Module 2: Client-Centered Communication Skills

Module Preview and Preparation

**Key Concepts for Participants**

1. Key elements of the OARS skills-based communication model will help build and maintain rapport, and help facilitate a discussion about each client’s goals, needs, and preferences.
2. Proficiency and consistency in using these skills takes a willingness to listen, reflect, learn and practice.

**About This Module**

This module will review strategies for building rapport and trust and communicating effectively with clients. It introduces the OARS Model, a clear and concise framework to help improve communication skills.

This module addresses the **Quality Counseling Principle** included in the *beginning* section of the *Contraceptive Counseling Process Guide*:

**Principle:** Establish and maintain rapport with the client.

OARS and other rapport-building skills will also facilitate the *middle* section of the counseling process. Staff can use these skills to elicit patient preferences for contraception and conduct an interactive, client-centered counseling session, as will be covered in future modules.

**Why This Module Matters**

The OARS skills-based communication model provides tools for developing a relationship between a client and staff person, so that staff can effectively support client decision making. This module helps participants become more intentional in their communication in order to build trust and rapport with a client and engage that client in a conversation about their personal experiences, considerations, preferences and needs. Establishing rapport, including asking open-ended questions, has been shown to be associated with contraceptive continuation.
Important Terms

As you prepare to deliver this module, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

Rapport-building strategies may include:
- Warmly greeting the client by name and introducing yourself.
- Being genuine, showing respect and empathy.
- Asking about the client’s reasons(s) for today’s visit.
- Explaining and ensuring privacy and confidentiality.
- Encouraging the client to ask questions and share information.
- Showing you are listening (verbally and non-verbally).
- Using culturally appropriate gestures, eye contact, and body language.

OARS is a skills-based, client-centered model of interactive techniques. These skills include verbal and non-verbal responses and behaviors. OARS outlines the ways we can engage the client in a conversation about the client's life and goals through the use of:
- Open-ended questions,
- Affirming statements,
- Reflective listening, and
- Summarizing statements.

Refer to the instructional tool OARS: Essential Communication Skills for further explanation and brief examples of each of the four skills.

Trainer Tip: As you prepare to deliver this module, think of your own examples of how these skills and other techniques help you build rapport with a client and assess what the client needs that day.
Training Activities in this Module

Activity 2.1 How to Establish Rapport (15–20 minutes)

Purpose: Participants will be able to describe the skills and strategies used to build and maintain rapport and a trusting relationship with a client, setting the stage for reviewing the OARS Model in Activity 2.2.

In this activity, you will:
- Describe the importance of using verbal and non-verbal communication to build rapport from the moment an encounter begins and maintaining it throughout the client interaction.
- Lead participants in exploring ways they welcome and establish rapport with clients.

Activity 2.2 The OARS Model — Essential Communication Skills (45 minutes)

Purpose: Participants will be able to describe the OARS communication skills that help build rapport and personalize counseling with clients, setting the stage for practicing these skills in Activity 2.3.

In this activity, you will:
- Introduce the OARS Model framework.
- Ask participants to give examples of each of the four skills and discuss how they support effective communication with clients.
- Review a Case Study that shows how the four skills fit together within a client interaction.
- Explore opportunities to build these skills through ongoing practice, reflection and feedback.

Activity 2.3 Communicating with Brilliance — Practicing Your Skills (45–60 minutes)

Purpose: Participants will be able to apply effective communication skills through direct practice interviewing a partner on a non-clinical topic and experience the perspective of the “client” as they’re being interviewed. This practice sets the stage for ongoing use of these skills in future modules.

In this activity, you will:
- Give participants an opportunity to practice using these communication skills interactively through a conversation with a participant partner.
- Give participants an opportunity to experience an intentional conversation and assess the skills being demonstrated.
General Guidance for All Activities:

- Suggested language for the trainer to say out loud is in italics and shaded. We encourage you to cover these points in your own words and add additional comments relevant to your site.

  **Example:**

  *This activity is to help us step back and think about what “client-centered” really means and how it’s demonstrated when a person is making a very personal and important life decision.*

- We encourage you to be creative with how you present the content within the activities. Have fun, and make it your own! While the content is evidence-based and should be delivered with fidelity, there are many training approaches you could use to help your participants engage with this content. See *Effective Teaching Methods* for ideas, or incorporate your own favorite training strategies!
**Activity 2.1  How to Establish Rapport**

**Purpose**
The purpose of this activity is to identify and explore the skills and strategies used to build and maintain rapport and a trusting relationship with a client.

**Who should participate?**
Especially important for all clinic staff because it is about basic communication skills, rapport building and establishing a welcoming and accessible clinic environment.

