

Learning Outcome

1. Understand the importance of interpersonal skills related to health care practice

1.1 Analyse the appropriate use of interpersonal skills in three health care scenarios

The SOLER Model Script

One important communication theory to consider as a health and social care learner or practitioner is the SOLER model. This was devised by Gerard Egan, and first published in his influential book, the *Skilled Helper*, in 1975.

The SOLER model focuses entirely on your body-language, reminding us that this is just as important as the words we use when communicating with service-users. The components of the SOLER model can also be considered as fundamentals of “active listening”, reinforcing the message that communication is a two-way process.

SOLER stands for

- Sit Squarely
- Open Posture
- Lean forward
- Eye-contact
- Relax

Let us have a look at these in more detail:

Sit squarely.

Sitting, as opposed to standing is a vital first step. You need to be on the same level as the person you are talking to, so that you don't appear to be towering over them, as if you are trying to assert a dominant position. Try to position your body so that there is enough of you facing the client, making you seem open and attentive, but not so straight that you might appear intimidating. This is not a staring match!

Open posture.

Body-language experts often claim that crossed arms and legs can be a sign of hostility or conflict. Keep your body “open” to avoid appearing defensive.

Lean forward.

By leaning towards the service-user, you are showing that you are interested in them and what they have to say. By contrast, leaning back can make you seem distant or uninterested. Of course, you should be careful not to lean too far forward, so that you do not invade personal space.

Eye-contact.

Egan stresses the importance of using eye-contact to show interest and attentiveness towards the other person in the conversation, while also finding a balance, so you do not end up staring. However, you must remember that in different cultures around the world, making direct eye-contact

can signify very different situations. So, while you may be trying to be interested, caring and attentive, people from different backgrounds may interpret this as anger, aggression, or establishing a hierarchical status. Considering the cultural background of your service-users is another important factor of person-centred care.

Relax.

By showing relaxation in your body language, you are showing the service-user that you have time for them, and you are not in a rush to leave. It can also convey confidence, which can further put your service-user at ease, as they feel they are being listened to, respected, and well cared for.

Examples of the SOLER model.

Let's consider a couple of contextualised examples that you might experience in health and social care and see how the SOLER model applies.

First, imagine you're talking to an elderly service user in a care-home. Perhaps this individual has only recently moved out of their own home, and does not yet feel comfortable and acclimatised living in residential care. This is an important reason for you to think about how to make the service-user feel as comfortable as possible, and adopting all of the SOLER principles in a discussion will help in this way. Start by sitting down, so you can make eye contact, and you take away the sense of power imbalance from standing over someone. Sit forward, lean slightly towards the person, keep your body posture with open arms, nod, and respond to the person so they feel listened to and you appear approachable. Additionally, the service-user might be deaf, and maybe you need to use signals or sign-language. Here, by sitting squarely and keeping your body posture open, you are keeping your 'signing space' clear in front of your body, so that it can easily be seen by the other person in the conversation.

Or, what about a situation where you are talking to a child with learning disabilities? With children, it's more important than ever that you sit and don't stand, as bringing yourself to the same level can help children feel more comfortable and relaxed, as the teacher or support worker is not towering over them, creating a power imbalance. This can also allow for eye contact to be made to show interest and that you are listening. However, please bear in mind that different people react to eye-contact differently. For example, a child with Autism may find eye contact difficult and uncomfortable. And as we mentioned earlier, people from different cultural backgrounds also react to eye-contact in different ways. Depending on the child's learning needs, you may need to use augmented communication devices, such as a PECS book, so it is important that you can both easily access this book in a shared space between you. This allows you to easily model the use of pecs back whilst also using language, and it means that you do not lose the possibility of eye-contact, or the ability to lean forward and show a connection with the child during the conversation.

Conclusion

As you continue to learn and practise health and social care, think about the implications of communication theories such as the SOLER model, and how you might apply it in all interactions with your service-users, and your colleagues.



References

- <https://www.counsellingcentral.com/the-egan-model-and-soler/>
- <https://everythingwhat.com/what-is-soler-in-health-and-social-care>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcGAjdfUjsE>