

Receiving Verbal Communication Accurately

Verbal (and non-verbal) communication can strengthen, weaken, and even confuse a client's communication (Nelson-Jones, 2005).

Using the acronym VAPER with the client to consider five aspects of voice messages that can help communication inside (and outside) treatment and ultimately increase the chance of forming empathy and understanding of the client and their experiences.

Use the following actions in sessions with clients to explore the voice messaging techniques using the five dimensions:

- **Volume** – does the client speak loudly, softly, or somewhere in between?
- **Articulation** – is their speech clear and distinct?
- **Pitch** – is their tone harsh (too high or too low) or even threatening?
- **Emphasis** – does the client use emphasis in the wrong place (too much, or too little) so that their conversation is difficult to listen to.
- **Rate** – is the client anxious and speaking too quickly? Slowing down speech may help them calm down.

1. **During the session**, capture some of the statements and phrases the client has used.

2. **Ask the client** to consider each one and reflect on the dimensions defined by the acronym VAPER.
3. **Ask them to repeat each statement** altering the dimension they feel is damaging their communication skills.
4. **Reflect on whether there are patterns in the verbal communication**
Would slowing down verbal communication in therapy (and perhaps outside) help get points across and help the listener hear, understand, accept, and gain empathy with what is being said.
5. **How could the client speak more clearly in future sessions?**

References

- Nelson-Jones, R. (2014). *Practical counselling and helping skills: Text and activities for the lifeskills counselling model*. SAGE.

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