**Time**
15–20 minutes

**Preparation**
Review the following:
- Module 2 Preview & Preparation
- Activity 2.1 Handouts

**Materials**

**Handouts:**
Make one copy for each participant (or re-use copies printed for Module 1):
- Contraceptive Counseling Process Guide
- Principles for Providing Quality Counseling (optional)

**Supplies:**
- Large paper to stick/tape to the wall — 3 sheets, labeled with “Look,” “Voice,” and “Beginning”
- Markers

**Resources**
Have at least one printed copy available for reference:
- Providing Quality Family Planning Services (QFP): Recommendations of CDC and OPA, Appendix C
1. **Introduce the activity:**

   *The purpose of this activity is to talk about how we welcome and develop rapport (both verbally and non-verbally) with our clients. We know that how we communicate with our clients is essential to providing high quality and consistent contraceptive services. This activity will give us a chance to talk about how we do this and will set the stage for talking about a communication model (called OARS) that gives us a short checklist on using communication skills and how to use these skills with intention.*

2. **Lead a group brainstorm** about specific ways to welcome a client.

   Have participants call out responses to each of the questions in **bold**. (If participants are struggling to come up with ideas, you might also ask the bulleted questions underneath.)

   **Encourage specific responses.** For example, if someone says “look welcoming,” ask, “Exactly, what does that look like?”

   As participants respond, take notes on the large papers you prepared.

   **How do you look?**
   - Is your body relaxed?
   - Do you smile easily?
   - What mannerisms are you aware of that might distract? (e.g., hair twisting, leg bouncing, etc.)
   - What does your face look like when you are concentrating?
   - How would you describe your “professional” appearance?
   - How do you show that you are listening? (e.g., nodding, appropriate eye contact, etc.)

   **How is your voice and voice tone? (in person and on the phone)**
   - Are you speaking clearly? Slowly, so others can understand you?
   - Are you speaking gently and softly (confidentially)?
   - Do you avoid using slang (e.g., “whatever…”)?
   - Do you explain any abbreviations you use?
   - How do you show that you are listening? (e.g., restating what you heard from the client)

   **How do you begin your client interaction? (in person and on the phone)**
   - How do you introduce yourself?
   - What words of welcome do you use? (“How can I help you today?”)
   - What questions do you ask?
   - How do you ask these questions?
   - How do you show respect?
   - How do you build trust?

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**At a Glance**

**Introduction**

- Developing rapport
- Verbal and nonverbal
- Communication is an essential part of high quality services

**Brainstorm**

How can you greet or welcome a client?

**How do you look?**

- Look

**How is your voice/tone?**

- Voice

**How do you begin?**

- Beginning

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**Module 2: Client-Centered Communication Skills**

May 2016
3. **Lead a group discussion** about ways to assess and improve your rapport-building skills.

   - How can we — as individuals — assess how we’re building rapport through our nonverbal signals, our words and our voice tone, and the messages we communicate at the start of a client interaction?
   - How can we — as a team — help each other improve our rapport-building skills? How can we give and receive feedback in this area?

4. **Review the “Beginning” section of the Contraceptive Counseling Process Guide.**

   Note that the bulleted list in that section includes rapport-building strategies like those the group just brainstormed, as well as skills related to the OARS model, which you’ll go over in the next activity.

   **Trainer Tip:** Activity 2.2 The OARS Model — Essential Communication Skills will offer a simple framework of skills that can help participants build a trusting relationship with clients.

   Ask participants:

   **Why do you think the Process Guide says that these communication skills are for the “Beginning (and throughout)”?**

   Pause for responses.

   Establishing rapport is something that is important for us to do intentionally at the beginning of a visit, and then continue to do throughout. If we take time in that first moment when a client walks in the door to invest in the relationship and build rapport, that investment will pay off throughout the visit as a client becomes more comfortable in sharing their needs and goals.

   However, it is possible to lose trust that you initially built, which is why it’s important to apply good communication skills throughout the visit to help maintain rapport and a trusting relationship.

5. **Wrap up the activity**, sharing summarizing comments such as:

   This quick activity was aimed at describing and clarifying the qualities and skills we use when greeting and welcoming our clients. **Could you each share with the group one specific way you intend to increase your skills in building rapport?**

   Remember: our non-verbal actions and voice tone are an important part of effective communication.
## Process

### Beginning (and throughout)

**Establish and maintain rapport with the client**
- Warmly greet the client by name and introduce yourself
- Be genuine, showing respect and empathy
- Ask about the client’s reason(s) for today’s visit, plan and prioritize visit
- Explain private and confidential services
- Ask open-ended questions
- Respectfully affirm what you see and hear (showing interest, support and cultural awareness)
- Show that you care by listening (verbally and non-verbally)
- Reflect on what you observe and hear, to gain a deeper understanding
- Summarize key points throughout with a focus on the client’s goals
- If using EMR, position the monitor to keep eye contact

