

Communication skills for safety briefings and toolbox talks



Seven steps > Step 4 > Further tools

Safety briefings are a useful way to keep health and safety forefront in the minds of your workers and make them aware of current risks and hazards. Daily safety briefings by supervisors to all workers help to foster a good health and safety culture.

Toolbox talks allow you and your workers to explore the risks of specific health and safety issues on your site, and think about ways to deal with them. Toolbox talks should focus on a single topic and be held regularly for greatest impact.

How can I communicate effectively?

- **First impressions count.** Show enthusiasm, and deliver a clear message about the importance of health and safety standards on site.
- **Know your audience.** If English is not your workers' first language then think carefully about how to get your message across.
- **Keep it simple and be consistent with your messages!** Use short, straightforward, simple words and phrases. Avoid slang words or jargon.
- **Demonstrate respect.** Listen to what your workers have to say, and show you are listening through your body language.
- **Think about the tone of your voice.** Workers are more likely to listen if you vary the tone of your voice.
- **Think about the pace of your delivery.** It's natural to rush when you are nervous. Take the time to slow down.
- **Use open questions to check understanding.** Ask your listeners to run through their understanding of what you have said. If you ask 'Do you understand?' people tend to say 'yes' even when they mean 'no'.
- **Some people may need more explanation than others.** Give yourself plenty of time. If you rush you may come across as impatient or not interested and listeners may not feel able to ask you any questions.
- **Keep it positive!** Focus on what workers can do to create a healthy and safe working environment instead of what can go wrong.

How should I deliver safety briefings?

- Most peoples' attention span is limited. Briefings should be exactly that – BRIEF.
- Prepare key points to put over, and focus on delivering them well. Repeat the main points at the beginning and end of the talk.
- Most people will only remember 25%-50% of what you said, so you may need to think about briefing cards or putting the key points from the safety briefings on the notice board. If you want your listeners to remember more than about five points, give them a prompt list to go away with.
- Promote the **SLAM** technique (see *Step 6 > Further tools*).

How should I deliver toolbox talks?

- Explain why you are having a toolbox talk in a way that will help your workers relate to the topic you want to cover.
- Prepare what you are going to talk about and any materials that you are going to use. The HSE website has a number of free materials including downloads.
- You may find it helpful to include a laptop or DVD player, employee pocket cards and leaflets, or a flip chart and a pen.
- Get feedback on the impact, messaging and content of the toolbox talk. Ask workers what they thought about it, perhaps design a short feedback form. Consider asking another supervisor or manager to observe one of your talks.



Act on feedback

If your audience tell you they are confused about something, or you failed to catch their attention, use this to help you see what you can do differently.

In every toolbox talk or safety briefing, remember it is important to make sure your workers know that if at any time they consider they are working in an unsafe way, that puts themselves or others at risk, they can **STOP, report and seek advice!**

There is more information on what to cover in a toolbox talk or safety briefing in *Training Pack 2* (see *Step 4 > Further tools*).

The Leadership and Worker Involvement toolkit is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business performance and productivity.