

TOOL:

OVERCOMING COMMON BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

The behaviour and body language of staff can sometimes be a barrier to effective and respectful communication and make positive outcomes less likely. Below are some recommended ways to increase positive interaction. Not all the recommendations will be appropriate in every context. The recommendations below must be tailored to the context.

Additional information on this topic can be found in “*Effective and Respectful Communication in Forced Displacement*” – Community-Based Protection in Action Series at <http://www.unhcrexchange.org/communities/9159/topics/15192/contents/215098>

Recommended	Not Recommended
FACIAL EXPRESSION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally appropriate use of eye contact • Warmth and concern reflected in facial expression • Eyes at same level • Appropriately varied, animated facial expressions • Mouth relaxed, occasional smiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of eye contact • Staring at the person or at an object • Lifting eyebrows critically • Eye level higher or lower • Nodding your head excessively • Frozen or rigid facial expressions • Inappropriate smile
BODY LANGUAGE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arms and hands moderately expressive • Appropriate gestures • Body leaning slightly forward, conveying attentiveness but relaxed • Be physically on the same level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigid body position • Arms tightly folded/crossed • Body turned at an angle • Fidgeting with hands, squirming • Slouching or placing feet on desk • Hand/fingers over mouth • Pointing finger for emphasis

Recommended	Not Recommended
SPEECH	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly audible but not loud speech • Warmth in tone of voice • Tone of voice varied to reflect nuances of feeling and emotional tone of refugee’s message • Moderate speech pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking inaudibly or mumbling • Voice only in one tone or very loud • Overly informal language • Alienating language (such as using “you/your people”) • Prolonged silences • Excessively animated speech • Slow, rapid or broken speech patterns • Nervous laughter • Consistent clearing of throat
PHYSICAL SPACE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half a meter between chairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive closeness or distance • Talking across desk or other barriers such as computers