

Department of Public Social Services



# Telephone Etiquette/Telephone Interviewing and Listening Skills

Marsha Bryant-Hurt, Director

Human Resources Division

DPSS Academy

# Table of Contents

- Introduction of Food Stamp Wavier Of Face-To-Face Interview Administrative Directive #
- Scenarios
- Telephone Etiquette/Telephone Interviewing and Listening Skills

**Purpose:** To assist staff in strengthening their telephone etiquette, telephone interviewing and listening skills.

**Goal:** For staff to become more skilled in the art of telephone etiquette, telephone interviewing, and listening skills.

**Objectives:** At the completion of this training, you will better understand:

- The dimensions of telephone etiquette.
- Telephone interviewing techniques.
- Effective listening skills.
- How to safely sit at your work station, positioning of the monitor, proper usage of the mouse and keyboard, etc., to ensure a safe Ergonomics environment.

- Participate in various Workshops to reinforce telephone etiquette, telephone interviewing, and listening skills concepts.

# Our Philosophy

- A can-do-attitude
- Accountability
- Compassion
- Commitment
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Respect for diversity
- Responsiveness

# Guiding Principle

- Appropriately greet each caller.
- Listen carefully and patiently.
- Be responsive to all participants needs.
- Explain procedures clearly.

# Tips For Excellent Customer Service

- Respect
- Self-Determination
- Confidentiality
- Individuality
- Accountability
- Reliability
- You are DPSS



## **Four (4) Basic Participant Service Needs**

- The need to feel **Welcome**
- The need to be **Understood**
- The need to feel **Comfortable**
- The need to feel **Important**

# The Four A's in Meeting a Participant's Needs

- Available
- Accessible
- Acceptable
- Appropriate

*It takes 17 muscles to smile but 43 to frown.*

## **Telephone Etiquette**

Put a smile in your voice. Verbal and non-verbal communications are utilized in telephone conversation. Staff who use the telephone at work are primarily responsible for DPSS customer service reputation.

It is important that you are courteous and professional when speaking to the participant on the phone.

Don't chew gum, eat food, or engage in other conversations or activities while talking on the telephone ( never answer the telephone and let the caller hear you finishing another conversation).

When you speak to someone on the telephone, vocal quality counts for 70% of the initial impression you make, and the words spoken count for 30%. The participant bases his/her opinions of you not only on what you say, but how you say it and the tone of your voice.

# Telephone Etiquette Tips

Use words that convey politeness and professionalism.

- Say “yes” not “yea” or “ah ha.”
- Use “excuse me,” but always wait until your the participant stops talking to continue to speak. “Excuse me, Ms. Johnson.”
- Use “please” and “thank you” when appropriate. “Ms. Samuels, please give me your telephone number?”

## Greeting

Always begin by utilizing the appropriate greeting.

“Good morning, this is the Department of Public Social Services, Ms. Smith speaking. How may I help you?”

“Good morning, my name is Jane Doe calling from the Department of Public Social Services, may I speak to John Public.

# Courtesy

Always use the following words when interacting with the participant:

- Please
- Of course
- Thank you
- You are welcome

These few words can set the tone of the conservation.



# The Six Cardinal Do Not's of Telephone Etiquette

- Do not yell or exhibit irritation
- Do not use sarcasm
- Do not sound depressed
- Do not be argumentative
- Do not use jargon
- Do not give incorrect information

Often unknowingly, employees may make a telephone statement that will leave participant's with negative perceptions. The following are examples of statements that may leave the caller with a less than favorable impression:

- “I’m sorry. Mrs. Moore is still at lunch.”
- “I don’t know where he is. May I take your number and have him call you?”
- “He left for a doctor’s appointment today.”
- “She’s out of the office on medical leave.”
- “She went home early.”
- “I’m sorry; Mrs. Smith has not come in yet.”
- “He is running late.”
- Your eligibility worker went home sick, but may I help you.”

Unfortunately , these statements have been used all too often in business communications and can have a negative impact on the participant.

Remember, everything you say on the telephone influences a participant's perception of you and the Department.

# Telephone Interviewing: An Art and Skill

Interviewing provides a primary means for communication. The definition of an interview is a conversation with a purpose. Establishing a good worker/participant relationship is key.

The major goal of an interview is effective communication with the participant. Interviews make use of communication with participants to obtain

information, verify information, answer questions,  
and provide information.

