

Tips for recording conversations

Regardless of how good our memories are it will be necessary to take notes in most conversations. It can be difficult to do this whilst still appearing present and engaged in the conversation. Note taking can also impact on active listening and observation. Finding a balance between participation and getting the right information down takes practice. Here are a few tips to help you:

- Prepare before the conversation, think about why you are going, who will be there and what might be said – the likely complexity.
- Make it clear to the person that you will be taking notes and why you are doing so.
- Be honest about your own note taking style, take the time to reassure the person you are still listening even if you need to break eye contact to ensure you get a detailed point down.
- Write what the person is telling you is important to them. Think actively about what the person is saying to identify what does need to be noted down and what doesn't. It is unlikely you will need, or be able to, note everything word for word. Pick out the significant things.
- Listen intently. Important statements might begin: "What I struggle with most is...", "What is most important...", "The key things are...", "What I really miss...", "My favourite...", "What I like best...", "The most frustrating thing is...", "I worry more about..." .
- Write down the main points 'in the moment' then when the person is finished speaking, clarify, go back over the main points and use that time to summarise and get things down in more detail, in their own words where possible. It's an opportunity for both you and them to reflect on what has been said before moving on.
- Consider using a shorthand way of writing things down and adopt a set of familiar abbreviations. But remember to expand these to comprehensible words when writing up. If you use abbreviations for organisation names or conditions, for example NHS or COPD, always provide a definition of the abbreviation where it is first recorded.
- Try using a framework for taking notes, like the [identifying outcomes tool](#) or a prompt sheet based on your form so you can note down the key points under the most appropriate theme or heading ready for when you write it up.
- Write up as soon as possible after the event, while it is fresh in your mind.
- Read it back to yourself before finalising it, how would it feel if someone wrote that about you....? What if the person was reading it over your shoulder...?

References and further reading

Cumbria County Council (2015) *Case Recording Standards* [Accessible on line at <http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/327/6904/4060314050.pdf> - accessed 16/06/2016]

Open University (2016) *Taking Notes from Speech* [Accessible on line at Open University <http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/taking-notes-from-speech.php> - accessed 10/06/2016]

Skills for Care (undated) *Observational assessment guidance for homecare providers delivering the Care Certificate*. [Accessible online at <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Document-library/Standards/Care-Certificate/Care-Certificate-assessment-guidance-for-homecare-providers-31.03.15.pdf> - accessed 16/06/2016]

Skills You Need (2016) *Note Taking* [Accessible on line at <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/write/notes-verbal.html> - accessed 16/06/2016]