



Level 2 Certificate in Fitness Instructing:

Know how to support clients
who take part in physical activity

LEARN - INSPIRE - SUCCEED

Know How to Support Clients

Introduction

This unit covers the knowledge and skills required to communicate effectively with clients, with the aim of helping them to adhere to an exercise programme. It explores the communication tools that increase exercise behaviour, adherence and retention. The unit looks at motivation and a client-focused approach to training.

This unit is for health and fitness professionals who are hoping to begin to understand what drives their clients both physically and mentally towards, or away from, activity.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- identify the importance of professional conduct
- identify the importance of building professional relationships
- identify professional boundaries.

It is vital that instructors display a professional attitude if they want clients to trust that they can do a professional job. It is important that instructors present themselves positively, as well as the organisation for which they work, paying particular attention to:

- professional conduct (appropriate dress and behaviour)
- respect for the clients
- reflection of equal opportunity (use of language and communication)
- inclusion and exclusion of a client in an exercise programme as a result of screening
- punctuality: arriving on time and keeping to timetable slots.

The Client

When individuals decide to take part in an exercise programme, it is important that they feel safe in the environment and they can trust the professionals looking after their needs. Clients should be able to rely on the same standard of instructor professionalism whether they join a large gym or attend their village hall.

The REPs' code of ethical conduct clearly defines mutual trust as an important element to help motivate clients to adhere to a programme. It is the role of the instructor to support the client in taking the first steps towards becoming more active. An instructor can provide professional advice, but the main skill is in listening to the client and finding out what they want from the experience.

There must be mutual trust between the instructor and client, clearly defined roles and evidence of an open, honest and unconditional positive regard towards the client. Carl Rogers (1902-87) is best known as the founder of 'client-centered', or non-directive, therapy. He believed that clients usually know better how to proceed than their therapist. Thorne argues that 'the whole conceptual framework of Carl Rogers rests on his profound experience that human beings become increasingly more trustworthy once they feel at a deep level that their subjective experience is both respected and progressively understood' (Thorne, B. (1992), Carl Rogers, London: Sage). This idea can be applied to the role of the fitness instructor and also as the instructor progresses to working as a personal trainer or with special populations.

The following conditions are a development of Carl Rogers' work:

- Unconditional positive regard - the instructor listens to all of the client's positive and negative thoughts and feelings. The client feels comfortable that there will be no rejection based on their beliefs.
- Empathetic understanding - the instructor understands the client's own perspective. The instructor has empathy with what the world must feel and look like from the client's point of view.
- Congruence - the instructor is genuine and does not have an attitude (at a conscious or unconscious level). The client should believe that the instructor is honest in their relationship.

The Instructor

The REPs' code of ethical conduct provides all instructors with a framework within which they should work in order to achieve high professional standards of best practice in the industry. It outlines the need for mutual trust and clearly defines roles for the instructor and client. Any behaviour or interaction that damages the client or professional constitutes a violation of the code.

The register performs the same function for exercise instructors as professional registers do for other health professional groups. Registration is achieved and maintained through the gaining of qualifications and training, which are nationally recognised and which are linked to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for exercise and fitness. Registration is available to anyone who works as, or is involved in, gym instruction, exercise to music classes, circuits, keep fit, personal training, yoga, aqua aerobics, advanced instruction techniques or working with special populations.

For the instructor, REPs' provides a clear career path, helps to ensure that qualifications and skills are kept up to date, aids with personal development and provides recognition of achievements. Inclusion on the register signifies that an exercise professional has met certain standards of good practice. The register encourages a properly qualified base of exercise professionals who:

- have gained recognised and approved qualifications
- can demonstrate competence in their working environment
- are committed to continuing professional development (CPD)
- have appropriate public liability insurance for the level at which they are working
- demonstrate commitment to the industry code of ethical conduct.

When an instructor joins REPs', he or she is agreeing to abide by its code of ethical conduct. These are essentially standards of best practice for fitness professionals reflecting the core values of rights, relationships, personal responsibilities, professional standards and safe working practice. Failure to comply, or a breach of any of these codes of conduct, do not only result in fines, loss of membership and employer disciplinary action, but can also lead to more serious consequences such as loss of employment and, in some cases, legal prosecution.

There are five main areas for consideration:

- Principle 1 — rights
- Principle 2 — relationships
- Principle 3 — personal responsibilities
- Principle 4 - professional standards
- Principle 5 - safe working practices.

The Register of Exercise Professionals code of ethical conduct

Introduction

As with all industries, we are professionals and should adopt a professional manner in everything we do. As such, REPS' have produced a code of ethics for fitness professionals to abide by, and reading this will help instructors to develop a greater understanding of their role within the fitness industry.

The Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs')

REPS' is a rigorous system of self-regulation for all instructors, coaches, trainers and teachers involved in supervising people who exercise and partake of physical activity programmes. The register has created a framework within which individual instructors can achieve the highest standards of professionalism linked to best practice in the health, fitness and exercise industry.

Registration is achieved and maintained through the gaining of qualifications and training, which are nationally recognised and linked to the NOS for the fitness industry. Membership signifies that an exercise professional meets required standards of good practice, and professionals who join the register will need to:

- have gained a recognised and approved qualification
- demonstrate competence in their working environment
- be committed to their own ongoing professional development
- have public liability insurance that meets the minimum requirements for registration
- adhere to an industry accepted code of ethical conduct.

In isolation, any one of the five points above is of little value - but together, they are essential in measuring the suitability of individuals to be members of the exercise community and members of the register.

Any alleged professional misconduct or avoidance of compliance with the terms of membership of the register will be referred to the Professional Practice Committee (PPC), which will consider any need for sanctions against the instructor, coach, trainer or teacher. The appropriate authority will deal with any criminal allegations. The terms of reference for the PPC can be viewed at: www.exerciseregister.org/whorunsit.asp.

This code of ethical conduct defines what is best in good practice for professionals in the fitness industry by reflecting on the core values of rights, relationships, responsibilities, standards and safe working practices. The term 'professional' is used in a qualitative context in this code and does not necessarily imply a paid position or person. Exercise professionals who assent to this code accept their responsibility to people who participate in exercise, to other fitness professionals and colleagues, to their respective fitness associations, professional bodies and institutes, to their employer and to society.

Instructors will need to download the code of ethical conduct and read it in full.
Go to: www.exerciseregister.org.

Equality and diversity

Fitness instructors have an obligation to promote equality and diversity in the workplace.

Equality is about ensuring that individuals (or groups of individuals) are treated fairly, equally and no less favourably regardless of issues such as race, gender, religion, belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing people's differences, and promoting an inclusive culture in which everyone can realise their full potential.

As a fitness instructor, equality and diversity can be promoted by:

- treating all clients fairly
- creating an inclusive culture for all clients
- ensuring equal access to opportunities to exercise and activity
- enabling all clients to exercise to their full potential
- ensuring that the exercise environment does not discriminate against any individuals or groups
- ensuring procedures do not discriminate against any individuals or groups.

Key points for establishing and maintaining relationships with clients

- When an individual decides to take part in an exercise programme, it is important they feel safe in the environment and can trust the professionals looking after their needs.
- The REPs' code of ethical conduct highlights the principles to adopt in order to form a professional relationship with a client.
- There must be trust between the instructor and clients, as well as clearly defined roles and evidence of an open, honest and unconditional positive regard towards the client.
- Both the client and the instructor can be at risk of boundary violation. Instructors should be aware of being open in all dealings with their clients, be visible to others where possible and not be misleading in communication.
- As a fitness instructor, it is essential to promote equality and diversity in the workplace.

Effective Communication

Effective communication skills are essential within all areas of our lives. When having a conversation, we often tend to hear the bits that we want to relate to our own experiences and do not hear or observe other key signs that would let us understand what the individual is really trying to say.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- identify effective visual and verbal communication skills
- recognise potential barriers to effective communication
- identify the importance of body language, listening, observation and rapport when communicating with clients
- define the fundamental skills: rapport and empathy, unconditional acceptance listening, active and reflective listening.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of communication will increase dramatically if the instructor understands the fundamental skills required. Although health professionals believe that they demonstrate these skills effectively, there is often still room for further development and improvement. Such skills are also transferable to other aspects of life and can positively affect both the client and the instructor.

Effective communication builds on the receiver's knowledge, affects attitudes and can change behaviour and have an influence on motivation and therefore adherence.