### Middle

**Assess the client’s needs and personalize discussions accordingly**
- Review and update the medical, sexual and social history
- Explore client preferences regarding method characteristics: frequency of use, effectiveness, how to use, menstrual changes, side effects, and benefits
- Ask about client knowledge and experience with birth control methods
- Address pregnancy and parenting intention/ambivalence along with STD/HIV protection
- Respectfully explore client beliefs and feelings, including ethnic, cultural, and/or individual factors that may be relevant to their birth control method decisions and method use

**Work with the client interactively to establish a birth control method plan**
- Ask open-ended questions about concerns or possible barriers relevant to method choice
- Explore the client’s method preferences, and if appropriate, offer additional information about the most effective methods
- Help the client to optimize method choice by assisting the client in aligning their preferences with their method selection
- Reflect back important thoughts or feelings you hear from the client and/or feelings you sense from the discussion
- Clarify partner involvement and the role of others who may be important to the client’s decision making and method use
- Affirm and support the decision making process with a respectful, nonjudgmental approach in helping the client make a plan

**Provide information that can be understood and retained by the client**
- Provide balanced, unbiased, tailored information about method characteristics in an interactive conversation
- Provide accurate information (correct use, effectiveness, benefits, side effects, potential risks, STD/HIV protection)
- Use clear, understandable words, images, materials, models and/or sample methods
- Use numbers and comparisons that are easy to understand
- Assess and address myths and misinformation in a respectful and affirming way
- Include information about STD protection and emergency contraception

### Closing

**Confirm client understanding**
- Ask the client to tell and show what was learned (teach-back) and provide additional information, as needed
- Address any possible barriers to a successful plan and method use
- Confirm the client’s plan for correct method use and follow-up, including what to do if dissatisfied with the method, back-up method, and emergency contraception, as needed
- Provide contact information and future opportunities for follow up, other methods or services
- Summarize with key points and provide a friendly close
Principles for Providing Quality Counseling

Counseling is a process that enables your client to make and follow through on decisions. Education is an integral component of the counseling process that helps clients make informed decisions. Providing quality counseling is an essential component of client-centered care.

Your client is the primary focus when providing counseling related to reproductive and sexual health decision making about preventing or achieving pregnancy and supporting healthy behaviors. Using client-centered skills, you tailor the interactive counseling and educational encounter to meet the unique and culturally appropriate needs of your client.

**PRINCIPLE 1:**

**Establish and maintain rapport with the client**

- Create a welcoming environment — greet the client warmly, show you care.
- Listen to and engage your client by asking open-ended questions. Explain privacy and confidentiality to help build a climate of safety and trust that will encourage questions at every stage of the client encounter.

**PRINCIPLE 2:**

**Assess the client’s needs and personalize discussions accordingly**

- Tailor your questions and conversation so that your client’s clinical needs, personal life considerations and psychological concerns are integrated into important education and decision making discussion.

**PRINCIPLE 3:**

**Work with the client interactively to establish a plan**

- Address your client’s personal goals by interactively exploring decision making and readiness for behavior change if needed. Help establish a plan that will allow the client to achieve personal goals.

**PRINCIPLE 4:**

**Provide information that can be understood and retained by the client**

- Provide an opportunity for your client to learn medically accurate information that is balanced, nonjudgmental and in accordance with your client’s plan at this time in her or his life.

**PRINCIPLE 5:**

**Confirm client understanding**

- Use an interactive teach-back process to give your client an opportunity to say — in his or her own words — the important information shared during the encounter. The goal of using a teach-back approach is to clarify any client misunderstandings to ensure your client’s success in their reproductive health choices.

Source: Providing Quality Family Planning Services: Recommendations of CDC and the U. S. Office of Population Affairs, 2014; Appendix C

FPNTC is supported by the Office of Population Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of OPA, DHHS, or FPNTC member organizations.

November 2015
Activity 2.2  The OARS Model — Essential Communication Skills

Purpose
The purpose of this activity is to help staff learn and apply OARS communication skills to build rapport and personalize counseling with clients, setting the stage for practicing these skills in Activity 2.3.

Who should participate?
Appropriate for all clinic staff who provide clinic services.

Especially important for staff who provide contraceptive counseling and education.

Staff who will participate in Activity 2.3, Communicating with Brilliance — Practicing Your Skills should participate in this activity if they are not familiar with the OARS Model.