Demonstrating competence is key to a productive  
interview. Being knowledgeable in your program,  
and planning the interview conveys to the  
participant a sense of organization and purpose.

Knowing your role and where to find information the participant needs also reflects your competence.

The telephone interview should start on time.

Making the participant wait beyond the scheduled time may imply that the participant's time is not important and that you have better things to do.

A timely start conveys common courtesy and respect for the participant. In the event that you are late for whatever reason, an appropriate apology should be made.



# Interviewing Techniques

## Be Prepared

- Review the case before phone interview.
- Request previous case record, if any.
- Prepare a list of documents needed.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask participant.
- Review case summary documents.

# Interviewing Skills

- Know your role as an Eligibility Worker.
- Introduce yourself by using your title and name of your office.
- Verify that it is the participant to whom you are speaking.
- Establish if it's a convenient time for you to speak with the participant.

# Ending the Call - Summarize

Summarizing is repeating back to the participant what has just been discussed during the interview.

Confirm any necessary future action with the participant. Thoroughly, explain what type of action will be taken.

There are policies and procedures that must be followed when providing services to non-English, or hearing impaired participants. The Department has established policies in place to follow when a request for an interpreter is made or the participant is hearing impaired.

In the event your participant is hearing impaired you can access the TTY/TTD system at (1-800-735-2922).

# Listening Skills

Good listening habits are created through experience, training, and practice. Though people often like to blame listening mistakes on an individual's intelligence, this is not the real cause. Good hearing doesn't necessarily lead to good listening.

Hearing is the first step in listening. It's the physical activity involving sound waves striking the eardrum, setting a complex hearing process into action.

Listening on the other hand is a mental activity. Comments such as “I have trouble hearing what people say in a crowded room” and “The room was too noisy” generally refer to outside interferences.

Comments such as “I wasn’t interested” or “I was thinking about something else” are mental blocks to effective listening. Both outside interferences and mental blocks are equally important to optimal communication.

# Listening Should Be Active Not Passive

Active effective listening demands a great deal of energy. Imagine yourself listening to an important event or your favorite radio station. You may visualize the location and the people involved, become strongly interested in the broadcast and hang on passionately to each of the announcer's comments. You become interested because you care about the event.



We can get involved in any listening situation when we choose to become an active listener.

This means not only absorbing the words spoken, but also listening for “word pictures.” These include an individual’s tone of voice and emotions.

# Ignore Distractions

When someone says they're not a good listener, what they really mean is, "I have not discipline myself to concentrate on the person speaking."

To really listen, you must consciously decide that what this person is saying is more important than anything else right now.

There will always be competing factors for your attention. If you determine that the person speaking is your top priority, then discard any intruding thoughts by saying, “I’ll think about that later (after this discussion is over, but not during).” If you think of something you want to say or something you need to complete, write it down so you will not have divided attention.

# Exercise 1

## Listening Skills

# Formulate Necessary Questions

When you listen to new information, it's important that you ask both open and closed-ended questions to make sure you understand what the speaker is trying to say.

If the participant's statements are unclear, you should ask the participant to explain or repeat the information.

Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple Yes or No. Use Open-ended questions when you want the participant to explain or discuss something. Open-ended questions begin with the words, **Why, When, Who, What, Where, and How.**

## Examples of Open-ended questions:

How long have you lived at this address?

What are your concerns?

Where can you be contacted by telephone?

Closed-ended questions should be used when all you need is a Yes or No answer.

Examples of closed-ended questions:

Did you receive the application?

Will you be able to attend the appointment?