Potential barriers to effective communication are:

- poor listening skills
- inappropriate nonverbal communication (body language and facial expressions)
- set patterns of thinking (prejudice and perceived ideas)
- making assumptions
- labelling and stereotyping
- lack of trust
- lack of clarity
- personal style
- social and cultural differences (age, gender, social class, ethnicity, language, etc.)
- learning difficulties.

Types of communication

There are three main forms of communication to consider, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. These are:

- written - in the form of posters, leaflets, newsletters, letters, e-mails, text messages and social network sites
- verbal - face-to-face or via telephone. The language used, voice intonation and how accent or dialect affect what is being said
- non-verbal - the use of body language, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions and posture.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Written	Provides a written record of what is being communicated.	The information can be missed, or misunderstood. Can be perceived as being impersonal.
Verbal	More personal than written. The meaning of the information can be more specific as long as it is clearly stated.	Can be misunderstood if the language, accent or dialect is strong. There is no record of what has been said.
Non-verbal	Positive body language can make customers feel at ease, be encouraging, welcoming and show empathy and understanding.	Can say more about what the instructor thinks than the words being said; therefore, care is required to ensure that it is not negative.

Body language

Body language is not considered an exact science; however, it provides additional information that can be useful when helping people to change their health behaviours. Various postures have been given specific meanings, although this, too, can be misleading. For example, sitting with one's arms crossed is often read as demonstrating that the individual is defensive; however, it could be a very comfortable position for some, while in others it could indicate that the client is feeling cold.

Research shows that body language is the most important aspect of communication and how one uses their body, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact override the words that are spoken. The term 'body language' refers to non-verbal, and often unintended, communication on the part of one individual to another. Non-verbal communication takes place by means of facial expressions, head movements, eye contact, hand gestures, body positions and acts, tones of voice, etc. In general, body language expresses an individual's emotions, feelings and attitudes.

Other people's body language reveals their feelings and meanings to you

Take note of your customer's body language, posture and facial expressions, as this can provide a lot of information about the situation and how the customer is feeling.

Use body language and posture to establish a level of unconscious rapport by assuming a similar body position and rate of speech as those of the customer. Putting oneself into this position can

provide the instructor with a greater understanding of the customer's thoughts and feelings. Try to avoid folding the arms in front of the body, as this can convey defensive or confrontational body language. Remember that body language reveals feelings and meanings to others.

Eye contact is a powerful tool because it lets customers know that you are interested and attentive. Make eye contact and concentrate on projecting a warm and friendly manner. Try to avoid averting one's gaze as this can give the impression of shiftiness or disinterest in what the customer has to say. Similarly, try not to stare uninterruptedly, as this may make some customers feel uncomfortable.

Effective communication can improve the customer's knowledge, attitude, behaviour and motivation to physical activity and exercise, thereby enhancing a positive customer experience.

Listening skills

Listening to another person is a key skill. We all believe that we listen to everything all of the time; however, sometimes we listen but do not hear. As information is absorbed from others, we attempt to make pictures and draw on our own experiences. This can interfere with listening skills, as it draws attention away from the information being given. This can be because pictures in the forefront of our own mind take centre stage.

When proper listening has been developed, the listener will hear more than the spoken words and capture more information. It is then possible to understand what is truly being said. For example, a client could be saying how much he or she enjoyed an activity while shaking his or her head, demonstrating that the speech and body language do not match. By developing listening skills, the instructor will be able to identify incongruent messages similar to this from their clients.

Effective listening is about understanding what is being communicated. One may sit quietly and appear to listen, but if now displaying the appropriate body language and facial gestures, then the person being listened to will easily be able to see that they are not actually being listened to. Instead, use open questions, such as 'Tell me more', which will give more information, or closed questions, which will elicit a short, simple answer, such as 'Yes' or 'No'.

Good listening skills are fundamental to effective communication, such as:

- instructors should ensure that they are not distracted. Switch off any phones and move to a place where it is quiet and away from any distractions. Focus on the customer.
- sit quietly and do not interrupt while your customer is speaking. Instead, use appropriate facial gestures and body language - nodding, smiling, arms unfolded. These simple gestures allow instructors to listen and convey to the speaker that they are listening without interruption.
- be attentive, face the person speaking and give appropriate eye contact. Turning the body towards them and mirroring their body posture conveys the message that the listener is attentive.
- take care not to invade the speaker's personal space. Keep enough distance to create the privacy necessary for discussion and to maintain a safe and comfortable distance. The accepted range in British culture is between 12-16 inches to retain personal respect. Bear in mind that social and cultural differences may affect these guidelines.

Active listening

After listening, employ active listening skills:

- amplification
- clarification
- verification.

The three stages of active listening	
Amplification	This is the stage when an instructor asks for more information and gathers all the facts before responding, using a range of open questions such as 'Tell me more', 'How did you feel about that?', 'When did you decide to begin a fitness programme?'. During this stage, it is important not to interrupt or impose one's own thoughts or ideas. Remember to speak clearly and not to raise the voice.
Clarification	When not completely sure of what the other person is saying, use clarification statements, such as 'Help me understand' and 'Could you be more specific?' By doing this, the customer's feedback will help the instructor to fully understand the message that the customer wants to communicate.
Verification	Simply by repeating the client's statements (ie, paraphrasing and regular intervals), it is possible to verify understanding. Verification statements include 'If I understand you correctly' and 'Let me make sure I've understood this'. By verifying what has been heard and obtaining acceptance from the other person before moving on, the instructor can get the essential information necessary to meet the client's needs.

Reflective listening

Reflective listening is a skill that is developed over time. It requires an individual to understand the meaning of what is being said. During any conversation, it is easy to listen to the general content and respond to that (active listening), as opposed to fully understanding what is being said, prior to responding (reflective listening). Misinterpretation is more likely if a response is given prior to fully understanding. This often causes the client to spend more time explaining the meaning of the original point than actually sharing their thoughts. When we are constructing our response while listening to the client, we are no longer listening. If the interviewer 'drifts off' and thinks of their own problems, they are also no longer listening.

Reflective listening differs from active listening - reflective listening is clarifying the meaning of a conversation, while active listening is repeating back the content of a conversation to prove that what was heard was correct.

Reflective listening is often described as making an educated guess about the meaning of the comment. Any conversation between two or more people has messages that are delivered in their own code. At this stage, the role of an instructor is to decipher the meaning of the coded message and to send an appropriate response that clarifies the meaning.

Any responses should be delivered within a statement rather than a question, as a statement produces less resistance. Questions, on the other hand, require the individual to reflect on their original statement, checking that the correct message and meaning was delivered. Questions may also make the client act defensively, providing an opportunity for them to defend and rationalise their position. However, by delivering a statement, the listener is confirming that they understand the client's original meaning and that this interpretation is correct.

Ensure that tone of voice, inflection and sentence construction are empathetic and attentive rather than judgemental or critical. For example, when a reflective statement is made, the inflection of the voice will go down at the end of the sentence, whereas when a question is asked, the inflection of the voice will go up. Avoid sentences starting with who, what, when, why, where and how, as these tend to be obvious questions as opposed to statements. However, incorporating these words into sentences when questioning and probing is appropriate.

Reflective listening is a way of checking the meaning rather than assuming that the listener knows what is meant. However, when using reflective listening, avoid underestimating the importance of 'you'. Placing emphasis on 'you' focuses on the individual and their behaviour, but may not allow the 'individual' to disassociate from the area they want to change.

Examples:

- 'You said that you are considering becoming more active.'
- 'Joining in with one of the classes is something you can see yourself doing.'
- 'Starting now would allow you to achieve some changes before the summer.'

This provides an instructor with the opportunity to establish the most appropriate support. Consider how different the response would be if this was said instead:

- 'What do you want me to do to help?'

The last example covers two issues that are best to avoid when listening reflectively. Firstly, this statement is a question, and secondly, the listener has taken responsibility for the individual's issue(s).

Reflection is not a passive process; full engagement in the process is needed in order to be successful. The instructor will need to make decisions regarding issues to reflect upon as well as areas to ignore. During a conversation, there will be too much content to reflect on everything. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to what appears to be important. Reflective listening is a subtle skill that can easily turn into a question-and-answer session.

Practice is needed when the skill of reflective listening is being developed. At first, there is a tendency to repeat the sentence used by the other person. This may not be the most appropriate method, as the instructor may start sounding like a parrot. It is preferable to reflect on occasion at first and then increase the frequency once the skill has been developed. As this skill develops, the instructor will learn to use words that are closer to the meaning of the individual's statement(s).