Time
45 minutes

Preparation
Review the following:
- Module 2 Preview & Preparation
- Activity 2.2 PowerPoint Presentation
- Activity 2.2 Handouts

Materials
Handouts:
Make one copy for each participant:
- OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills
- OARS Cards Job Aid (print on cardstock and laminate if possible)
- Practice Worksheet for OARS

Presentation:
Load onto laptop and/or print slides as a handout for participants:
- The OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

Supplies:
- (if available for presentation) Laptop, projector and screen
- Large paper to stick/tape to the wall or whiteboard (optional)
- Markers (optional)
Detailed Instructions

1. **Introduce the activity:**

   The purpose of this activity is to learn about the OARS model and use this model as we assess our own skill level in how we offer a safe and welcoming environment and build and maintain rapport with each client.

   In addition to helping to establish rapport, these skills can help us as we move through the contraceptive counseling process, helping us elicit client preferences for contraception and conduct an interactive, client-centered counseling session.

2. **Review the Key Concepts for Participants.**

   (Optional: Post on large paper or white board.)

   There are two Key Concepts for our activities on communication skills:

   - Key elements of the OARS skills-based communication model will help build and maintain rapport, and help facilitate a discussion about each client's goals, needs, and preferences.
   - Proficiency and consistency in these skills takes a willingness to listen, reflect, learn and practice.

   We’ll have several opportunities to practice these skills in this activity and the next; and every interaction you have with a client (or friend, or co-worker!) is always an opportunity to practice.

   **Trainer Tip:** If you plan to go through Modules 3, 4 and 5 with the same group, note that these communication skills will come up in each of those modules.

3. **Conduct the PowerPoint Presentation** (or use the slides handout).
The model we will look at offers basic counseling skills that are easy to understand — but need practice, practice, practice.

These are skills and techniques that can be used the moment an encounter begins, and throughout the entire encounter to help build and maintain rapport.

Remember — rapport-building begins the moment your encounter begins. This may be on the telephone, at reception, when a session begins, and/or the moment a provider steps into an exam or consultation room.

The goal is to listen for the client’s goals and preferences and communicate with empathy, understanding and intention. With intention you can tailor your questions and your information to meet the client’s decision-making goals.

Who is familiar with the OARS Model? How about Motivational Interviewing (MI)?

**Trainer Tip:** The OARS model was developed by Miller and Rollnick in their MI approach, which is a larger framework outside the scope of this activity.

**OARS** is a simple but comprehensive model of communication that provides a framework for self-assessment & reflection aimed at improving our skills.

**OARS** is a client-centered model of key skills that will help you create an interactive encounter focused on the client’s goals, needs, and preferences.

**How intentional are you with your communication skills?**

Invite participants to share a few responses.

As we go through each of these skills, remember that they are used throughout an encounter; they will help you to elicit patient preferences for contraception and conduct an interactive, client-centered counseling session.

Also, remember that these skills include both verbal and non-verbal qualities and behaviors.

What are open-ended questions you ask clients (or patients)?

Invite participants to share a few responses. You may want to write them large paper or a whiteboard.

What are the reasons we want to ask open-ended questions?

Take a few responses before moving to the next slide.
Ask for one or more volunteers to read the four bulleted reasons why we ask open-ended questions.

*Open-ended questions can help you learn about your client’s world. How can you better understand what they want, need, and how you might help?*

One great over-arching question you may ask a client is: Is there anything you would like to share with me about what’s important to you that would help me give you what you need today?

*What are some of the positive things you say to clients?*

*And why are these affirmations important?*

Take time for a brief discussion.

Ask a volunteer to read the two bulleted reasons why we offer affirmations to clients.

*What are other ways we can offer our clients affirmations?*

*How hard is this to do? How much time does it take?*

Affirmations don’t have to take much time at all; the hard part is just remembering! Practice helps, and you can practice with one another.

Who has heard of “active listening”? What does “active listening” mean? (you’re engaged, demonstrated with verbal and non-verbal behaviors, etc.)

Take time for a brief discussion.

Reflective listening is a bit more specific. It is actually reflecting out loud what you hear a person say, in the words they use, such as: “… you said the irregular bleeding you’re experiencing is really frustrating.”
Reflective listening also involves more than words; it’s also how they say it, or the emotion behind the words. An example: “When you talked about having irregular bleeding, your voice got really strong. This must be really frustrating for you.”

Reflective listening is also reflecting what you see the client doing. An example may be: “When you said you don’t want to get pregnant right now, there were tears in your eyes…”

Reflective listening should be grounded in our desire to truly understand what is going on with a client. It can help us to not make assumptions about a client; if a client disagrees with a reflective statement you say to them, it’s an opportunity to correct assumptions and improve understanding.

Using reflective listening to understand a client’s words, feelings, and behaviors can also save time and help you more quickly move to what is important for your client today.

This is the heart and soul of counseling: helping the client see that you truly want to understand and help the client find the right pathway to a decision.

When do you summarize what your client has been saying?

Take time for a brief discussion.

Summarizing takes place both during and toward the end of a session. It’s an opportunity to explicitly restate what’s been said so far in the conversation.