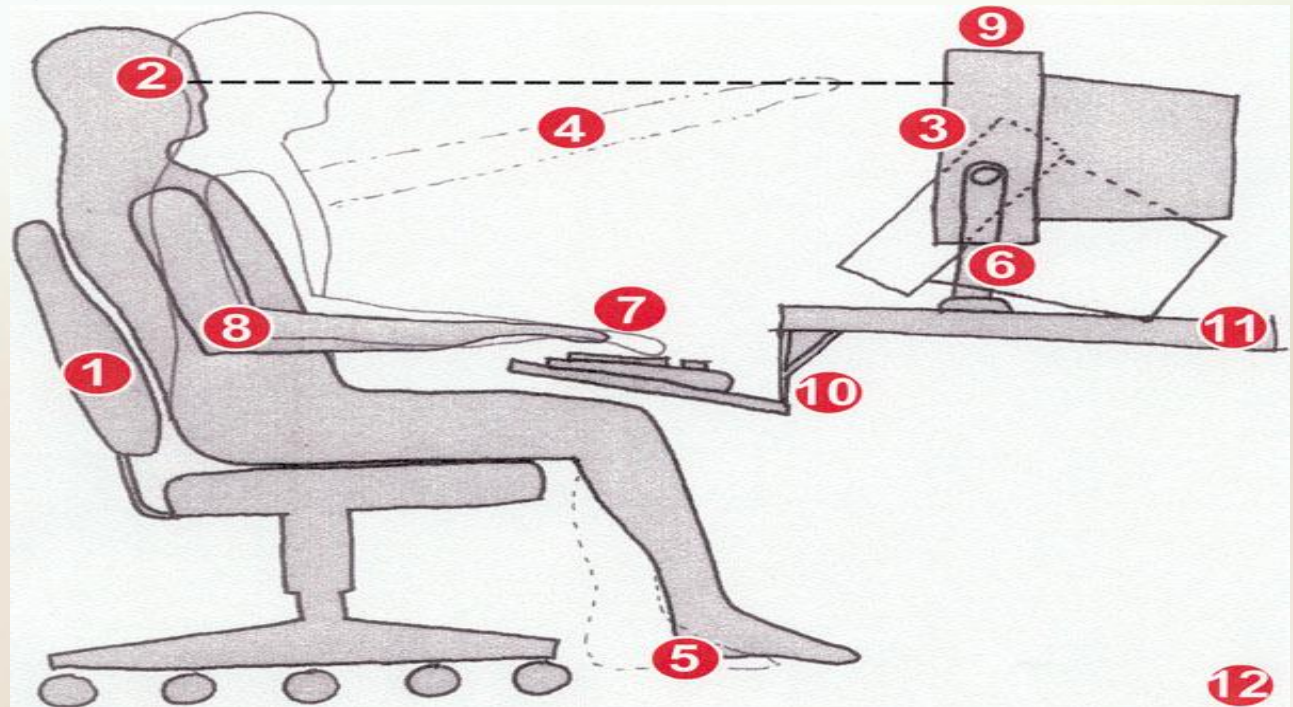
# Exercise 2

## Open & Closed-Ended Questions

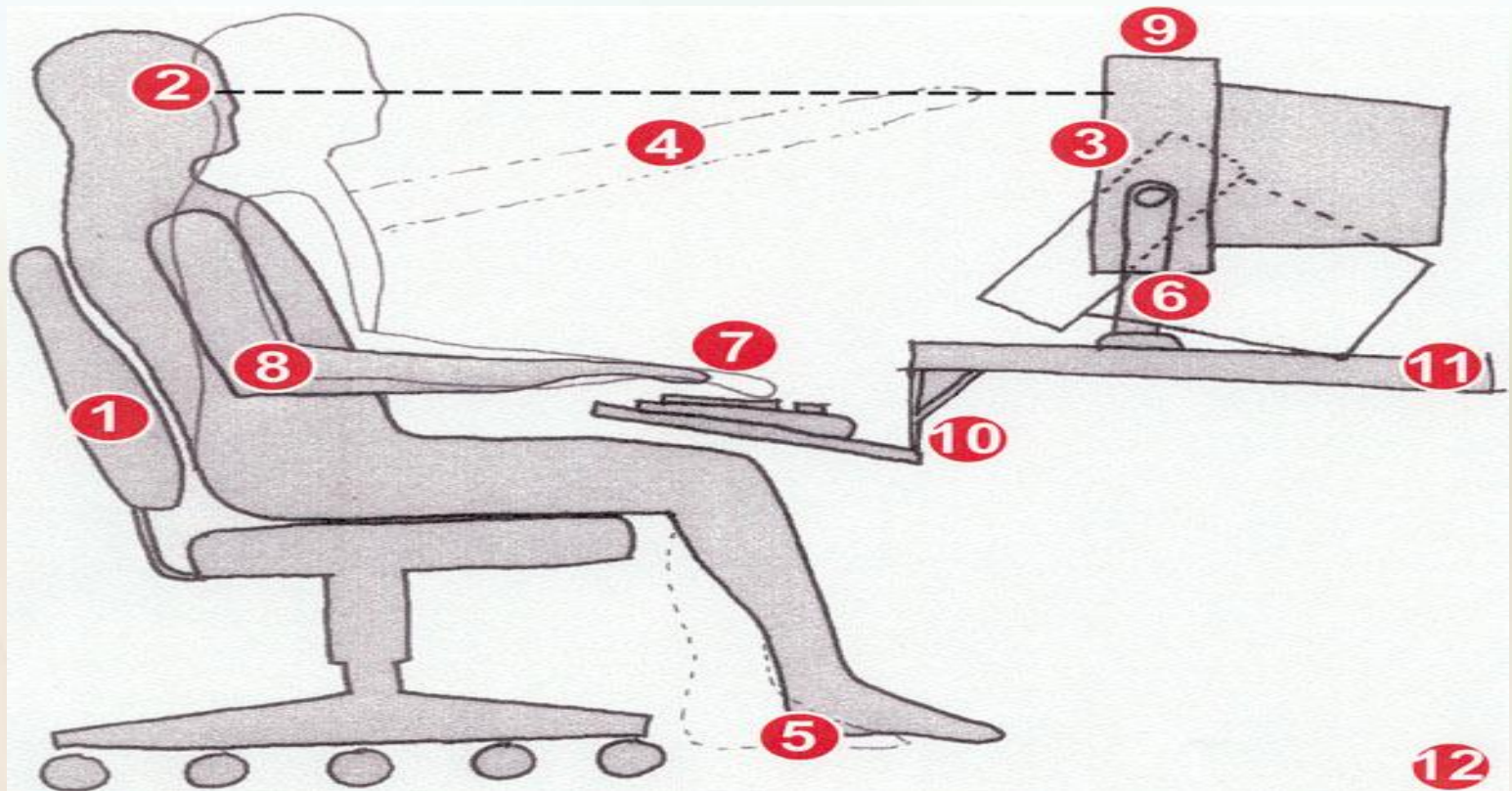
# Ergonomic Work Station

The word ergonomics comes from the Greek words Ergos (**work**) and Nomos (**natural law/system**). It is the application of scientific knowledge to