

Talk to Me Principles:

Supporting you to engage all older people in physical activity

Activity Alliance developed the Talk to Me principles based on research with disabled people. It also involved a mix of people who provide or deliver activity to disabled people. The principles support sporting providers to engage more disabled people, but if applied effectively, are also relevant to all audiences.

Through the Get Out Get Active (GOGA) programme we are testing these principles and understanding how to apply them for different audience groups e.g. women, younger people etc.

Working in partnership with Age UK we have developed the following information to share practical ideas, insight and better practice in engaging older people in activity. It is gathered from learning through GOGA and additional insight where available, further information can be found later in this resource.

It's important to think about your work with people, not just the activities. Find out what people are interested in, reconnect them to something they used to enjoy, or give them the opportunity to develop a new interest!

“The GOGA sessions have really helped me improve how I feel – I’m less achy, have less pain and can breathe better. I have also made new friends and feel happier in myself!”

Kate, Manchester GOGA participant



1. Use the channels I already trust

Use trusted channels to promote your activities. If you target your audiences through their preferred channels, it will save you time and money.

Think about where you place your posters, advertising and what calls to action you have for the participants.

Things to consider:

- Many older people use traditional communication channels to find out about activities e.g. printed newspapers, radio and television. You should also look at ways to maximise word of mouth and some social media sites (Facebook in particular), posters and

adverts. Key influencers may be health professionals, family and/or friends.

- Aim to reach a variety of people with a variety of interests. Here are some of the ways Age UK has reached people to take part in health and wellbeing projects:

Local Age UK groups, Fire and Rescue Services, Falls Pathway Group, Public Health, Cardiac Rehab hospital team, Local council, GPs, Dentists, Local leisure services, Dementia care unit, Alzheimer's society, Sheltered housing units, Physiotherapists, Macmillan Cancer Support, self/ family referrals, local faith groups, village halls, dial a ride services libraries and many more!

2. Stay local to me

Travelling to get to activities can be a significant barrier for many people. Local activities increase the chances of someone attending regularly.

Things to consider:

- Having an activity directory for your area.
- If there is a group of people interested in a particular activity, investigate taking the class to them. For example at the local day centre.
- Look into local transport options. Depending on how far the activity is from the older person's location, investigate a route planner and relevant costs. Is there any information on best routes you can provide alongside the activity description?

- Is it possible to travel with someone else in the area? Is a shared taxi a cheaper travel option? Could this be a role that a volunteer or community champion could play in supporting older participants?
- Look at the following website for local activities- www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/exercise.

Also, how could you add value to opportunities or avoid duplicating activities already out there?



3. See me as an individual

Many people do not identify with being disabled or old and are put off by advertising that focuses on disability.

It can be tricky to ask everyone involved what their preference is in your promotions, but mixing up the language can help. Ask the person what they would like. Don't assume that you know what they need or want! Focus on fun, enjoyment and what someone can do rather than what they can't. Demonstrate trust, understanding and care.

- When recruiting new participants consider the language you use and the materials you distribute. It's important to reinforce clear messages and remember accessibility, especially for people who may have language barriers.
- Develop approaches to reinforce messages about 'what counts' and 'how much' physical activity is needed to feel the health benefits. It could include raising awareness by 'doing' (e.g. providing opportunities for older people to participate in different types of activity) or providing guidance on how to incorporate physical activity into everyday living.
- Make sure the language is dementia friendly (no columns of text, or pictures that interrupt the text). For further information on this, please visit these helpful pages- [Guide Writing dementia friendly information](#)

Things to consider:

- Find out what kind of activities people used to enjoy when they were younger.
- Ask if there is an activity they have always been interested in but have not managed to do yet.
- Does the older person want to be with a similar age group or do they really want to meet younger people? Intergenerational activity is a fantastic way of engaging all of the family. It's important not to assume that older people will just want to be active with other older people.
- Instead of focusing on disability in the main headlines, focus on other values or key selling points. You can promote how inclusive and accessible the activity is in other ways without using disability words. For example, accessible toilets on site, café has large print menus, centre has hearing loop.

“After only 10 mins of playing (table tennis) Jean had improved her speed and coordination. When she was younger she remembered playing with her brothers and had fond memories, she now tries to play every day”

Jean, GOGA participant, Nottingham



4. Talk to as many of my values as possible



As part of your first contact, it is important to establish what someone's values and motivations are. You will have better engagement if you show this understanding when delivering activities.

Things to consider:

- Get to know your audience and understand what they are interested in. What existing commitments do they have and how does being active fit into their lives?
- The Talk to Me research showed the following values to be very important across all demographic groups. They were: friendships and connections, my health, progressing in life, mental strength and well-being, having fun and feeling free and family and support systems.

How could you connect your activities to these values?

- School holidays - many older people are carers for grandchildren and cannot attend non-intergenerational activities during school holidays.

"I hate sport, don't expect me to get involved in anything"

Quote taken from a Sporting Memories GOGA participant in Wandsworth who now takes part in the whole session and loves it!



5. Continue to fulfil my values in new ways:

Be aware and sensitive to people's life story. Things may change during the course of someone's life. Changes in ability, ill health, bereavement and or loss (for example income, hearing or independence). Tell people if there is a new type of activity that they can attend. Think about the channels principle- keep communications open and involve them in your programme design.

