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Application of Soft Skills

Psychology

Communication skills, interpersonal relationships, time management, stress management, resilience, teamwork, presentation and professional etiquette.

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CHAPTER 09: APPLICATION OF SOFT SKILLS

Subject: Applied Psychology Course: B.Sc. Nursing

1. Introduction

Soft skills are personal, interpersonal and behavioural abilities that enable individuals to communicate effectively, establish relationships, manage responsibilities and work successfully with others.

In nursing, soft skills are essential for patient-centred care, teamwork, leadership, conflict management and professional development.

2. Definition

Soft skills are non-technical abilities that influence how individuals communicate, interact, adapt, solve problems and manage professional responsibilities.

3. Soft Skills vs Hard Skills

Soft skills	Hard skills
Interpersonal and behavioural abilities	Technical and professional abilities
Communication	Medication administration
Empathy	Intravenous cannulation
Teamwork	Wound dressing
Leadership	Catheterization
Time management	Vital signs measurement
Emotional intelligence	Clinical procedures

Both are essential for competent nursing practice.

4. Types of Soft Skills

- Communication skills
- Visual communication skills
- Aural and listening skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills

- Teamwork
- Time management
- Stress management
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Adaptability
- Emotional intelligence
- Presentation skills
- Professional etiquette

5. Communication Skills

Definition

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts and feelings between individuals.

Elements of Communication

1. Sender
2. Message
3. Encoding
4. Communication channel
5. Receiver
6. Decoding
7. Feedback
8. Noise or interference

Communication Process

Sender -> Encoding -> Message -> Channel -> Receiver -> Decoding -> Feedback.

6. Types of Communication

Verbal Communication

Communication through spoken words.

Examples:

- Patient interviews
- Health education
- Nursing handovers
- Clinical discussions

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Non-Verbal Communication

Communication through behaviours and expressions.

Examples:

- Facial expressions
- Gestures
- Eye contact
- Posture
- Body movements
- Tone of voice

Non-verbal behaviours should be interpreted with consideration of cultural and individual differences.

Written Communication

Exchange of information through written or digital records.

Examples:

- Nursing documentation
- Patient reports
- Discharge instructions
- Professional emails

Visual Communication

Exchange of information using visual materials.

Examples:

- Posters
- Charts
- Diagrams
- Educational presentations
- Patient instruction cards

Aural Communication

Communication involving listening to and interpreting spoken or auditory information.

Examples:

- Listening to patient concerns.
- Receiving clinical handovers.
- Understanding verbal instructions.
- Recognizing changes in tone.

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7. Principles of Effective Communication

Seven Cs of Communication

Principle	Meaning
Clear	Easy to understand
Concise	Avoid unnecessary information
Concrete	Specific and factual
Correct	Accurate information
Coherent	Logically organized
Complete	Includes essential details
Courteous	Respectful and professional

Additional Principles in Nursing

- Maintain privacy.
- Use accessible language.
- Verify understanding.
- Listen without unnecessary interruption.
- Respect cultural differences.
- Document important clinical information.

8. Communication Styles

Style	Characteristics
Passive	Difficulty expressing personal needs or concerns
Aggressive	Expresses demands while disregarding others' rights
Passive-aggressive	Expresses dissatisfaction indirectly
Assertive	Expresses needs and concerns clearly while respecting others

Assertive communication is particularly important for patient advocacy and clinical safety.

9. Therapeutic Communication

Therapeutic communication is purposeful professional communication that promotes patient well-being and understanding.

Therapeutic Communication Techniques

Technique	Example
Active listening	Providing full attention to the patient's concerns

Open-ended questions	Asking how the patient feels about treatment
Clarification	Confirming the meaning of a statement
Reflection	Encouraging the patient to identify feelings
Restating	Repeating relevant information to confirm understanding
Therapeutic silence	Allowing time for thought and emotional expression
Summarizing	Reviewing important points
Providing information	Explaining a procedure accurately
Empathy	Acknowledging the patient's emotional experience

Non-Therapeutic Communication

- False reassurance
- Unnecessary criticism
- Judgmental statements
- Giving unsolicited personal advice
- Interrupting repeatedly
- Dismissing patient concerns
- Arguing
- Making unrealistic promises

10. Barriers to Communication

Physical Barriers

- Noise
- Poor lighting
- Distance
- Lack of privacy

Psychological Barriers

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Anger
- Prejudice
- Emotional distress

Language Barriers

- Different languages

- Medical terminology
- Limited literacy
- Unclear instructions

Physiological Barriers

- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Speech difficulties
- Cognitive impairment

Cultural Barriers

- Differences in beliefs
- Social customs
- Communication preferences

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

- Use simple language.
- Provide qualified interpreters when needed.
- Maintain privacy.
- Reduce environmental distractions.
- Use accessible communication aids.
- Confirm understanding.
- Respect cultural differences.
- Encourage clarification and feedback.

11. Interpersonal Relationships (IPR)

Definition

An interpersonal relationship is a social or emotional connection established between two or more individuals through communication and interaction.

Types of Interpersonal Relationships

- Family relationships
- Friendships
- Professional relationships
- Nurse-patient relationships
- Nurse-nurse relationships
- Nurse-physician relationships
- Community relationships

Purposes of Interpersonal Relationships

- Promote effective communication.
- Establish trust.
- Provide emotional support.
- Encourage cooperation.
- Improve teamwork.
- Facilitate problem-solving.
- Support psychological well-being.

Essential Interpersonal Skills

- Empathy
- Active listening
- Respect
- Cooperation
- Assertiveness
- Emotional regulation
- Negotiation
- Conflict resolution

12. Nurse-Patient Relationship

A nurse-patient relationship is a professional therapeutic relationship established to support the patient's health and well-being.

Phases of the Therapeutic Relationship

Phase	Activities
Pre-interaction	Review information and prepare for patient contact
Orientation	Establish trust, define roles and identify patient needs
Working	Implement nursing interventions and address patient concerns
Termination	Evaluate outcomes and conclude the therapeutic relationship

These four phases are commonly taught in nursing. Peplau's original interpersonal relations framework described orientation, identification, exploitation and resolution.

Principles

- Confidentiality
- Trust
- Respect

- Professional boundaries
- Empathy
- Patient autonomy
- Non-discrimination

13. Time Management

Definition

Time management is the effective planning, organization and utilization of available time to achieve objectives.

Importance in Nursing

- Improves clinical efficiency.
- Supports timely patient care.
- Reduces avoidable delays.
- Helps prioritize responsibilities.
- Reduces unnecessary stress.
- Supports work-life balance.

Principles of Time Management

- Establish clear objectives.
- Prioritize tasks.
- Prepare a realistic schedule.
- Avoid unnecessary interruptions.
- Delegate appropriately.
- Complete urgent activities first.
- Review and adjust plans.

14. Eisenhower Priority Matrix

Category	Action
Urgent and important	Complete first
Important but not urgent	Schedule
Urgent but less important	Delegate appropriately
Neither urgent nor important	Reduce or eliminate where possible

Clinical Prioritization

In healthcare, prioritization must consider:

- Airway, breathing and circulation.

- Immediate safety threats.
- Acute clinical deterioration.
- Time-critical treatment.
- Patient acuity.
- Professional responsibilities.

Clinical emergencies take priority over routine scheduling frameworks.

15. SMART Goals

Effective goals should be:

- S: Specific
- M: Measurable
- A: Achievable
- R: Relevant
- T: Time-bound

16. Stress Management

Stress management involves identifying stressful demands and using appropriate strategies to maintain psychological and physical functioning.

Common Sources of Nursing Stress

- Heavy workload
- Clinical responsibilities
- Night shifts
- Emergencies
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Emotional demands
- Academic pressure
- Inadequate resources

Management Techniques

- Time management
- Appropriate rest
- Physical activity
- Relaxation techniques
- Mindfulness
- Peer support
- Professional supervision

- Constructive coping
- Access to psychological support

Workplace stress also requires organizational measures such as adequate staffing, safe working conditions and supportive leadership.

17. Resilience

Definition

Resilience is the process or capacity of adapting to adversity, recovering from difficulties and maintaining functioning during challenging circumstances.

Characteristics of Resilience

- Flexibility
- Emotional awareness
- Problem-solving ability
- Realistic optimism
- Social support
- Ability to seek assistance
- Capacity to learn from difficulties

Methods to Develop Resilience

1. Develop supportive relationships.
2. Establish realistic goals.
3. Practise emotional regulation.
4. Maintain healthy routines.
5. Reflect on experiences.
6. Seek constructive feedback.
7. Access professional help when needed.

Resilience does not mean tolerating unsafe workplaces or suppressing emotional distress.

18. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to managing professional responsibilities alongside personal needs, relationships, rest and recreation.

Methods

- Maintain reasonable schedules.
- Establish professional boundaries.
- Prioritize sleep.
- Schedule recreational activities.

- Seek support when responsibilities become excessive.
- Use available leave and workplace support appropriately.

19. Teamwork

Definition

Teamwork is the coordinated effort of individuals working together towards a common goal.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

- Shared goals
- Clear responsibilities
- Effective communication
- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Accountability
- Cooperation
- Supportive leadership

Tuckman's Stages of Team Development

Stage	Description
Forming	Team members become familiar with one another
Storming	Differences and conflicts may emerge
Norming	Shared expectations and cooperation develop
Performing	Team works effectively towards objectives
Adjourning	Team completes its purpose and concludes activities

Teams do not always progress through these stages in a fixed sequence.

20. SBAR Communication

SBAR is a structured communication technique used to exchange important clinical information.

Component	Meaning
S - Situation	Current problem
B - Background	Relevant clinical history
A - Assessment	Current assessment findings
R - Recommendation	Required action or recommendation

Example

Situation: The patient has developed sudden breathlessness.

Background: The patient was admitted with pneumonia.

Assessment: Oxygen saturation has decreased, and respiratory effort has increased.

Recommendation: Request urgent clinical assessment and activate the appropriate escalation pathway.

21. Closed-Loop Communication

Closed-loop communication confirms that important instructions or information have been received and understood.

Process

Sender communicates -> Receiver repeats or confirms -> Sender verifies accuracy.

This helps reduce misunderstanding during emergencies, clinical procedures and multidisciplinary care.

Teach-Back Method

The patient explains healthcare instructions in their own words to demonstrate how clearly the information was communicated.

Teach-back assesses communication effectiveness rather than testing or blaming the patient.

22. Presentation Skills

Presentation skills involve organizing and communicating information clearly to an audience.

Steps of an Effective Presentation

1. Define the objective.
2. Identify the audience.
3. Collect accurate information.
4. Organize the content.
5. Prepare suitable visual aids.
6. Practise delivery.
7. Maintain clear speech.
8. Encourage relevant questions.
9. Summarize key points.

Qualities of a Good Presenter

- Confidence
- Clear pronunciation
- Accurate knowledge
- Good organization

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- Appropriate body language
- Time management
- Audience awareness

23. Motivational Skills

Motivational skills help individuals encourage engagement, confidence and goal-directed behaviour.

Important Techniques

- Set achievable goals.
- Provide constructive feedback.
- Recognize progress.
- Encourage participation.
- Understand barriers.
- Support autonomy.
- Demonstrate professional role modelling.

24. Professional Etiquette

Professional etiquette refers to standards of respectful and appropriate conduct in professional settings.

Nursing Professional Etiquette

- Maintain punctuality.
- Wear the prescribed professional uniform.
- Maintain personal hygiene.
- Communicate respectfully.
- Address patients appropriately.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Avoid gossip.
- Maintain professional boundaries.
- Demonstrate accountability.
- Follow institutional policies.

25. Telephone Etiquette

- Identify yourself and your department.
- Verify the identity of the intended recipient.
- Speak clearly and professionally.
- Protect confidential information.
- Record important details.

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- Confirm critical information.
- Follow institutional policy for telephone orders.
- End the conversation respectfully.

26. Digital and Social Etiquette

- Use professional language.
- Protect patient information.
- Avoid unauthorized patient photographs.
- Do not disclose confidential clinical information online.
- Verify information before sharing it.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Follow organizational social media policies.

27. Application of Soft Skills in Nursing

Soft skill	Nursing application
Communication	Patient education and handover
Empathy	Emotional support
Teamwork	Multidisciplinary patient care
Time management	Prioritization of responsibilities
Leadership	Coordination of nursing activities
Assertiveness	Patient advocacy and safety
Resilience	Managing professional challenges
Critical thinking	Clinical judgment
Adaptability	Responding to changing patient needs
Presentation skills	Health education and academic presentations

28. Important Examination Questions

Long Answer Questions

1. Define soft skills and discuss their importance in nursing.
2. Explain the communication process, types and barriers.
3. Describe interpersonal relationships and their application in nursing.
4. Discuss time management, stress management and resilience.
5. Explain teamwork and professional etiquette.

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Short Answer Questions

- Seven Cs of communication
- Therapeutic communication
- Assertiveness
- Nurse-patient relationship
- SMART goals
- Time management
- Resilience
- SBAR communication
- Presentation skills
- Telephone etiquette
- Work-life balance

29. Quick Revision

- Soft skills are interpersonal and behavioural abilities.
- Communication includes sender, message, receiver and feedback.
- Assertive communication respects both personal and others' rights.
- Therapeutic communication supports patient well-being.
- SBAR: Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation.
- SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.
- Resilience involves adaptation to adversity.
- Effective teamwork improves coordination and patient safety.
- Professional etiquette supports accountability and ethical conduct.

Conclusion

Soft skills are essential for competent and professional nursing practice. Effective communication, interpersonal relationships, teamwork, resilience and time management improve patient safety, professional performance and healthcare outcomes.

Practice questions

Choose one best answer. The answer key and explanations follow the questions.

1. In SBAR, B stands for:

A. Behaviour
B. Balance
C. Background
D. Breathing

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2. In SMART goals, M stands for:

A. Measurable

B. Motivational

C. Medical

D. Memorable

3. The teach-back method asks the patient to:

A. Repeat the nurse's words without explanation

B. Explain instructions in their own words

C. Complete an intelligence test

D. Give a diagnosis

4. A patient cannot repeat newly explained wound-care instructions. What is the most useful next step?

A. Use a yes-or-no question as the only check of understanding

B. Explain in simpler steps and use teach-back to check understanding

C. Repeat the same technical explanation without adapting it

D. Record completion of education based only on having handed over a leaflet

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Answer key and explanations

1. C - Background

SBAR means Situation, Background, Assessment and Recommendation.

2. A - Measurable

The SMART framework includes Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

3. B - Explain instructions in their own words

Teach-back checks how clearly instructions have been communicated by inviting the patient's own explanation.

4. B - Explain in simpler steps and use teach-back to check understanding

Teach-back checks the effectiveness of the explanation and identifies where it should be adapted. Difficulty repeating instructions should not automatically be labelled refusal.

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