improve the well-being (safety) and efficiency of both the individual and the organization.

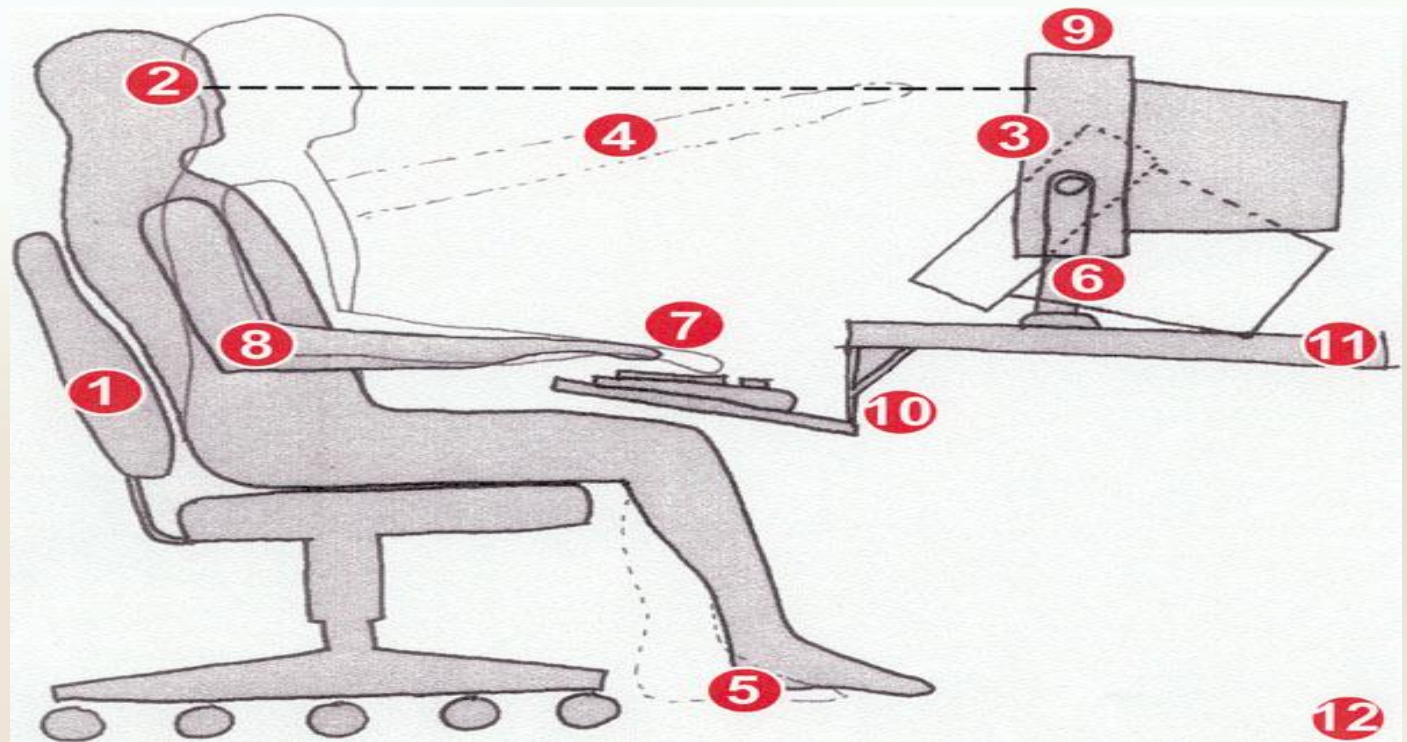
1. Use a good chair with a dynamic chair back.
2. Top of monitor casing 2-3” (5-8cm) above eye level.
3. No glare on screen, use an optical glass anti-glare where needed.