It can help you move to a new topic, for example:

“So we’ve been talking about what’s important for you right now — not getting pregnant and finishing school — and having birth control that really, really works! Shall we talk more about the methods that are really effective and easy to use?”

It’s also a key step before moving to a plan of action, such as:

“We’ve talked about several methods and it sounds like you think an IUD might be a great choice for you. Tell me what you’ve heard are the most important points of using an IUD.”
Let's do a brief case study to practice the skills and to think about using the skills with a client.

Distribute the **OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills** hand-out and **OARS Card** job aid to each participant.

Have one of the participants read the details about Celine.

*Think for a moment how you might begin the session… what would you say and/or do?*

Invite participants to share responses.

Have one of the participants read the dialogue box.

*What skill is the provider using?*

Invite participants to share responses.

*The skill is affirming — letting Celine know that you understand that she is busy and capable.*

*Why is this important — what is your intent?*

Invite participants to share responses.

*This helps to build trust. You’re acknowledging her busy world, affirming her planning, and showing respect for her effort.*

*How else can you provide her with an affirmation statement?*
Have one of the participants read the dialogue box.

**What skill is this? And what's the intent with using this skill?**

Invite participants to share responses.

The skill is reflective listening — reflecting her words and her possible feelings, i.e., “worried.”

Doing this demonstrates understanding & empathy. Also, reflecting words, feelings, and/or behaviors can give you a chance to get to the “underneath” question or concern, checking your understanding and then digging deeper.

It’s important to use reflections throughout an encounter, to:

- help keep you on track;
- help the client know what your focus is;
- help to clarify that your understanding is the same as your client’s (be sure to ask the client to confirm!)

**What else might you say?**

*Trainer Tip:* People might say this is summarizing — and yes, it is. Reflective listening and summarizing are similar. The key difference is that reflective listening is usually not making a transition to another topic or closing the encounter.

Have one of the participants read the dialogue box.

**What skill is the provider using? And what’s the intent?**

Invite participants to share responses.

This is an open-ended question. It can help you quickly learn about a client’s experience, what method did (or did not) work, and more of what they know about birth control in general.

What else do you want to know about Celine? What are other open-ended questions that will explore, build rapport, or facilitate a decision making process?
Have one of the participants read the dialogue box.

**What skill is the provider using? And what’s the intent?**

Invite participants to share responses.

**Summarizing is the skill, and the intent is to make explicit your understanding about what has been discussed or decided, and then transition into talking about other topics.**

**Summarizing is mostly reflective listening, with the purpose of making a transition to a new topic or the client’s action plan.**

**The most important thing to remember is: It’s the client’s decision and the client’s plan.**

**What else might you ask?**

Do a quick review of the 4 essential skills.

**Take a moment to think about which skills you feel comfortable and confident with, and what skills you’d like more practice with… would anyone like to share?**

**Getting comfortable in using these skills with intention takes lots of practice. I encourage you all to practice with a friend or a colleague. You could even record the practice with your phone and play it back to check out your skills.**

**Any other questions or comments?**

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**References & Resources and Contact Information are included at the end of each presentation.**

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4. **Hand out the OARS Practice Worksheet.**

   If you have time, give participants a few minutes to complete it on their own. Then review as a full group.

   If you don't have time to review as a group, you may still hand this out, possibly as a homework assignment if you have another training session planned.

5. **Wrap up the activity.** In your own words, review these key messages:

   - The OARS skill-based communication model helps us build and maintain rapport, and personalize a client assessment of needs, goals and preferences.
   - Proficiency and consistency in using these skills takes a willingness to listen, learn, practice, get feedback, **practice** some more, and — most importantly — grow your self-awareness and intention in using these skills.

   **Trainer Tip:** It is ideal to follow this activity with Activity 2.3: Communicating with Brilliance — Practicing Your Skills. This will give staff a chance to practice and get some feedback from a colleague.
OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

OARS is a skills-based, client-centered model of interactive techniques. These skills include verbal and non-verbal responses and behaviors that need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. This model integrates the five principles of providing quality counseling from the QFP recommendations. Using these skills will help establish and maintain rapport with your client, assess your client’s needs, and personalize your counseling and education responses.

**OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

- Establish a safe environment and help to build rapport and a trusting and respectful professional relationship.
- Explore, clarify and gain an understanding of your client’s world.
- Learn about your client’s experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and hopes for the future.

**You may ask:**

✓ What… brings you to the clinic today?
✓ When… if ever, might you want to be a parent?
✓ Where… will you get the support you need?
✓ Who… have you talked to about birth control?
✓ How… have you made decisions before about birth control?
✓ Tell me more about…?