Verbal skills

When speaking, it is important to always use good grammar and pronounce words properly. Avoid being sloppy or lazy with language, using words such as 'yeah', 'yep' or 'um'. Speak softly, clearly and be courteous at all times to convey a sense of respect and consideration. Always address the customer formally with their title (eg, Mr. Smith); only use their first name if you have been invited to do so.

Two useful techniques are explained by the acronyms PICTURE and MERK

PICTURE

- **Pitch** - it is believed that 38% of our communication consists of how we say what we say. A high-pitched voice can often sound weak and irritating. A lower voice may sound more authoritative and can be used to gain and maintain attention.
- **Inflection** - by varying the inflection in our voices, what we say sounds more interesting and will keep participants' attention. Monotone doesn't work for maintaining and engaging an audience.
- **Courtesy** - treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. 'Please' and 'thank you' paired with positive, non-verbal gestures are great for business.
- **Tone** - by using tone, emphasis can be placed on words, exaggerating meaning and impact. If one speaks in a monotone or 'flat' voice, this can give the impression of boredom. If one speaks too quickly, it can give the impression of lack of time.
- **Understanding** - use jargon-free language and easy-to-understand words. Every industry has its own jargon, for those in the know, and this can be extremely useful shorthand. However, consider the use of terminology that is inappropriate to your client and the adverse effects of excessive jargon. If the listener does not understand, rapport could be disrupted, as participants may feel too intimidated to ask for explanations.
- **Rate** - this relates to the speed at which we speak. A variety of speed gives power to the delivery, slowing down to make a specific point, speeding up to add emphasis and excitement.
- **Enunciation** - speaking clearly helps to avoid misunderstandings. The letters 'T' and 'D' are often confused, as are 'P', 'B', 'S' and 'F'. Precise enunciation ensures explicit delivery.

The acronym MERK is more concise and therefore may be easier to remember.

Merk

- **Modulate** - alter or adapt the tone of voice according to the circumstances.
- **Emphasise** - lay stress on certain points.
- **Repeat** - repeat phrases, if necessary, to emphasise their importance.
- **Keep eye contact** - sufficient eye contact conveys interest.

Empathic responding

Empathy is the ability to understand the experience of the client from the client's perspective. This is one of the most important skills in the instructor's repertoire. The instructor must learn the ability to understand reasons for becoming more physically active. It is also a time to work on communication skills to also identify any barriers that may stop exercise participation and adherence.

Below are some suggestions to help an instructor to develop these skills:

- identify non-verbal behaviours
- identify whether the non-verbal behaviours match verbal behaviours
- identify if behaviour(s) create and/or support an underlying theme
- be aware of one's non-verbal reactions to the person and how reactions are interpreted
- identify the content of the information provided
- compare the experiences (content) that the person recounts to the person's previous experiences and/or patterns already identified
- ask oneself how you would feel if this experience happened to you and you were exhibiting the same non-verbal behaviours as the individual.

Building rapport

Building rapport is important in order for effective communication to take place. In order to establish rapport with a client, it is essential to understand the individual prior to progressing. Rapport is built through conversation and body language. When building rapport, it is not vital to mimic the exact position or posture of the other person; however, this may be worth considering. For example, if the person is sitting in a relaxed position, it may be appropriate to copy this.

Remember that voice, tone and pace play a part in developing rapport, as well as the types of vocabulary that are used. For example, using words and descriptions just because they are fashionable will not establish rapport, and can actually make individuals feel uncomfortable. Another area to consider is clothing, it may be appropriate to take consideration prior to dressing for a client session.

- Do the clothes project an image of superiority or power? This is not desirable.
- What would be the most appropriate thing to wear with the people you are working with?

Finally, it is important to remember the rules below:

- Rule 1 - establish rapport
- Rule 2 - attempt nothing else until you have established rapport.

A popular approach to establishing rapport is known as a 'typical day' approach: trying to understand what is involved in a client's typical day. The instructor could ask the client to describe what they do during a typical day, starting with the first thing they do when they get up. The

theory behind this approach is that the client will discuss where and when physical activity may start to be incorporated into their daily routine.

Once rapport has been established, the next step is to set an agenda. The setting up of an agenda identifies the time constraints and areas for discussion. The client may have single or multiple issues to discuss; however, the role of the instructor is to identify what is to be covered and the importance of that issue. Some clients will want to spend time talking to get a better understanding of what is going to happen, and they may expect that the instructor is going to tell them what to do. If this reaction has been apparent from the client, it normally indicates that the instructor has not managed to establish rapport. If this is the case, go back to Rule 1.

Physical touch

In many cultures, touch is commonplace during conversation. However, in British culture, it still only remains appropriate in established relationships.

With the increase in the popularity of yoga and Pilates instructors have been encouraged to teach and correct posture and position via touching and placing participants into position. While this has become more acceptable in the industry and is a reliable form of correction (if used with positive verbal communication), it is important to always request permission prior to touching an individual and, again, respect the decision of the individual.

Barriers to effective communication

Perhaps the best way to think about the way in which communication can go wrong is to think about what good communication would be like. Recognising barriers to effective communication is a first step in improving communication style.

Below is a list of what can go wrong:

- poor listening skills and barriers to listening
- inappropriate nonverbal communication (ie, body language and facial expressions)
- set patterns of thinking (ie, preconceived ideas and prejudice)
- making assumptions about clients
- labelling and stereotyping clients
- lack of trust between instructor and clients
- lack of clarity of what is being communicated
- social and cultural differences (eg, age, gender, social class, ethnicity, etc.).

The effects of effective communication

Communication is only successful if the receiver understands what the sender is trying to convey. When the message to be conveyed is not clearly understood, the speaker should understand that it is because they have not delivered the information effectively to the receiver. It is also worth remembering that it is important to remain flexible in communication style. Different clients may have very different needs when it comes to communication. It is therefore necessary to be adaptable and to use the correct communication skills in order to convey the information effectively.

Key points for effective communication

- Effective visual and verbal communication skills are vital for maintaining a positive relationship with a client.
- Body language can build or break down barriers to communication.
- Listening, clarifying and demonstrating empathy are important factors to effective communication.
- People have personal boundaries in relation to proximity to others. It is important to respect individual personal space.

Customer service

This section looks at who customers are and the best way to look after them, the service given to them and why it is important to form effective working relationships with them. It looks at how to develop a non-judgemental approach, equal opportunities and clear professional boundaries in line with the REPS code of ethical conduct.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- describe internal and external customers
- discuss the significance of customers to business
- describe 'excellent customer service'
- explain how to deal effectively with customer complaints
- identify ways to improve the customer service
- describe how instructors can positively contribute to creating a perception of quality service.

Customers

The fitness industry is a service industry, and it is imperative that instructors look after their customers accordingly. The industry today is very competitive; therefore how the customer perceives their experience is vital. An enhanced customer experience is important for several reasons. It improves the instructor's reputation, as well as that of their organisation, helps with customer retention, provides potential referral (friends and family) and assists the client in achieving their goals. It also gives the instructor and their organisation a professional image.

Customer service generally involves two people - the service provider, or instructor and the customer. A customer is described as any individual or organisation that is the user of the provider's products, services and/or information. To offer a high level of customer service, it is necessary to have a genuine interest in people and enjoy interacting with them. How the provider handles people is as important as knowing how to teach a safe and effective exercise session. Good customer service is a challenge that involves balancing the customer's wants and needs with the interests of the business.

The number one rule is: Every instructor represents their own company!

Whether self-employed or employed, there is no distinction between the instructor and the company from a customer's perspective. If an instructor treats the customer well, the company has treated them well.

Customers come in many guises and consist of:

- internal customers
- external customers.

Internal customers

Internal customers are described as anyone within the organisation involved in the delivery or supply of a product, service or information. An internal customer can be another instructor or another department (eg, the sales department or anyone involved in providing products or services to the external customer).

External customers

These customers include the general public wanting to use and pay for the facilities. These include:

- those wanting a product, service, information or advice
- potential customers
- people wishing to complain
- visitors
- specialist groups such as older adults, children and teenagers, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities
- other professionals whose services may be used (eg, physiotherapists)
- people from ethnic minorities.

Customer expectations

Improving the customer experience is about exceeding the customers' expectations. If a service is merely adequate, it is probably invisible. Adequate service therefore often registers as poor. Only excellent service gets noticed.