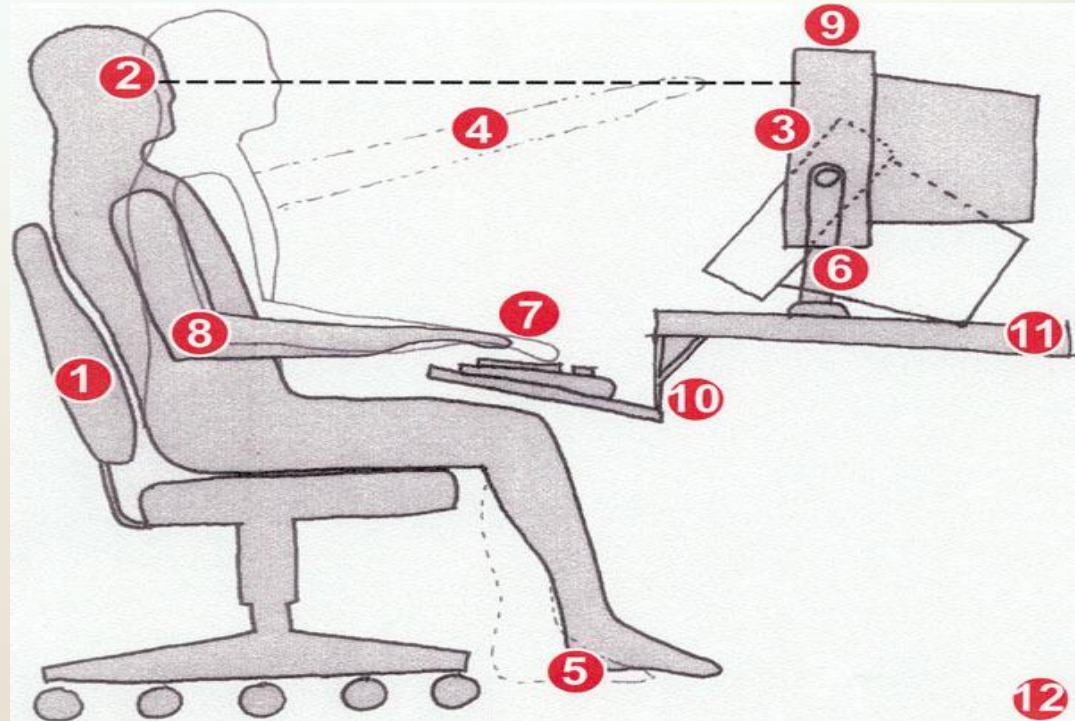
4. Sit at arms length from monitor.
5. Feet on the floor or stable footrest.
6. Use a document holder, preferably in-line with the computer screen



7. Wrists should be flat and straight in relation to forearms to use keyboard/mouse/input device.
8. Arms and elbow relaxed close to body.
9. Center monitor and keyboard in front of you.



10. Use a negative tilt keyboard tray with an upper mouse platform or downward tilt keyboard tray with an upper mouse platform adjacent to the keyboard.
11. Use a stable work surface and stable (no bounce) keyboard tray.
12. Take frequent breaks.



# Thank You

We would like to thank you for your time, patience, and attention.

# Questions & Answers