**AFFIRMING**

- Build rapport, demonstrate empathy, and affirm your client's strengths and abilities.
- Build on your client's level of self-efficacy and share a belief that they can be responsible for their own decisions and life choices.

**You may ask:**

✓ It's great that you are here today. It's not always easy…
✓ It sounds like you've been really thoughtful about your decision.
✓ You're really trying hard to…
✓ It seems like you are really good at…

OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

R

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

▶ Listen to your client to help you gain a deeper understanding of their life.
▶ Listen, observe, and share (reflect on) your own perceptions of what your client shares.
▶ Reflect on the words that they use — You say you really don't want to be pregnant right now.
▶ Reflect on behavior and feelings — You have tears in your eyes and you sound sad...
▶ Your client gains an opportunity to “hear” your experience of what was shared reflected back to them.

You can reflect words, emotions, and/or behaviors:

(Reflecting words) Some of what I heard you say...
(Reflecting emotions) You seem [to be feeling]...
✓ sad
✓ frustrated
✓ excited
✓ angry
(Reflecting behavior) I noticed...
✓ tears in your eyes...
✓ your voice sounds shaky...
✓ you smiled when you said that...

S

SUMMARIZING

▶ Help move the conversation from the beginning, through the middle, to closing.
▶ Check that you are understanding your client’s goals and preferences.
▶ Confirm that your client has an understanding of the key elements of a plan.

Summarizing can be demonstrated in three ways:
✓ A collective summary — So let’s go over what we have talked about so far.
✓ A linking summary — A minute ago you said you wanted to talk to your partner... Would you like to talk more about how you might try?
✓ A transitional summary to close — So you’ve just described your plan. We’re always here to help in any way. What other questions do you have before you leave today?
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

▶ What…
▶ When…
▶ Where…
▶ Who…
▶ How…
▶ Tell me more about…?

AFFIRMING

▶ It’s great that you are here today…
▶ It sounds like you’ve been really thoughtful about your decision.
▶ You’re really trying hard to…
▶ It seems like you are really good at…

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

- Some of what I heard you say...
- You just said that it's really important for you to...

You seem [to be feeling]...
- sad...
- frustrated...
- excited...
- angry...

I noticed...
- tears in your eyes...
- your voice sounds shaky...
- you smiled when you said that...

SUMMARIZING

- How would you summarize...?
- A minute ago you said... would you like to talk more about that?
- It seems like your plan is to...

OARS Practice Worksheet

Open-ended questions – *Change these closed questions into open-ended questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you use birth control regularly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like your birth control method?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you talk to your partner about birth control?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you use condoms every time you have sex?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it important that you don’t get pregnant?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you take a pill every day?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need protection from STDs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you care if anyone knows you are using birth control?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use alcohol or drugs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you good at keeping track of your periods each month?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Affirming – What might be one affirming response to the statements below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve never been here before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure, I use birth control sometimes...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know I should use condoms, but what a hassle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My girlfriend told me Depo would make me depressed, so I don’t want to try that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My boyfriend pulls out – I haven’t gotten pregnant yet!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflective listening – What would be a reflective statement; reflecting words? reflecting feelings? Remember you can also reflect a behavior; a smile, a frown, folded arms, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve tried all these methods and I just hate using birth control. It’s such a hassle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ve been talking about having a baby, I’m just not sure now is the right time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband thinks I should get on the pill.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using condoms just doesn’t work for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve heard that getting an IUD will really hurt!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really care about my boyfriend, but I’m just not sure I want to have sex yet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m really tired of hormones in my body – I just don’t like the way I feel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m just not good at taking a pill every day. I think I need something that works and I can just forget.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t mind using condoms but my boyfriend just won’t use them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s ok – if it happens; it happens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summarizing – Remember summarizing is a long “Reflective listening.” When will you summarize?
Activity 2.3  Communicating with Brilliance — Practicing Your Skills

Purpose
The purpose of this activity is to apply effective communication skills through direct practice interviewing a partner about a non-clinical topic.

Who should participate?
Especially important for staff who provide contraceptive counseling and education.

Participants should be familiar with the OARS Model or have participated in Activity 2.2.

Time
45–60 minutes

Preparation
Review the following:
- Module 2 Preview & Preparation
- Activity 2.2 PowerPoint Presentation
- Activity 2.3 Handouts

Materials

Handouts:
Make one half-sheet checklist for each participant (they will print two to a page):
- OARS Observer Checklist
- OARS Practice Instructions
Make one copy for each participant (or re-use copies printed for Activity 2.2):
- OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills
- OARS Cards Job Aid (print on cardstock and laminate if possible)

Presentation:
Optional — for review only (same presentation as Activity 2.2):
- The OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

Supplies:
- (if available for presentation) Laptop, projector and screen
- Large paper to stick/tape to the wall, with discussion topics:
  - Where you want to go on your next vacation
  - Whether or not you want to get a pet
  - What you want to have for dinner
- Large paper to stick/tape to the wall, with prompts:
  - What's important for this person?
  - How is this person making their decision?
Detailed Instructions

1. **Introduce the activity:**

   The purpose of this activity is to practice and identify which OARS skills are easy for you and which are more challenging. You will practice using the OARS skills to focus your questions, your affirmations, and your reflections on learning about your “client” — in this case, your colleague.