There are general skills and qualities required to exceed expectations, plus some more specific to the role of a fitness professional. They may include the following:

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional behaviour• Clean, neat and tidy appearance• Appropriate dress/uniform• Positive body language• Good listening skills• Being (not appearing to be) interested in the customer• Constructive verbal response• Empathy• Referral knowledge• Desire to help
Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good standard of teaching/instructing• Friendly approach, tone of voice, recognition of personal space, etc• Up-to-date industry knowledge• Punctuality• Discretion• Appropriately qualified and insured• In possession of relevant music licenses• Knowledge of other related products and services• A role model for an active, healthy lifestyle

Note: These lists are not exhaustive.

Providing excellent customer service

Simply smiling at the customer and saying 'Hello' is not enough to project a customer-friendly attitude. Customer service is about continuous improvements in service. Good is simply not good enough - make it better for the customer. Give the customer reasons to enthuse about the experience. The difference between ordinary customer service and extraordinary customer service is that little bit extra. A frequently used phrase is 'under-promise, over-deliver'. It is important to give the customer reasons to enthuse about the club or fitness centre, the business and the services on offer, or the individual instructor.

In a nutshell, that 'little bit extra' is exactly what customer service is all about. It is not about settling for the minimum; it is about adding something extra to the service and giving the customer a reason to come back.

There are many ways that this can be achieved; here are some fitness environment examples:

- helping to spot the weights for clients
- making a correction to an exercise technique
- praising and complimenting an exercise technique
- helping to set up equipment for clients
- offering an exercise adaptation or progression
- making a program suggestion
- offering an alternative exercise when the equipment is busy
- offering alternatives when the class choreography or content is too complex
- offering alternatives in intensity for easier and harder versions to cater for everyone's needs
- helping someone who appears uncertain
- providing heart rate monitors and towels
- offering warm-up, stretching and cool down advice
- ensuring health and safety and cleanliness standards are met in the exercise environment.

Paying attention to detail pays off because people appreciate it

Remember that when working with customers, it is vital to work within the professional boundaries as set out in the code of ethical conduct. Everyone is entitled to the same opportunities and non-judgemental approach. Respect any cultural differences that may impact on how to deal with a client and the content of their exercise session.

The customer comes first!

It is an old adage, but instructors should remember these five simple points:

1. Customers are not dependent on us; we are dependent on them.
2. Customers are not an interruption of work; they are the purpose of it.
3. Customers are doing us a favour when they call; we are not doing them a favour by answering them.
4. Customers are human beings with feelings and needs like our own, not cold statistics.
5. Customers are people who bring us their wants; it is our job to satisfy those wants.

Customers are the lifeblood of our business and we are dependent upon them. It is commonly stated that 'The customer is always right' in customer service. The importance of this statement is frequently misunderstood and is perhaps best summed up with the acronym RIGHT.

RIGHT	
Respect	There should be mutual respect between the instructor and the customer. It is important to remember that every customer has the potential to increase or decrease the company's business.
Indispensible	All customers are an indispensable part of the business and need to be able to feel a part of it. Asking for feedback on a particular product or service not only helps make improvements, but makes the customer feel part of the process. A sense of belonging can be conveyed in many different ways (eg, thank-you cards, company newsletters, discounted prices and fun events).
Greeted	All customers expect their presence to be acknowledged. Greet each customer promptly so that he or she feels as welcome as a guest in your home (eg, at Disneyland and Disneyworld, every person who visits is called a guest).
Helped	It is important that instructors have a thorough knowledge of their company's products and services so it can easily be passed onto the customer. Instructors may have to research appropriate forms of exercise to meet individual needs. Knowledge is a tool to help better service customers.
Thanked	Whether customers take up a product or service or not, they should always be thanked for their interest. Customer service research indicates that when we receive good service, we tell 9-12 people on average. When we receive poor service, we tell up to 20 people. If customer service is really poor, 91% of retail customers won't come back. Always bear in mind that customers may not need products or services on offer today but they might need them tomorrow.

Dealing with customer complaints

No matter how good an instructor's customer service may be, there may be times when they will have to deal with complaints. When a customer complains, it is because they feel they have a right to. The customer may be angry, shouting and gesticulating. In this type of situation, keep calm and give them the opportunity to express their feelings.

When a customer vents their anger in an instructor's direction, consider the following five key points:

1. Listen to the complaint. If they are angry, it will generally last no more than 30 seconds.
2. Do not interrupt. Allow the customer to convey their message.
3. Do not be defensive, as inevitably it prolongs the process and intensifies the customer's anger.
4. Apologise to the customer and acknowledge that they are upset and have a right to complain.
5. Solve the complaint as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Consider a complaint as an opportunity to 'solve' a problem and make the customer happy. It is a time when an instructor will have to employ all of their communication skills. When a customer complains, listen and then acknowledge the complaint immediately by saying 'Thank you. I can see why you feel that way' or 'Thank you. I understand how upsetting this must be'.

Instructors should put themselves in the customer's shoes. If the tables were turned, would the instructor also be upset? Show empathy and ask for the person's permission to seek further information, allowing time to get the facts straight and better understand their complaint to allow time to get on with solving it.

The use of open-ended questions enables the instructor to engage the client in discussion. This technique does not require a specific answer and leaves the door open for the client to choose the direction of the conversation and allows the instructor to gather the essential information. Open-ended questions usually begin with words such as:

- What?
- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- Why?

The use of closed questions does not engage the client in discussion and usually provides the opportunity for a yes or no response.

To ensure that the complaint is dealt with effectively and the client feels respected, the following procedure should be followed.

- Acknowledge the complaint immediately.
- If possible, deal with the complaint personally.
- If the instructor is not able to deal with it personally, explain this to the customer and assure them that the complaint will be referred to the appropriate person.
- Record the precise details of the complaint and ask the customer to read it and confirm that it is an accurate recording.
- Ensure that the complaint is resolved satisfactorily.

Remember that everybody has a bad day. If customers get angry, forgive them. Make them feel comfortable about coming back by applying the five points discussed above.

Key points for customer service

- Customer service is a people business, which involves considering customer wants and needs.
- Customers are described as any individual or organisation (internal or external) that uses the instructor's products, services or information.
- There are two types of customer: internal and external. The relationship between both is critical to business success.
- Customer service requires attention to detail and a commitment to provide extra service.
- When interacting with customers, consideration should be given to both non-verbal and verbal communication methods.
- The five steps to dealing with customer complaints are to listen, to not interrupt and to not be defensive. Instead, apologise and solve the complaint.
- Customer perceptions are strongly affected by the impression created by the instructor.

Barriers and motives for exercise

To reap the benefits of exercise at a local leisure centre or gym, the most important step is turning up. However, the reality is many people do not. Over 50% of the people who join a leisure centre or fitness club cease exercising within three months, and only about 5% of the population in England work out at a vigorous level three times a week for 20 minutes.

In this section, we explore the barriers that prevent people from exercising and discuss the motives that turn people on to exercise.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- describe inactivity levels in England
- identify the main barriers to taking part in exercise and discuss strategies for dealing with these barriers
- discuss the barriers that exist in the gym environment
- describe the main motives for participation in exercise and discuss strategies for motivating clients to exercise
- describe interventions that can be made in the exercise environment to improve adherence.

Inactivity levels in England

In order to promote basic health (as opposed to improving fitness), all adults should take part in activity in accordance with the following guidelines:

At least 150 minutes of activity a week - two and a half hours of moderate intensity activity, in bouts of 10 minutes or more or 30 minutes 5 days per week (Chief Medical Officer's guidelines, 2015).

Numerous studies have shown that physical activity consistently decreases with age after late adolescence or early adulthood. For example, studies (Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey (ADNFS), 1992; HEANSAH, 1991; National Household Survey, 1998) in England found that the following populations were unable to report participation in any bout of moderate physical activity of 30 minutes per week in the past four weeks:

- 15% of men and 25% of women aged 16-24
- 32% of people aged between 45-64
- 55% of those aged 65 or older

Attitudes and perceptions of the sedentary person

A study (Health Education Authority, 1993) that explored the attitudes and perceptions of sedentary people in England found that sedentary people held very negative views concerning physical activity. In fact, participation was perceived to be:

- difficult
- unpleasant
- pointless

A large part of this perception is thought to be due to poor quality experiences of physical activity while at school.

The ADNFS (1992) also examined people's beliefs and attitudes towards physical activity and fitness, and this study found that 80% of both men and women of all ages believed themselves to be fit, and the majority incorrectly believed that they did enough exercise to keep fit. For example, men and women categorised as physical activity level 0 (no occasions of moderate or vigorous activity in the past four weeks) responded to the self-assessment questions in the following way:

Self-assessment related to physical activity level

Activity self-assessment for:	
Men	Women
Very or fairly active: 47%	Very or fairly active: 57%
Fitness self-assessment Very or fairly fit: 61%	Fitness self-assessment Very or fairly fit: 69%

What stops people exercising?

