

# VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

This card has been created to help you listen, see, and understand people who may communicate in ways different from your own. It offers knowledge and guidance on how to build a shared language in a diverse group – even when not every word is spoken.

Because everyone – regardless of how they speak or hear – wants to be noticed, understood, and welcomed as part of the group.

## VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

- **Verbal communication** – words: speaking, writing, reading.
- **Non-verbal communication** – gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, tone of voice, physical contact (e.g. a touch on the shoulder).

Both are equally valuable and necessary, especially in the forest, where communication often relies more on the body than on language.

## COMMUNICATING IN DIVERSE GROUPS

### Deaf and hard-of-hearing people

Many lip-read – speak slowly and clearly, facing the person, without covering your mouth.

Some use sign language – it helps to know a few basic signs or have an interpreter present.

Body language and eye contact are essential.

Short written notes (on paper or a phone) can also be very effective.



### Blind and partially sighted people

Communication depends on hearing, touch, and a predictable environment.

Describe what is happening, give clear directions (e.g. “there’s a large tree on the left side of the path”).

If guiding, explain what you are about to do, e.g. “we’re going to stop for a moment now”.

Ask whether the person would like to take your arm or prefers to move independently.

### People with disabilities

Often benefit from simpler, calmly repeated messages.

A gesture, a smile, or a touch of the hand may carry more meaning than a sentence.

Pictograms, pictures, or pointing to objects work well.

Communication should always be respectful and equal – never patronising.

## THE LEADER’S ROLE:

- Ensure messages are clear and easy to understand.
- Pay attention to what is not said, to the quieter signals.
- Notice non-verbal cues: a glance, a gesture, stepping back, no response. These are all forms of communication.
- Adapt the way you communicate to the person, not the other way round.

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING

- Speak calmly, simply, and clearly.
- Address the person directly, not their carer – everyone deserves direct contact.
- Ask, rather than assume, e.g. “What’s the easiest way for you to communicate?”
- Use your body – show, demonstrate, touch (with consent).
- Encourage people to express their needs: “Let me know if you need anything.”
- Use supporting tools – boards, pictures, gestures, tactile objects.

## QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON:

- Which messages are clear to me, and which are not?
- How can I make my way of speaking more accessible?
- How would I feel if I did not understand what was happening, and no one explained it?
- What do I need to better see, hear, and understand another person, even if they communicate differently from me?

Write down your reflections:

## REFLECTION

- Communication is not just about exchanging information – it is about building bridges.
- You do not need to know sign language, nor be a specialist.
- What matters is being present, attentive, and open.
- Because everyone – however they communicate – wants to feel included.