2. **Create and post Group Agreements for this activity:** (optional)

   You may want to set Group Agreements to help participants feel safe and prepared to participate and share with other participants. Participants in the ‘client’ role should feel free to adapt what they say in the role to protect their privacy, if needed.

   **SAMPLE — Group Agreements**
   ✓ Confidentiality (no stories, names or disclosures leave the room)
   ✓ Keep an open mind
   ✓ Be inclusive of each other
   ✓ Take care of your needs
   ✓ Have fun (as a team/group)!

3. **Distribute copies of the OARS handout and job aid**

   **Trainer Tip:** Participants may already have copies if they received them in Activity 2.2.

4. **Break participants up into groups of three.**

   Within each group, there should be:
   • An interviewer
   • A client
   • An observer

   Group members choose their own roles. The groups will do the practice exercise three times, switching roles each time, so that each person gets a chance to play every role.

   **Fewer than 6 participants?** You can do this in pairs (eliminating the observer), or as a full group.
5. **Tell participants about the goal of the practice exercise.**

   *As an interviewer, your goal is to practice using OARS skills to learn about your client, keeping in mind these two key questions:*
   - *What's important for this person?*
   - *How is this person making their decision?*

   **Trainer Note:** These are the two key questions you wrote on a large piece of paper as part of your preparation of training supplies.

   *For those playing the client, this is an opportunity to explore how it feels when someone is asking and reflecting on what you are saying.*

   *For those acting as the observer, you will see OARS in action and practice identifying the use of these skills within a conversation.*

6. **Give a brief demonstration of the practice exercise.**

   Invite someone from the group to volunteer to play the client, with you acting as the interviewer.

   Ask the client to talk (briefly) about **where they want to go on their next vacation**, while you demonstrate how to ask open-ended questions, use affirmations, reflective listening and summaries in this context.

   **Trainer Tip:** Feel free to use the OARS handout or job aid for reference as you do this quick demo! It can be a helpful resource for you, and will show participants how they can also look to the handout for ideas.

7. **Introduce the decision topics.**

   Tell those participants who are playing the **client** in the first round of practice that they can select one of three decision topics:
   - Where you want to go on your next vacation
   - Whether or not you want to get a pet
   - What you want to have for dinner

   **Demonstration**
   - You play the interviewer
   - Get a volunteer to play the client
   - Volunteer talks about where they want to go on their next vacation
   - You demonstrate OARS skills to learn more about the client
8. **Hand out copies of the half-sheet OARS Practice Instructions and OARS Observer Checklist to each participant.**

   Review the instructions for each role, reminding participants that they will switch so that each person gets to play each role one time.

   **For the interviewers…**
   - Think about how you want to open and close your interview.
   - What are some questions you might ask?
   - How will you remember to listen for chances to offer affirmations?
   - What reflections might you look for: face, body language, other?

   **For the clients…**
   - Only to disclose what you want to disclose. This is for practice only.
   - Prepare to describe your reasons for making your decision.
   - Pay attention to what it’s like to be asked personal questions.
   - Notice what the interviewer does that is effective.

   **When you are the observer…**
   - Use the Observer Checklist to take notes on the skills that are being demonstrated.
   - Your role is to focus on the positive, sharing what you see that is helpful and successful.

9. **Instruct the groups to start their first round of practice.**

   Allow 5-6 minutes for the practice interaction.

10. **After 5-6 minutes, instruct the groups to debrief.**

    Ask each group of 3 to talk about what was helpful or challenging.

    Allow 2-3 minutes for this small group debrief.

11. **Instruct group members to switch roles, then do a second practice, with the new ‘client’ selecting the topic.**

    Ask the new ‘clients’ to select one of the three topics to discuss. They can discuss the same topic as the first ‘client’ if they wish.

    For this second round, again allow 5-6 minutes for practice interaction, followed by 2-3 minutes for debrief within the small groups.
12. **Instruct group members to switch roles one last time, and do the final practice and debrief.**

13. **Bring everyone back together for a full group discussion.**
   
   Ask questions like:
   
   - How did your practice go?
   - What was it like to be the client? What was effective? Did you learn anything?
   - What was it like to be the interviewer? Did you try anything new? How did it go?
   - What did you learn as the observer? What did you see that was really effective?
   - Overall, which of the OARS skills is the easiest? Do you all agree?
   - Which of the skills are more challenging to you?
   - What would help you become more skilled and comfortable in effective and intentional communication?