Things to consider:

- Ask people what they used to do when they were younger – what music did they like dancing to? How can you incorporate this within your

activities? Be thoughtful as people's past memories may not always be positive.

- Many people may have taken part in activities that they may not recall as exercise. Work out what appeals to your audience at that point in time.
- Keep communications open. How they are doing? What changes might you need to make?

6. Reassure me I'm going to fit in:

Some older people fear standing out. They need to feel welcomed and reassured that their ability and age will not be a barrier to taking part. You should offer additional support to participants attending their first session, including practical information and help to access the session and the facilities.

Things to consider:

- Make activities accessible to all. Having mixed abilities taking part in an opportunity is useful.
- Would they like a mentor or support buddy?

Below are some questions an older person may have when thinking about taking part. It would be a great idea to have the answers to these to hand.

- What is the activity and what might I be doing?

- How am I going to get there or what bus can I take?
- Does it have good access or accessible toilets for people like me (regardless of ability or impairment)?
- Are there refreshments?
- What is the cost?
- What do I wear?
- When does the activity start and finish?
- Who do I ask for when I get there?
- Is there a contact I can ring if I can't find it or what happens to my place if I can't make it?

It's important to discuss the above points before the activity starts to make the older person feel confident and positive about attending a new opportunity.



7. Make me feel I can do it:

Make everyone feel positive after attending and taking part. Acknowledge the effort it takes people to get to the class especially if it's a long way, and/or bad weather.

Things to consider:

- Ring or text people the night before the activity to check they are going to attend.
- Develop a buddy system to help and reassure new members of the group.
- Consider having a course leader that reflects the makeup of the class. For example if it is a women-only swimming session, then it would be a good idea to have a woman delivering the session.

- Once they are shown how to do particular exercises or classes, give individuals the autonomy to do it themselves.

“Within the community the ladies have got something more in common now than what they did before.”

**Ruth Pickthorn- GOGA Ladies Only
Walking Netball coach**

8. Make it easy for me to tell you my needs:

It is better to promote a culture where people can talk and are listened to. Promote this by encouraging participants to share session ownership and shape them for the better.

Things to consider:

- Have a safe, private space for older people to talk to you about matters that may concern them.
- Be considerate of people's routine. Study the local community's demographics, and ask people when is a good time for you to attend a class. For example, some older people will not leave the house after a certain time of night.

They may not feel safe getting home once its dark outside. Or they have a long-standing appointment on a certain day of the week, which they don't want to change.

- Consider asking people how they are finding transport links (getting there) and social aspects (any friendships groups). How are they feeling after attending the sessions. How might they improve it further?
- Checking in with older people informally after the first, third and fifth sessions to find out if they are enjoying the activity.



9. Ensure my first experience is good

Make sure that the first session is a welcoming and warm experience. This will encourage people to return.

Things to consider:

- First impressions are so important. If there isn't a receptionist, consider having a greeter, who can welcome people. They could help in explaining the facilities or showing them around.
- Make sure the facilitator knows people's names and has the right leadership skills to build trust with the group.
- Make it social, finish a session with refreshments and a chance to chat. For some people this will be a huge motivation to attend.
- Ask the older person if they want to bring a family member along to the session.
- Think about how the session can be adapted slightly to meet their needs or abilities.

- Perhaps people who have attended the sessions themselves could act as volunteers. Think about various roles they could have in the sessions.

"I am writing to thank you for all your help in demonstrating the various models of bikes and trikes. I have now purchased a tricycle and look forward to years of pleasure. Thank you again, Douglas"

GOGA Participant, Forth Valley



10. Encourage me through existing advocates:

Engage older people who are already involved in your activity. They can help to promote it to other older people.

Things to consider:

- Ask older people to promote the benefits of being active to others. Could these individuals be your next community champions?
- Suggest they 'bring a friend' and encourage new members to the group. Are there any incentives that you could introduce?
- Ask attendees for suggestions for improvement



“Throughout our GOGA programme there have been many people that have not only engaged in the our activities as participants but also as advocates for the programme. These ‘community champions’ play a pivotal role in sharing their experiences, publicising our activities in other peer groups and encouraging participants to stay involved.

One such champion is Heather aged 74 from Tandragee who currently attends two GOGA sessions per week. Heather has experienced a number of health complications in recent years which has motivated her to become more active more often. Six months ago she had heart surgery and attributes her ability to get through the operation and her quick recovery to her improved fitness level. Upon taking part in our GOGA Nordic Walk programme she is now an avid Nordic walker out every day. Heather is also a very sociable person and is extremely welcoming to any new participants. She is involved in a lot of peer groups where she is constantly spreading the word on our activities and the importance to stay active. Heather is the perfect individual to show others of a similar age how beneficial being active is.”

Ryan McQuillan, GOGA lead for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon



Further Information:

We hope you've found these ideas useful. Please share with us how you engage older people in the community to be more active.

Useful links:

- [Age UK](#)
- [Activity Alliance](#)
- [Get Out Get Active](#)
- [Talk to Me principles](#)
- [Inclusive communications guide](#)
- [Older people engagement in physical activity and sport](#)

For further resources, please contact:

Age UK

- ✉ fitasafiddle@ageuk.org.uk
- ☎ 0800 055 6112

Activity Alliance

- ✉ info@activityalliance.org.uk
- ☎ 01509 227750

Get Out Get Active

- ✉ goga@activityalliance.org.uk
- ☎ 01509 227750

#GetOutGetActive