The following table highlights the main reasons given for stopping regular participation in moderate to vigorous sport or active recreation among men and women.

Reasons for stopping regular exercise	Men	Women
Work reasons	23%	17%
Lost interest in activity	19%	16%
Needed time to do other things	13%	10%
Marriage / change in partnership	6%	10%
Having children / looking after children	2%	10%
Facilities closed or changed	7%	6%
Moved house	4%	7%
Team / partner no longer available	4%	4%
Injury or health problem	4%	4%
Sports injury	3%	2%
Getting too old / health failing	3%	1%
Could no longer afford it	1%	2%
Difficulty getting there	1%	1%
Other reasons	10%	10%

Source: Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey (1992)

As can be seen from the table above, the three main factors stopping people were:

- work reasons
- loss of interest
- time needed to do other things.

Significant differences between men and women can also be observed in the proportion who gave reasons associated with childcare, marriage and moving house, which suggests that, in general, women perform the larger share of domestic duties.

The barriers to exercise

When clients discuss their exercise goals, they are also likely to raise difficulties in meeting those goals. These difficulties can be described as barriers to change. The significant point about the barriers that clients anticipate is that they can reduce their confidence and may even prevent them from initiating the change to meet their exercise goals.

The key to motivating people is to help them to explore the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the new exercise behaviour, and to identify the exercise or physical activity options that are available to them and that fit in with their lifestyle. It is important to recognise that each individual has the capability to find simple and realistic how-to solutions to overcome or neutralise their barriers. The instructor's role when dealing with client barriers is simply to provide a framework in which the client can freely discuss, explore and evaluate exercise options in a non-judgemental way.

Factors that stopped people aged 16-69 from taking more exercise		% men	% women
Physical barriers	• I have an injury or disability that stops me	18	15
	• I'm too fat	7	14
	• My health is not good enough	11	7
	• I am too old	7	7
Emotional barriers	• I'm not the sporty type	24	38
	• I'm too shy or embarrassed	4	12
	• I might get injured or damage my health	7	5
Motivational barriers	• I need to rest and relax in my spare time	25	26
	• I haven't got the energy	13	21
	• I'd never keep it up	12	19
	• I don't enjoy physical activity	9	13
Time barriers	• I haven't got the time	41	43
	• I don't have time because of my work	34	21
	• I've got young children to look after	10	18
Availability barriers	• There is no one to do it with	14	22
	• I can't afford it	9	14
	• There are no suitable facilities nearby	8	12
	• I haven't got the right clothes or equipment	5	7

Source: Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey (1992).

The main gender differences

Factors that stopped men aged 16-69 from taking part in exercise		16-34 yrs %	35-54 yrs %	55-69 yrs %
Physical barriers	• I have an injury or disability that stops me	10	18	32
	• I'm too fat	4	8	7
	• My health is not good enough	4	9	24
	• I am too old	1	7	17
Emotional barriers	• I'm not the sporty type	14	27	34
	• I'm too shy or embarrassed	3	5	5
	• I might get injured or damage my health	3	8	8
Motivational barriers	• I need to rest and relax in my spare time	22	28	26
	• I haven't got the energy	10	13	18
	• I'd never keep it up	10	12	14
	• I don't enjoy physical activity	4	12	14
Time barriers	• I haven't got the time	46	46	25
	• I don't have time because of my work	39	40	16
	• I've got young children to look after	15	10	1
Availability barriers	• There is no one to do it with	19	12	12
	• I can't afford it	10	8	8
	• There are no suitable facilities nearby	9	8	7
	• I haven't got the right clothes or equipment	5	5	4

Factors that stopped women aged 16-69 from taking part in exercise		16-34 yrs %	35-54 yrs %	55-69 yrs %
Physical barriers	• I have an injury or disability that stops me	9	14	24
	• I'm too fat	12	13	18
	• My health is not good enough	5	11	23
	• I am too old	1	6	17
Emotional barriers	• I'm not the sporty type	29	43	46
	• I'm too shy or embarrassed	12	11	13
	• I might get injured or damage my health	2	5	9
Motivational barriers	• I need to rest and relax in my spare time	23	26	28
	• I haven't got the energy	19	22	22
	• I'd never keep it up	17	20	20
	• I don't enjoy physical activity	8	16	17
Time barriers	• I haven't got the time	54	45	27
	• I don't have time because of my work	24	25	10
	• I've got young children to look after	31	15	3
Availability barriers	• There is no one to do it with	26	18	23
	• I can't afford it	19	10	11
	• There are no suitable facilities nearby	13	12	12
	• I haven't got the right clothes or equipment	8	6	7

Source: Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey (1992).

As is apparent from the above tables, women are less likely than men to participate in sport and may reject some activities because they do not consider themselves to be the 'sporty type'. Promoting activities such as walking, cycling, swimming and exercise classes may be important in encouraging women to take more exercise.

Women's role as carers (particularly in the 16-34 age range) limits the time available to participate in certain types of physical activity. As stated above, 31% of women and 15% of men reported this as their main barrier.

Promoting home-based activities, such as doing the housework in a continuous block of 30 minutes, using exercise DVDs and walking to the shops instead of taking the car, will help to make exercise opportunities more readily available.

Time pressures because of work were mentioned more by young and middle-aged men than women (men 39% and 40%, women 24% and 25%). Promoting activities that can be incorporated into the working day such as walking or cycling to and from work, climbing the stairs and taking a brisk walk during a lunch break may help to make physical activity opportunities more readily available.

Injury or disability problems are more frequent barriers for older men (men 32%, women 24%). Promoting the idea that a physically active lifestyle does not need to include team or individual sport and emphasising the health benefits and social opportunities that can be accrued from adopting a moderately active lifestyle might help motivate older men.

Barriers to exercise in the fitness environment

Few studies have specifically investigated the barriers that exist in the gym or fitness setting for sedentary people. However, empirical observations indicate that the factors below should be taken into consideration when planning and coaching an exercise programme, to avoid noncompliance.

- Complexity of exercise movements - keep the movements simple and gradually build up the skill levels to increase confidence (eg, when inducting a client on a treadmill, gently increase the speed, gradient or duration. In an exercise to music or studio setting ensure, alternatives are introduced in a positive and encouraging way).
- Speed of exercise movements - avoid quick and uncontrolled movements that could increase the risk of injury and trauma to the joints and surrounding tissues. Have the client focus on exercising at a preferred or comfortable pace (eg, have the client self-select a pace for the workout on a treadmill. In a group situation, ensure the individual can work at a level that suits his or her needs).
- Choice of activities - focus the exercise programme on the client's activity preferences, wants and needs. It is pointless to include exercises the client dislikes; the focus must be on exercises the client enjoys doing.
- Graduated progression of exercise intensity - ensure that workloads, repetitions and sets are increased progressively in accordance with the client's exercise goal.
- Start-up resistance levels - take into consideration the client's current physical capabilities. On fixed resistance machines, if the initial resistance is too much, use dumbbells or offer an alternative exercise for the same body parts. In a body-conditioning class, offer easy versions of exercises, such as a box press-up rather than a full press-up.
- Set-up procedures for cardiovascular machines - be aware of 'techno-fear', keep the instructions short and simple and let the client do the programming. Then check that the client has understood how to programme the machine correctly. In group situations, use 'layering' techniques while building choreography; bite-size chunks of complexity are easier to deal with.
- Use rating of perceived exertion to monitor intensity alongside heart rate: alternatively, ask clients to exercise at the preferred level of exertion that they feel they can maintain for the relevant period.
- Establish realistic starting goals - the client must believe the goal is attainable. Confidence breeds confidence, and the current adherence literature indicates that exercise goals in the first three months should be achievable, measurable, time-framed and realistically challenging to promote compliance.
- Inform and educate the client about safe and effective exercise technique - use handouts, posters, videos or mini lectures to explain the risks, benefits and effectiveness of certain exercises or exercise programmes.
- Keep the sessions varied to avoid boredom - vary the programme goals or the programme (eg, use time, distance or calorie goals, or offer steady state, interval and fartlek programmes. In an exercise to music setting, change the choreography regularly).
- Use social support structures - social support can emanate from a wide variety of sources (eg, instructors, family, friends, workout buddies, peers, interest groups, etc), as well as through a number of other channels (eg, face-to-face, via the phone, etc.). The available adherence

evidence indicates that social support has a profound role to play in the adoption and maintenance of exercise programmes.

