

Care Skillsbase: Manage Skills

Manage the risk posed by staff with limited skills

Where safety and quality depend on staff dealing with information and communicating effectively, staff with limited communication and number skills may pose a risk. It is important to recognise, assess and manage that risk.

Apply your normal risk management procedures, but recognise that effective supervision is key to risk management. Your supervisors may find support in this area valuable. Use this guidance to help you.

1. Risk assess the work activity

Consider the consequences to the people who use your services, staff and/or organisation if staff do not deal with information and/or communicate effectively. Would the consequences be trivial or serious?

Then consider how likely it is that staff will not consistently deal with information and communicate effectively. Is it just a remote possibility, or highly likely?

	Likelihood of problem				
Seriousness	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Near certain?
Insignificant	Relax				
Minor					Be careful
Moderate				Be careful	Watch out!
Severe			Be careful	Watch out!	Danger!
Disastrous?		Be careful	Watch out!	Danger!	Disaster!

Finally, consider:

- how often the task or activity is undertaken
- how critical the task or activity is to overall service delivery.

The more frequent and critical the task or activity, the greater the risk posed by ineffective application of communication and number skills.

2. Check the communication and number skills of staff

Use Care Skillsbase Skills Checks (available at www.scie.org.uk/careskillsbase) to check the ability of staff to use information and communicate.

If results suggest that one or more of the members of staff responsible may lack the ability to communicate and deal with information in the ways required, consider the options.

Are there other staff involved in the task or activity who have demonstrated the ability?

If so, are the staff with proven skills willing and available to support the staff with more limited skills? Are the staff with more limited skills willing to be supported?

If so, what form would the support take?

To answer these questions, consult with the staff involved.

3. Put support in place

Begin by making sure staff know how they are expected to deal with information and communicate. Show them in detail what you want them to do.

If there are a number of staff involved, agree who is responsible for what.

Explain how communicating and dealing with information **ineffectively** may compromise safety and quality.

Confirm that staff understand what is expected of them and are:

- committed to achieving the required outcomes
- prepared to follow the agreed procedure in order to achieve the outcomes
- confident of their ability to understand and use information and communicate
- willing to apply communication and number skills to the best of their ability.

For each element of the task or activity, agree with staff how they can help each other ensure that they deal with information and communicate effectively.

Ask staff:

- What are the consequences if information is not understood or used properly?
- What if communication is not effective?
- How will we know?
- What else can we do to ensure effective understanding and use of information and/or communication?

4. Monitor performance

Monitor how staff deal with information and communicate in work activity.

Give staff constructive feedback on their performance. When you see staff doing what was agreed, tell them and praise them.

When you see staff doing things differently to what was agreed, point out the difference and ask them why they are not doing it the way that was agreed.

Depending on the reason given, either modify the agreed procedure or ask staff to comply.

If you modify the procedure, make sure all staff involved know and understand why you have done so.

Record your monitoring; note what it has revealed and any actions you have taken.

Your records may serve two useful functions:

- a reference for staff
- evidence that you are taking action on communication and number skills.

5. Take action to address persistent problems

If monitoring reveals that staff are not easily able to deal with information and communicate effectively, call staff together to address the problem.

(Also, to help get to the root of the problem, see Care Skillsbase > Manage Skills > Meet your organisation's needs > Use quality management tools at www.scie.org.uk/careskillsbase)

Describe your perception of the problem, citing examples to illustrate what you mean. Check that staff agree that your analysis is fair and accurate.

When you and staff have reached a shared understanding of the issues, ask staff if:

- they can think of another way to achieve the outcomes you require
- they would find any on-the-job or off-the-job support useful.

Options may include one or more of the following:

- redesigning the work process to achieve the desired outcomes
- organising more on-the-job support to enable staff to achieve the desired outcomes
- organising off-the-job support.

(Also see Care Skillsbase > Manage Skills at www.scie.org.uk/careskillsbase)

6. Monitor and review regularly

Monitor and review the agreed solution regularly and involve staff actively in the process of reviewing.

Guidance for supervisors

This generic guidance is designed to help supervisors address skills issues with staff. It should be adapted according to circumstances.

What the supervisor should do

Draw the person's attention to the issue

1. Identify to the person exactly where in their work the way they communicate and deal with information concerns you.
2. Describe how staff are expected to communicate and deal with information.
3. Describe how you have seen the person behaving, explaining where their behaviour is different from what is required. Be careful not to accuse or blame the person.
4. Ask whether they think your description is fair and accurate.
5. Ask them to explain why they deal with information and communicate in that way (as opposed to the way they are required to).
6. Explain exactly what you want them to do differently and why.
7. Check that they understand what you want them to do. If possible, ask them to demonstrate it in front of you.

Offer support

Tell the person that you want to help them with any aspect of the work that is difficult. Say that you (or a colleague) will be on hand and you expect the person to ask for help with anything they find difficult.

Monitor performance and give feedback

1. Monitor how effectively the person applies communication and number skills in the tasks and activities.
2. Give feedback. Say whatever you can that is positive about their work. Ask them how they feel about their performance. If you still have concerns, repeat steps 1-7 above.
3. Ask whether they feel able to work in the way you want them to, or not.
4. If they say yes, ask them what help would be useful (e.g. support from a colleague, changes to the task or activity, training, instruction sheets, etc).
5. If they say no, thank them for being honest and say that you will adjust their workload.
6. Do this either by reassigning them to tasks and activities where their skills do not pose a risk, or by pairing them with a colleague who has the required skills.