistant and has worked her way up - she decides that one of her first priorities will be to understand the culture of the organisation and get to know and listen to staff; to observe first hand how they work and communicate with each other and those using Zephyr Care’s services. She sees the staff as the organisation’s biggest asset and she thinks she needs to understand this culture and how it works, before making any changes.

Remembering staff anxiety is quite high, if you were Rose, how would you go about understanding the culture of your new organisation and how it works?

How would you communicate with staff to enable you to listen to their views? Factor in the impact of environmental influences on the different teams e.g. lone workers, shift workers.

Look at some recent communications (emails are a good example but consider verbal communications too) within your teams. What factors make good communication and what impact do less positive communications have on people?
How to establish good lines of communication

Here’s some examples of good communication.

■ Don’t use jargon, acronyms or complicated words.
■ Consider how different people communicate for example you might need to use ALT or sign language to communicate.
■ Have good internal communication that’s role modelled by leaders, for example a staff Intranet, regular newsletter or staff updates.
■ Involve staff and people who need care and support in your decision making.
■ Leaders could have an open door policy and be open and approachable.

Some of the ways that you can establish good lines of communication are through:

■ full staff meetings
■ regular supervisions
■ emails
■ newsletters
■ team development days
■ employee surveys
■ employee forums
■ 360 degree feedback
■ ensuring that everyone understands the vision, aims and objectives of the organisation and their role in this.

Resources to help: Manager Induction Standards

Leaders are essential and can lead by example when establishing good lines of communication.

There’s a section about communication in the Manager Induction Standards, which sets out what a manager needs to know and understand to perform well in their role.
You can download the standards at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/MIS

You can also purchase a workbook edition which has activities to capture evidence of your learning or to reflect on your practice. Get your copy from our bookshop at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/bookshop

Resources to help: Core skills learning activities

It’s also important that the wider workforce has good communication skills, and as a manager you’re responsible for developing these.

Our core skills learning activities can help you assess and develop the communication skills of your staff. They include short activities you can do individually or in a small group, manager assessment criteria and links to other useful resources.

Visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills to download them.
Visit our online toolkit

This is section four of our ‘Culture for care’ toolkit. View the rest of the toolkit on our website, or email us to request a printed copy at marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk

Culture for care toolkit

Workplace culture is the character and personality of your organisation. It’s made up of your organisation’s leadership, values, traditions and beliefs, and the behaviours and attitudes of the people in it. Having a positive workplace culture is vital to delivering high quality care and support.

Our ‘Culture for care’ toolkit explains what workplace culture is and how you can develop a positive one in your organisation. It’s for adult social care employers of all sizes, including individual employers.

There are activities you can do as you go along and some longer activities at the end. You can also use them with front line care workers (and other staff) to help you develop your workplace culture.

Find out more at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/culture