Tip Sheet: Communication Skills

Why are communication skills important?

Engagement with community leaders involves regular communication, whether hosting and facilitating meetings, discussing sensitive subjects, supporting individual survivors, or advocating for women and girl's needs. Good communication skills help GBV teams demonstrate and earn trust and respect, build collaborative relationships, and maximize safety and effectiveness in programming.

- **Communicate in language that is clear, accessible, and appropriate to the context.**
    - Use the local language or dialect whenever possible, in both verbal and written communication.
    - Use common words and phrases; avoid "jargon" and acronyms. For example, 'GBV' is likely not the best way to first describe your programming.
    - Be attentive to words that may be offensive to any group.
    - When working with an interpreter, make sure they are respected within the community, trained in GBV core concepts, and understand GBV words and meanings.

- **Be respectful, open, and honest.**
    - Learn about expectations for greeting and communicating with different types of community leaders. For example, is there an expected order for greeting a group of leaders, what etiquette and pleasantries are expected, etc.?
    - Be aware of body language and nonverbal communication. For example, in some places, it is not appropriate to stand directly in front of a leader or to make direct eye contact.
    - Give your undivided attention. Use active listening skills and silence mobile phones.
    - Avoid interrupting someone when they are talking.
    - Be humble and open to dialogue. Do not cast yourself as the expert on all matters related to women and girls; value the expertise and lived experience of community leaders and community members.
    - Do not argue when you disagree with an idea. Listen first. Then ask questions to better understand, and to stimulate discussion and further thinking on the topic.
    - Express appreciation for the work of community leaders.
    - Be open about the purpose of your work and the values that underpin GBV programming. Demonstrate that you are guided by these values.

- **Apply a strengths-based approach**
  - Focus on mutual interests and common issues of concern to build relationships and trust. A foundation of trust and collaboration will make it easier to address more difficult issues over the course of programming.
  - Recognize the contributions and potential of community leaders to make positive changes within communities, even where leaders may also contribute to concerning practices.
  - Frame issues in positive terms whenever possible. For example, highlight the benefits of non-violence instead of only focusing on the consequences of violence.

  - Share examples of other program successes, or communities that are implementing similar strategies and the benefits to those communities.
  - Look for opportunities to reinforce positive practices and social norms, including positive aspects of culture, positive exercise of power, and positive efforts to address GBV.
  - Ask questions that encourage thoughtful discussion
  - Ask questions in a way that expresses genuine interest in others' ideas and perspectives.
  - When someone asks a question or expresses an idea that could perpetuate harm to women and girls, consider asking others what they think. Ask follow-up questions that invite further reflection.
  - Start with easier topics and build up to more sensitive topics of discussion.Look for opportunities to reinforce positive practices and social norms, including positive aspects of culture, positive exercise of power, and positive efforts to address GBV.

- **Ask questions that encourage thoughtful discussion**
  - Ask questions in a way that expresses genuine interest in others' ideas and perspectives.
  - When someone asks a question or expresses an idea that could perpetuate harm to women and girls, consider asking others what they think. Ask follow-up questions that invite further reflection.
  - Start with easier topics and build up to more sensitive topics of discussion.

➡ **Resources**: For essential communication skills for GBV teams and community leaders, it may be helpful to review the **Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings (2019**) section on **Effective communication** (pp.176).