HANDOUT 9.1: COMMUNICATION DO’S AND DON’TS

**Things To Do**

**Verbal communication**

* Concentrate on what is being said;
* Skillful listening is more than just paying attention to what is said. It is important to be responsive and to communicate that you are following what the other person is saying (nod, affirm).
* Paraphrase what was said to ensure understanding (“what I hear you saying is…”);
* Avoid expressions of disapproval of actions or feelings;
* Use clarifying questions and statements;
* Listen and look for feelings, display empathy (“I am sorry this happened to you. It wasn’t your fault”)
* Acknowledge and reflect back: “it sounds like this was very stressful for you…”
* Acknowledge the person’s strengths and self-efficacy. “It’s really great how you made your own shelter….you are very resourceful.”

**Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication varies markedly from culture to culture. The following are issues to consider, but these should be discussed and adapted in your context:

* Ensure that your non-verbal communication reflects and supports your verbal communication.
* Face the survivor, but do not do so in a way that will crowd her space or make her feel uncomfortable (it can help to sit in an L shape/kitty-corner);
* Display an open posture, avoid crossing arms in front of your body;
* Stay near the person, but keep an appropriate distance;
* Consider the appropriate level of eye-contact in your context. You want to make sure the survivor knows that you are engaged and listening, but that she does not feel uncomfortable.
* Consider also the level of touch that is appropriate in your setting and for the individual.

**Things Not to Do**

* Make false promises; (“everything’s going to be OK”)
* Tell survivors you think their experiences were terrible (“you are so unlucky?”, “what else can happen to you”)
* Blame (“you were not following religion so it is a curse from God”)
* Touch the person if not appropriate
* Dress/behave in ways that are culturally offensive (dress modestly)
* Rush the person (look at your watch or speak fast)
* Feel you have to solve the person’s problems
* Take away the person’s strength and sense of being able to care for themselves
* Expose people to media (e.g. photography of people without permission)
* Use language or words that are difficult to understand (use their language as much as possible)
* Stare at people (maintain normal eye contact)