- Keep the exercise sessions fun and enjoyable - how clients perceive their exercise experience may depend upon the instructor's ability to create a positive expectation. Let clients know that their enjoyment is important. Simply asking 'What would make exercise fun or enjoyable for you?' can elicit the client's criteria for making the sessions enjoyable.

Responding to a client's barriers

When dealing with barriers, try not to be judgemental or dismissive. To the individual concerned, this is a serious problem. Respect the client's point of view and take time to explore the pros and cons of their barriers and be empathetic and prepared to listen to them. Use positive body language and good listening and verbal skills to convey a professional image. Give feedback and support, above all, negotiate a realistic solution to the problem.

Consider the different types of social support that may be available to the client (eg, the support of others such as family, friends, a training partner or perhaps attending group exercise session or the using services of a personal trainer). Discuss how these may help to overcome their barrier and aid motivation and adherence.

Try to establish a sense of self-responsibility with the client. Once discussion and agreement have taken place, clients must take responsibility themselves. Make them feel positively supported and able to work around any barriers that may occur.

It is important to help clients to explore the pros and cons of their barriers, and instructors need to take care not to dismiss these barriers as excuses. This approach just shifts the client into a defensive mode and generally makes the client more resistant to change.

Respect for the client's view is an absolute prerequisite for facilitating positive behavioural change. We all see the world differently, and being empathetic with others means acknowledging them and their view of the world. It is not necessary to agree with a client's view; however, an instructor should recognise and respect it. Research onto addictive behaviours has shown that persuasive logical argument is generally not very effective. Paradoxically, acceptance of people as they are seems to free them to change.

Therefore, when responding to the client's barriers, instructors must ensure they do the following:

- build rapport
- listen carefully to what is being said
- check the content regularly, with open and reflective questions
- encourage self-responsibility
- encourage freedom of choice.

It is imperative to avoid 'expert' mode when discussing the how to of overcoming barriers. Remember that the clients know what is best for them and how to realistically achieve it. They just need the chance to articulate the issues and to resolve any ambivalence to change.

What gets people moving and staying more motivated?

The key to getting a person moving is to find ways in which the individual is self-motivated enough to sustain that change. The underlying concept of motivation is that a driving force exists within the individual to achieve an exercise goal. The easiest way to tap into this driving force is to establish what it is that the client enjoys doing. Data from the ADNFS (1992) reveals that the four major motivational factors for taking exercise are to:

- feeling in good shape physically
- improving or maintaining health
- feeling a sense of achievement
- getting outdoors.

The following table highlights the various results for men and women. The first column (A) shows the percentage that gave the factor a high personal score. The second column (B) shows the percentage that gave the factor a high score in terms of the ability of exercise to achieve it.

Motivating factors for exercise among men and women aged 16-69 years	Men		Women	
	A	B	A	B
1. To feel in good shape physically	88	75	89	73
2. To improve or maintain health	87	74	89	71
3. To feel a sense of achievement	87	74	89	71
4. To get outdoors	84	62	83	60
5. To look good	64	50	82	64
6. To control or lose weight	60	62	72	67
7. To have fun	78	53	76	52
8. To relax and forget about your cares	82	48	85	42
9. To feel independent	77	39	82	45
10. To get together and to meet new people	67	42	73	48

A = percentage who gave the factor a high personal goal score

B = percentage who gave high score on achievement through exercise

Source: Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey (1992).

This data highlights that the motivation to comply with an exercise programme is influenced by a wide range of factors. Some of these factors may be out of the client's control; others may be factors that the client is completely unaware of. What is obvious is that the types of strategy used to enhance adherence during the initial critical phase (the first three months) may well differ from those most useful in maintaining exercise in the long run.

Instructors can help address the motivational needs of a client during the initial phase by addressing the following issues:

- working with the client on strategies for overcoming barriers
- increasing the client's confidence - agreeing rewards, giving praise and encouragement, looking at ways of incorporating social support and commitment, etc.
- agreeing SMART goals
- agreeing action plans
- promoting autonomy (personal independence) and interdependence (relational skills with others and sharing common principles)
- promoting adherence strategies to include differentiation between dependant, independent and interdependent relationships.

Additional factors

1. To clarify client expectations - in a neutral manner, clarify the client's exercise expectations and discuss the pros and cons of adopting and maintaining the new exercise behaviour. If the individual's expectations are unrealistic, such as 'If I do legs, bums and turns classes for two months, I'll lose all this excess weight on my hips and thighs', resolve these expectations, as they can lead to noncompliance when unfulfilled. Above all, resolve expectations in a non-judgemental way.
2. To establish realistic expectations - inform clients about the realities of beginning an exercise programme and let them know that initially they will probably get hot and sweaty; they might even feel some mild discomfort in their muscles after the first few exercise sessions, which is perfectly normal.
3. To establish the client's previous exercise history, exercise preferences and needs - this can simply be done by a questionnaire. Questions of interest include the types of exercise programme clients have participated in (frequency, duration and intensity) previously, the length of time of participation, reasons for quitting, what expectations and goals they hope to accomplish and how quickly, current preferences regarding types of exercise, potential roadblocks ahead based on past experience, constraints with respect to time, injuries and other issues.
4. To plan for relapse - such as the 'New Year's resolution effect' while addressing expectations, activity preferences and needs, inform clients that relapses are the norm. For example, relapses due to illness, work schedules, holidays, family commitments, etc. are inevitable. Preparing clients ahead of time for high-risk situations can help to prevent them from dropping out when unplanned breaks interrupt their schedule. Create a fallback plan.
5. To set appropriate and realistic exercise goals - seek agreement on the specific types of activity that best fit the client's objectives, time, commitments and personal lifestyle. Decide which activities best fit the client's daily routine, and help the client to set goals that the client feels are sufficient and realistically challenging. Establish a measurable target (eg, a specified distance per session, a calorie goal or a set time per session).
6. To provide feedback - feedback early in the exercise programme can be an extremely powerful reinforcer. Feedback can take many forms: physiological-based feedback could include changes in maximum oxygen uptake, resting heart rate or perceived exertion, whereas behavioural feedback can include regular recording of attendance and exercise logs. Having clients maintain their own records also helps to ensure that they share responsibility with the instructor for the exercise programme.
7. To establish a sense of self-responsibility and to use a social support system - clients need to understand that their goals are their goals. The exercise programme is a self-development project and an instructor's prime job is to support clients in reaching their goals. The use of varied social support structures, such as a buddy or contact at the club, can help to create an environment that is going to support the client in adopting and maintaining the new behaviour.

Social support

Social support can play a major role in motivating clients to adhere to a new exercise programme. Family and friends can support clients by adapting their behaviour and assisting with caring for dependants, etc. Other participants can assist with adherence, as the exercise environment can become a place to socialise with others in the same position and with similar interests. Buddy systems and training partners can be extremely effective as a support and motivational tool. Clients are more likely to stay motivated and to adhere to an exercise programme if they enjoy the content and find it fun and engaging. Instructors should ensure that they discuss exercise preferences and include them in the programme, as well as avoiding exercises that the client dislikes. The instructor must also consider previous exercise history and ensure that the programme is pitched at the right intensity for the level of fitness and to achieve the goals. Focus on what the client has achieved by adding incentives and rewards.

These could include one or any combination of the following:

- praise, enthusiasm and encouragement from the instructor
- challenges (eg, gym challenge)
- review sessions that show the client how they have improved
- providing information on the health benefits of regular exercise
- social events
- external rewards, such as prizes or treats for achieving a certain goal
- internal rewards, such as the feel-good factor for achieving goals
- taster sessions.

Bear in mind that a motivated client is a successful client!

Key points for barriers and motives for exercise

- Physical activity levels in England are low, and sedentary people generally hold negative views about physical activity.
- Work reasons, a loss of interest and time needed to do other things are the main factors that stop people from regular participation in moderate to vigorous sport or physical activity.
- The main barriers to exercise are: 'I'm not the sporty type', 'I need to rest and relax in my spare time', and 'there is no one to do it with'.
- The major motivational factors for taking exercise include: to feel in good shape physically, to improve or maintain health, to feel a sense of achievement and to get outdoors.
- The main barriers in the gym environment are complexity and speed of exercise movements, exercises being too intense too soon, lack of understanding of machine set-up, boredom and lack of support.
- The instructor must always listen and demonstrate empathy to avoid losing rapport with clients. If the issues are too complex, refer the client to a relevant expert.
- It is important to create an agenda and to set an action plan and goals appropriate to the client's needs.
- The client must be involved in the whole process to ensure adherence and ownership of the programme.

