Breaking Down Barriers

A Communication Workshop for Treatment Center Teams

Napier Models · Modules

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Part 1 · Overview

Breaking Down Barriers

A Communication Workshop for Treatment Center Teams

This workshop identifies and dismantles communication barriers between departments, disciplines, and hierarchical levels. Participants learn to recognize systemic obstacles and develop practical strategies for improving information flow.

2-3 hours

Learning Objectives

- Identify common communication barriers in treatment settings
- Understand how hierarchy impacts information sharing
- Develop strategies for cross-departmental communication
- Create action plans for removing specific barriers
- Build relationships across traditional silos

Key Topics Covered

Organizational Silos

Hierarchical Communication

Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Information Flow

Systemic Barriers

Change Management

Stakeholder Engagement

Intended Audience

- Multi-disciplinary treatment teams
- Organizations with departmental silos
- Leadership teams addressing communication gaps
- Quality improvement committees
- Staff experiencing coordination challenges

Prerequisites

- Representation from multiple departments/disciplines
- Organizational support for implementing changes
- Completion of 'Permission to Be Open' recommended

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Part 2 · Worksheet

Workshop Overview

This interactive workshop is designed to improve communication and understanding between different roles within substance use disorder treatment centers. By temporarily reversing traditional roles and creating safe spaces for dialogue, we can break down barriers between:

- Clinical staff and administrative leadership
- Direct care counselors and management
- Different departments within the treatment center
- Licensed and non-licensed staff members

The goal is to foster mutual understanding, reduce defensiveness, and create lasting positive changes in how we communicate and collaborate as a treatment team.

Phase 1: Preparation & Setup

Creating the Foundation for Open Dialogue

Setting the Stage

This activity works best when we have representation from different levels and departments:

- Group A (The Consultants): Direct care staff, counselors, case managers, intake specialists
- Group B (The Interviewees): Clinical directors, program directors, administrators, supervisors

15-20 minutes for initial setup

Facilitator Tips

- Ensure equal representation from different departments
- Create a comfortable, non-threatening environment
- Establish clear ground rules for respectful dialogue
- Emphasize that this is about understanding, not blame

Pre-Workshop Reflection: What communication challenges do you currently face in your treatment center?

Consider issues like information flow, feedback processes, interdepartmental communication, hierarchy challenges...

Phase 2: The Consultant Briefing

Empowering Direct Care Staff as Expert Advisors

Role Reversal Instructions

To the Direct Care Staff (Consultants):

"This afternoon, you are expert consultants hired to improve staff-management relations in our treatment center. Leadership wants to understand how to better support you and improve

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communication. Your role is to listen, probe for understanding, and provide honest, constructive feedback. You have the freedom to ask questions you might not normally feel comfortable asking."

20-30 minutes for briefing and preparation

Consultant Preparation Questions

Work in small groups to develop 5-6 interview questions for leadership. Consider asking about:

- Their biggest challenges in supporting clinical staff
- What they wish direct care staff understood about their role
- How they measure success in staff relations
- What barriers they face in implementing staff suggestions
- Their vision for ideal team communication

Draft your interview questions here:

Example: What aspects of direct care work do you find most challenging to understand or support from your position?

Phase 3: The Interview Process

Creating Safe Spaces for Honest Dialogue

Interview Structure

Form interview teams of 3 consultants and 3 leadership members. This creates psychological safety through balanced numbers.

- Each interview session lasts 30-40 minutes
- Consultants ask prepared questions
- Focus on understanding, not defending
- Take notes on key insights and surprises

40 minutes for interviews

Creating Psychological Safety

- Use active listening techniques
- Ask follow-up questions for clarity
- Acknowledge emotions without judgment
- Focus on systems, not individuals
- Look for common ground and shared goals

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Key Insights from the Interview:

What surprised you? What did you learn about the other group's perspective? What common ground did you discover?

Phase 4: Synthesis & Problem-Solving

Turning Insights into Action

Group Synthesis

All interview groups come together to share their top insights. The facilitator captures common themes on a shared board.

- Each group shares one key insight (no duplicates)
- Focus on actionable discoveries
- Identify patterns across different interviews
- Celebrate moments of mutual understanding

15 minutes for group sharing

Mixed-Team Problem Solving

Create new teams mixing staff and leadership (pairs or triads) to brainstorm solutions to identified challenges:

- Each team tackles one specific issue
- Generate 3-5 potential solutions
- Consider feasibility and impact
- Present one "best idea" to the group

20 minutes for problem-solving

Our Team's Best Solution:

Describe your proposed solution, including specific steps, who would be involved, and expected outcomes...

Phase 5: Implementation & Follow-Up

Making Lasting Change

Creating Accountability

To ensure lasting change, establish clear next steps:

- Direct care staff select 2 representatives for ongoing dialogue
- Leadership commits to specific actions with timelines

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- Schedule follow-up sessions (30, 60, 90 days)
- Create a shared document for tracking progress
- Celebrate wins and adjust strategies as needed

Sustaining Momentum

- Share results with all staff, including those not present
- Create visible reminders of commitments made
- Incorporate learnings into regular team meetings
- Recognize and reward improved communication
- Be patient - cultural change takes time

Personal Commitment: What will you do differently based on today's workshop?

Be specific about actions you'll take, behaviors you'll change, or new approaches you'll try...

How will we measure success? What changes would indicate improved communication?

Consider both quantitative metrics (meeting attendance, suggestion implementation) and qualitative measures (staff satisfaction, trust levels)...

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Adapted for substance use disorder treatment centers

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