14. **Wrap up the activity.** In your own words, review these key messages:

   Thank you for taking some risks today. When we practice, it can be a bit stressful. But the way we get better in our work is by taking the risk to change (or tweak) what we do when we work with clients.

   The same skills you practiced today to learn about your “client’s” decisions related to vacations or dinner can be used within a contraceptive counseling visit, to help learn about what is important to your client as they make decisions about contraception.

   How we communicate with clients — and each other — is important and is the foundation to quality client-centered counseling and education.
OARS Observer Checklist

Please listen for the following OARS skills as you observe. 
Put a check mark after each skill you observe and some brief notes to document how it was used.

Open-ended questions —

Affirmations —

Reflective listening —

Summarizing —

Body language & voice tone —
**OARS Practice Instructions**

### For the interviewers:
- Think about how you want to open and close your interview.
- What are some questions you might ask?
- How will you remember to listen for chances to offer affirmations?
- What might be some reflections you want to be looking for: face, body language, other?
- Focus on…What’s important for this person? How are they making their decision?

### For the clients:
- You only need to disclose what you want to disclose. This is for practice only.
- Think about how you want to describe your reasons for making your decision.
- Pay attention to what it’s like to have someone ask you personal questions.
- Notice what the interviewer does that is effective.

### For the observers:
- Use the Observer Checklist to take notes on the skills that are being demonstrated.
- Your role is to focus on the positive, sharing what you see that is helpful and successful.
OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

OARS is a skills-based, client-centered model of interactive techniques. These skills include verbal and non-verbal responses and behaviors that need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. This model integrates the five principles of providing quality counseling from the QFP recommendations. Using these skills will help establish and maintain rapport with your client, assess your client's needs, and personalize your counseling and education responses.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

▶ Establish a safe environment and help to build rapport and a trusting and respectful professional relationship.
▶ Explore, clarify and gain an understanding of your client's world.
▶ Learn about your client's experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and hopes for the future.

You may ask:

✓ What… brings you to the clinic today?
✓ When… if ever, might you want to be a parent?
✓ Where… will you get the support you need?
✓ Who… have you talked to about birth control?
✓ How… have you made decisions before about birth control?
✓ Tell me more about…?

AFFIRMING

▶ Build rapport, demonstrate empathy, and affirm your client's strengths and abilities.
▶ Build on your client's level of self-efficacy and share a belief that they can be responsible for their own decisions and life choices.

You may ask:

✓ It's great that you are here today. It's not always easy…
✓ It sounds like you've been really thoughtful about your decision.
✓ You're really trying hard to…
✓ It seems like you are really good at…

OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

**R**

**REFLECTIVE LISTENING**

- Listen to your client to help you gain a deeper understanding of their life.
- Listen, observe, and share (reflect on) your own perceptions of what your client shares.
- Reflect on the words that they use — *You say you really don’t want to be pregnant right now.*
- Reflect on behavior and feelings — *You have tears in your eyes and you sound sad…*
- Your client gains an opportunity to “hear” your experience of what was shared reflected back to them.

**You can reflect words, emotions, and/or behaviors:**

(Reflecting words) *Some of what I heard you say…*

(Reflecting emotions) *You seem [to be feeling]…*

✓ sad
✓ frustrated
✓ excited
✓ angry

(Reflecting behavior) *I noticed…*

✓ tears in your eyes…
✓ your voice sounds shaky…
✓ you smiled when you said that…

**S**

**SUMMARIZING**

- Help move the conversation from the beginning, through the middle, to closing.
- Check that you are understanding your client’s goals and preferences.
- Confirm that your client has an understanding of the key elements of a plan.

**Summarizing can be demonstrated in three ways:**

✓ A collective summary — *So let’s go over what we have talked about so far.*
✓ A linking summary — *A minute ago you said you wanted to talk to your partner… Would you like to talk more about how you might try?*
✓ A transitional summary to close — *So you’ve just described your plan. We’re always here to help in any way. What other questions do you have before you leave today?*
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
- What…
- When…
- Where…
- Who…
- How…
- Tell me more about…?

AFFIRMING
- It’s great that you are here today…
- It sounds like you’ve been really thoughtful about your decision.
- You’re really trying hard to…
- It seems like you are really good at…

OARS Model

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

- Some of what I heard you say…
- You just said that it’s really important for you to…
You seem [to be feeling]…
- sad…
- frustrated…
- excited…
- angry…
I noticed…
- tears in your eyes…
- your voice sounds shaky…
- you smiled when you said that…

SUMMARIZING

- How would you summarize…?
- A minute ago you said… would you like to talk more about that?
- It seems like your plan is to…