Theories and concepts of behaviour change

All people are individuals, and so each one behaves differently. For some, being physically active is a way of life. However, for many individuals, activity is not part of their lifestyle or thoughts.

There are many theories, or models, of individual behaviour. These models were originally developed to help explain how individuals choose a healthier behaviour, such as increasing activity levels or eating a nutritionally balanced diet.

The main role of the instructor in this field is to help individuals to understand and reach their goals of the benefits of positive health behaviour. Knowledge and understanding of how these concepts work can help the instructor to understand how clients can develop and change behaviour patterns. By discussing a client's current behaviour patterns and initial desires to become more active, it will then be possible to assist the client in working towards those desired goals.

This may be an appropriate time to review other behaviours that may have a negative impact on the health of the individual, such as a poor diet or smoking. However, there may be times when an instructor needs to recognise their own limitations in this field and refer a client to a health professional who has specific experience in behaviour change, especially when dealing with clients with multiple negative behaviour patterns.

Most importantly, to be effective in helping individuals to change to a more positive pattern of behaviour, the instructor must be empathetic and non-judgemental at all times.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- identify the main determinants of physical activity
- understand that changing behaviour is a complex process and there are several theoretical models of behaviour change that require further research to understand more comprehensively
- explain the three stages of growth to empower clients to be responsible for changing their attitude towards physical activity.

Patterns of behaviour

Patterns of behaviour are developed over a period of time. Therefore, attempting to change them may not be an easy task for some individuals. The two main areas that influence individuals' behaviours are sociology and psychology. Sociology focuses on the way that the individual interacts within society, whereas psychology focuses on the individual's thoughts and behaviours.

Society is governed by policies, rules and regulations that make it difficult to change the environment we live or work in. However, we are in control of how we individually cope with these, in the ways in which we think and act towards such issues.

Changing behaviour

A wide range of theories has been developed to explain all aspects of human behaviour. Each theorist has attempted to explain why individuals behave in certain ways in given circumstances. Although most of these theories are successful in their diagnosis of some aspects of human behaviour, no one theory can explain all aspects, suggesting that the individual is a very complex being.

Effectively, when instructors ask an individual to commit to a training programme, instructors are asking them to change their behaviour. It sometimes seems as though behavioural change is a single event that takes place at a moment in time and thereafter becomes fixed. People decide one day that they will join a gym, stop smoking, lose weight and they do it. However, there is a wealth of psychological research that has identified that behavioural change truly is a process that can be extremely lengthy and is characterised by a series of stages.

Theories regarding motivation and ability to change habits can be found in behaviour change models. These classify how people make changes and construe change as a process involving progress through a series of cyclic stages of change. Many do not succeed in their efforts to establish and maintain lifestyle and activity changes and relapse (i.e. move in and out of the cycle at different stages and different times). It is therefore important for fitness instructors to have an understanding of people's perception of the reasons why they feel they cannot start or continue exercising in order to be able to develop strategies and counter arguments for overcoming those barriers and to help them in moving through the stages of change until the change becomes permanent.

Initially, many of these behaviour change models were developed for the field of psychology, rather than specifically for physical activity and exercise, However, it is worth researching the various models and extracting from them what might be appropriate to each chosen situation.

Suggested research:

- Theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975)
- Theory of planned behaviours (Ajzen, 1988)
- The health belief model (Rosenstock, 1966)
- Health locus of control (Wallston, Wallsofn, Kaplan and Maides, 1976)
- Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a)
- Transtheoretical model (Prochaska and DiClement, 1982)

Empowering clients to change

When an instructor first starts to work with a client, the instructor will be relied on for advice, support and motivation. The aim of the fitness professional should be to empower clients to be responsible for their own training and their attitude towards adhering to their programme. In order to empower clients, there are three stages of growth that every person goes through. These include:

1. **Dependent** - initially, clients are completely dependent on instructors. They do not yet have the skills to become more active without the instructor's help and are totally reliant on providing information about becoming more physically active, their training programme, motivation and adherence. However, instructors do not want their clients to remain dependent, as this in itself may become a barrier if the instructor is not always there. A natural progression would be for the instructor to enable their clients to become independent.
2. **Independent** -this is when the clients are no longer as reliant on instructors for their needs and have accepted responsibility for their training and adherence. They have become self-motivated individuals who are regularly active and do not rely on instructors for motivation and adherence. However being totally independent can be isolating for an individual. A natural progression from here would be to become interdependent.
3. **Interdependent** - although clients are now independent individuals, they still need intervention from others. They will need instructors to reassess their training programme and to give them ongoing advice. They need others, such as a buddy or training partner, to communicate with and discuss their progress and adherence. Interdependence cannot happen unless the client has already been independent. Independence is a necessary stage. If clients have skipped the independence stage, they are probably still dependent, even if it is not apparent.

As outlined above, it is crucial for instructors to encourage clients to become interdependent. Some people may feel that needing others is a sign of weakness, but with interdependence, the essence is really about working with others to achieve a common goal. It is empowering, and it is a choice born of strengths and respect. Interdependence is essentially wanting the best for others: valuing, trusting and cherishing their unique abilities, while still being secure about one's own.

Key points for behaviour change

- Patterns of behaviour are developed over a long period of time for adults. Attempting to change behaviour can be difficult.
- There is a range of theories and concepts that has been used by psychologists in behaviour change.
- Changing client behaviour requires the instructor to be empathetic and non-judgemental.
- Empowering clients to change is a three-stage process: dependant, independent and interdependent.

Goal setting

Goal setting is a familiar tool within the health and fitness industry for helping individuals to adhere to exercise. There are many types of programme and goals. Some programmes are so focused on goal setting that they even insist the client has a specific goal from the outset. However, this can be a challenge to some clients because they have not had the opportunity to explore the possible outcome from the get-go.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner should be able to:

- understand the importance of setting SMART goals
- state what information the instructor needs to gather from the client and its importance in the process of goal setting
- explain why it is important to make the client part of the process of goal setting.

What is the importance of goal setting?

Before a training programme begins, the instructor needs to establish the training aims. Nearly 50% of people who start a training programme drop out within the first few months. One of the reasons for this is that they never really established what they were trying to achieve from the outset.

Below is a series of questions that can be utilised to help with the goal-setting process. They can be used as a guide to check for a clear understanding of the clients perspective:

What is your goal?

When do you want to achieve this by?

How will you know when you have achieved it?

What will you see, hear and feel?

What skills do you need to learn?

For whom do you want to achieve this?

Who will support/not support your efforts?

What will you need to change in order to reach your goal? Intrinsic motivations are more likely than extrinsic to produce a successful outcome. It is the role of the instructor to encourage clients to want to achieve a goal for themselves and not because others tell them that they should. It is important that clients take responsibility for their fitness motivation. Clients will then have a

greater chance of achieving their goals, increasing activities of daily living, maintaining their programme and adhering to exercise.

A great deal of thought is required in order to write a meaningful training programme that will give the maximum benefit from the time spent training. People undertake training for many reasons.

They might be one or a combination of the following:

- **physical** - fitness, weight management, to improve a specific sporting activity or component of physical fitness to meet specific needs
- **psychological** - mental and emotional, well-being, stress management
- **lifestyle** - health, mobility, improving or managing medical conditions
- **social** - to make friends, develop their social network
- **adherence** - changing behaviour towards physical activity / exercise and developing positive habits for long-term participation.

When setting goals for a client, it is best to ensure that they are a part of the process. This can help them to take personal responsibility for their own fitness and motivation. By doing this, they are more likely to adhere to the programme and achieve their goals.

An instructor should meet with the client and discuss the following:

- their expectations and fears
- specific personal goals
- available time
- their level of commitment
- personal information (eg, ParQ, health screening and informed consent)
- their personal motivation
- any current or perceived barriers.

SMART goals

Whatever the client's reasons for becoming more physically active, setting SMART short, medium and long-term goals can help them to achieve them. Timing and commitment needs to be realistic.

SMART stands for:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable/agreed
Realistic
Time-framed

Specific

Be specific when working with the client as to exactly what they want to achieve. Go beyond the superficial reasons. Question and explore vague statements such as to 'tone up' or to 'lose weight'. This will enable both instructor and client to focus on achieving a specific result. Long-term goals are the end result and are more often realised if short and medium-term goals are set along the way.

Measurable

Having set the short, medium and long-term goals the instructor should then discuss a system for measuring the success of achieving them throughout the training programme. Encourage the client to use a training diary to monitor and measure their progress, as this will allow even the smallest of changes to be recorded. Specific variables such as the exact resistance, number of sets and reps should be recorded in each training session. A quality rating of the training session based on how your client felt the session went (1 as poor and 10 as good) and whether they achieved the aims is a good indicator when assessing progress against the agreed short-term and long-term goals.

Initial assessment records (eg, body fat percentage, body weight, circumference measurements, etc.) should be reassessed at agreed intervals to monitor progress. Also periodic reviews and the analysis of training logs and diaries can help the instructor to assess whether the exercise prescription has been successful in meeting the client's goals.

Achievable/agreed

The instructor should discuss the training aims with the client. The instructor may have to negotiate these to ensure that they are realistic for the client. Agree the following with the client:

- short-term goals
- medium-term goals
- long-term goals
- when the training programme will start
- how often the training programme will be reviewed
- what potential barriers may arise
- what will happen if any of the goals are not met.

Be careful not to set goals that are too far out of reach for the client. They may start with the best of intentions, but if they do not believe that they can achieve them, subconsciously this will stop them from even giving it their best and will result in failure. It is always better to underestimate than to overestimate what one feels the client is capable of achieving. In this way, if the client's goals are exceeded or achieved more quickly than expected, it will not only motivate them to continue but will also make them feel that they have been given an exemplary service.

Realistic

Be realistic about what an individual can achieve. Consider the client's physical capabilities, such as age and body type. Discuss their lifestyle habits and how the training programme will fit in with available time, family, occupation and other commitments.

Time-framed

If a goal has no deadline, it can easily be put off. Timed goals are more often achieved than open goals, therefore it is important to decide and agree a time to start and end the programme. Set a

clear time scale for reaching the short-, medium- and long-term goals, times when the instructor will analyse the client's training diary and complete body assessment records.

Note: The 'achievable' and 'realistic' components are often quite subjective and influenced by factors such as client motivation, injury and unforeseen circumstances. Instructors can, however, use their knowledge and experience to make reasonable estimates about what a client can achieve within a certain timeframe.

Goal setting and screening will enable the instructor to build an invaluable picture of the client as an individual. Part of this process should include establishing any barriers to starting, maintaining and adhering to the training programme.

If a barrier presents itself during the goal setting/screening phase, the instructor should consider planning intervention strategies (i.e. an action plan), to reduce the impact of the barrier on the programme. For example, if the client has planned to take a holiday during the programme, the instructor must consider how this will impact the programme and the client's goals. The instructor must ensure that the programme is suitable for the client to carry on with when they return and that the goals are still achievable.

It may be that the client has no obvious barriers at the beginning of a programme. However, there may be times during the programme that a barrier presents itself. It is important to identify it swiftly and deal with it appropriately in order to keep the programme on track to meet the set goals. Barriers can be more easily identified if the instructor asks specific questions, writes them down and agrees a solution with the client.

Key points for goal setting

- It is important to create an agenda and to set an action plan and goals appropriate to the client's needs.
- Setting SMART goals can help to achieve short-, medium- and long-term training goals.
- The client must be involved in the whole process to ensure adherence and ownership.

Client retention

The value of the fitness industry in the UK is estimated at approximately £3.6 billion (Fitness Industry Report 2007) and boasts that in excess of 1.8 million people are members of health and fitness clubs (National Audit of Fitness Consumers, 2006). Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of new public and private fitness facilities. This has led to a reported 3% growth in club memberships since January 2006 (Fitness Industry Report, 2007).

With over 90% of the UK population living within two miles of a public or private health and fitness facility (FIA State of the Fitness Industry Report, 2010), the provision for keeping fit and healthy is apparently more accessible and attainable than ever before.

Objectives

By the end of this section, the learner will be able to:

- define client retention
- recognise the importance of client retention
- state the factors that affect client retention
- identify the role of the fitness professional, the client and the fitness facility in contributing to client retention.

What is client retention?

When applied to exercise, client retention can vary in meaning depending on the stakeholder. A significant stakeholder is the individual who wants to become fitter or lose weight, working towards some fitness, health or lifestyle goal. Once the goal has been achieved, the issue for the individual is whether to continue to exercise, thereby retaining the fitness benefits. To the client, their personalised wants and goals must be central to any provision of health and fitness instruction, support or facilities.

The measure of client's success is likely to relate to their wants and goals in seeking an exercise and fitness solution. Becoming fitter or slimmer may be a declared target for the client, and their expectation is that the fitness professional or facility is there to help them to achieve their goals.

To the fitness facility, 'member retention' is an organisational objective and measured in terms of member retention rates and financial targets. Therefore, a fitness instructor who works within a fitness club would have to balance the exercise adherence needs of the client against the member retention and financial goals of the facility. For example, the village hall instructor has an interest in keeping numbers high in order to cover costs and make a profit.

Why do clients stop attending?

Learning the reasons why clients stop attending is a crucial question for increasing retention rates and helping people to move towards their fitness goals. However, many individuals may not give an accurate reason for leaving or may state one reason when, on closer inspection, there appears to be a number of factors that cause the member to leave the gym (IHRSA, 1988).

Some of the reasons why people leave their health and fitness clubs include:

- financial
- personal
- situational
- facility-related
- customer service.

Financial reasons

In order for the monthly membership fee or paying for a block of classes to be economically viable, the client must be able to justify this payment with regular and sustained usage. Therefore, if the clients fail to attend regularly, then they are more likely to perceive that the membership is poor value for money.

Personal reasons

Over time, clients may lose interest in their training and stop attending the gym or class, therefore finding it increasingly more difficult to justify the membership fees. The reason for this may be as simple as not having a training partner to promote regular attendance, meaning that a habit has not been developed in order to keep attending.

Situational reasons

Illness or external factors, such as changing job or moving house, can often precede a client's or member's cancellation. The member may have even decided to change to another form of exercise, such as training at home or running outdoors.

Facility-related reasons

Common complaints from ex-members are that they were dissatisfied with staff, overcrowded facilities, unresponsive club management and cleanliness of facilities. This shows that fitness club managers, staff and other fitness professionals need to work together to produce a cohesive, caring customer experience to ensure customer retention.

By monitoring and evaluating the service, facilities can assess membership retention rates and strive towards maintaining an economical and viable business. Members who use the club more frequently are more likely to remain members for longer. If the teams within the clubs do their jobs well, then adherence to exercise programmes will be maintained, subsequently leading to achievement in fitness goals as well as increasing retention rates.

Customer service issues

Customers need to feel that the club or instructor is giving them the level of service that they want and expect. Any shortfall in this might push them in the direction of a competitor. If members feel that the club's cleanliness is not up to scratch or that the group fitness sessions are overcrowded,

they are more likely to leave (IHRSA, 1998). Members want to get results (whatever they may be) and need their efforts to be recognised by the club and its staff.

Customers who actively want to come to the club and who regularly use its facilities often tell others how good the whole experience is. This gives the fitness club or class an unrivalled marketing advantage. If the experience is a positive one, the customer is more likely to continue its patronage and tell friends, family and colleagues about the fantastic club, class or instructor. Similarly, members who perceive that they have received poor service may be even more eager to spread the word.

Members want to feel part of the club or class environment. By establishing social activities and targeted programmes, this will help to achieve this. Events such as party theme nights and 'young at heart' targeted programmes for the older member help to create a feeling of value for the member. Simply by saying 'thank you' to clients for attending, and asking for their opinions, either directly or by using suggestion boxes and feedback events, help all participants to feel included, no matter how long they have been a member.

Participants can feel further valued if the facility creates well-designed fitness programmes and classes that recognise their fitness, social and emotional needs. Programmes such as the penetration of personal training into clubs have been shown to increase retention (IHRSA, 2000).

Strategies such as regular communication and review sessions have shown to increase both exercise adherence and member retention. Newsletters, emails, membership surveys and even birthday cards will all help towards making the member / participant feel valued and thus have an impact on retention rates (IHRSA, 2000).

Key points for client retention

- Client retention has a variety of meanings depending on the stakeholder, the individual potential member, the instructor and the health and fitness facility.
- Less than 50% of new exercisers maintain their exercise programmes through their first six months.
- Membership retention is related to keeping members for longer periods.
- The main factors that affect membership retention appear to be not using the facility, getting bored or unhappy with the facilities on offer, falling out with members of staff or finding another fitness facility that better suits their needs.
- Reviewing members' programmes on a regular basis contributes towards higher retention rates.
- The client should be involved in choosing the type of exercise to increase exercise retention.
- Regular communication and review sessions have both been shown to increase exercise.