

# Some Top Tips

## Keep your head up and be at the person's level

Talk to the person – not their support worker. Gain their attention, by saying their name, so the person knows you are talking to them. Give them your full attention so you can judge whether they understand. Make sure the person can see you clearly and can see your hands and mouth in case they use lip reading or gestures to help them.

## Speak clearly and use easy everyday words and sentences

People with learning disabilities have difficulties understanding spoken language. It is easy to overestimate their understanding and make language too complicated, placing too many demands on a person, who may then withdraw, use behaviour that challenges, or fail to do what is asked. Speak slowly, clearly and use everyday vocabulary.

## Take time

Give enough time for the person to listen, process, understand and think of an answer. Some people with learning disabilities take longer to process what you are saying. Others may find physical movement or speech effortful, so it takes them longer to respond. Remember many people with learning disabilities have unidentified health needs that may affect their communication.

## Give information a bit at a time

Use short sentences. Two or three key words in a sentence is often enough. Do not give large amounts of information at once. Break this into smaller chunks and give time for people to listen and understand.

## Do not ask too many questions

People with learning disabilities find questions hard. Try and get them to tell you things. If you ask lots of yes/no questions, they will probably answer you but not necessarily understand what you said.

## Check out understanding

People with learning disabilities may appear to understand because they are good at responding to facial expression, body language, tone of voice or other cues. They may misunderstand, forget or not catch some of what you say. They may answer "yes" even if they do not fully understand. They may not be able to contradict you if you have misunderstood them. They may not let you know they don't understand. Recap all information you have given. Summarise and write it down if that will help.

## Use visual clues so the person can see and hear what you are talking about

Supporting your spoken language using visual cues such as images and gestures is very important. This means drawing what you are talking about, pointing to what you are discussing or show objects and where possible demonstrate how they work. People with learning disabilities like to use other ways to help them understand spoken language. Visual cues may increase the person's chance of understanding what you are saying to them.

## Interactive Approaches

Interactive approaches are a way of developing and building relationships with people with a learning disability. An interactive approach helps us to make sense of the individual by acknowledging and respecting differences, whilst building on shared interactions which are led by the person. Within this style of interaction it is the supporting partner that (consciously or not) makes changes to their interaction pattern and the interaction is shared and non directive.

## Talking Mats™

A Talking Mat is an interactive resource that uses pictures, symbols, photos or words to help people with communication difficulties give their views and express their opinion.

It provides a visual representation of someone's views and a permanent record can be kept by taking a photo of your discussion. Talking mats are also useful for people who appear to be very able verbally but find it hard to integrate lots of ideas. They help to act as a thinking tool.

## Easier Read or Accessible information

Easier read information involves the use of images together with simple wording. It is a statutory requirement for services to make information accessible. It is vital to consider what and how much information an individual or population needs and then how they can be supported to benefit from this information. Good easier read information needs to be well planned, laid out clearly, use simple fonts and easy language and include carefully selected images that add information. It is not possible to produce one resource to meet everyone's communication needs - what counts as accessible for one person, will not for many others. To achieve any degree of person-centeredness support will be required to enable people to understand.

## Good Communication Strategy for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

Eight standards for good communication have been agreed locally with our partners across Health and Social Care. This means people should take account of individuals' communication, include them in appropriate ways, and provide opportunities to learn about communication for everyone.

## Ask for help – there is no substitute for knowing a person well

- Check that you have understood. Help the person to tell you if you have misunderstood them. Don't pretend you can understand if you really can't!
- If you continue to have difficulty communicating with the person, talk to others who know them well.

- Contact the Specialist Speech and Language Therapy service for people with learning disabilities, via the Community Learning Disability Teams or Nottinghamshire Healthcare's Learning Disability Service.

- The Specialist Speech and Language Therapy service will be able to help you with questions and further information about all these communication resources, the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Good Communication Strategy and about locally provided learning and development opportunities around communication. They will also advise on individuals and whether a referral for assessment and/or intervention around speech, language and communication needs would be appropriate.

- For further information contact SLT-training@nottshc.nhs.uk

# Getting Involved



# Inclusive Communication

Getting Started

People with learning disabilities use a range of means to express themselves and each person may have a unique way of communicating. Some speak but may not be able to use complex language. Some use non verbal communication such as pointing at pictures, gestures, signs, objects, symbols or communication aids (such as voice output devices). Some people prefer symbols, others colour photos. Some may use informal communication such as facial expression, eye gaze or body language.

# Understanding

- Up to 90% of people with learning disabilities have communication difficulties
- Around half have significant difficulties with both expressing themselves and understanding what others say
- Less than 10% of people with learning disabilities are able to read and write
- Up to 40% of people with learning disabilities have a hearing loss that is often missed and undiagnosed
- People with Autism have lifelong communication impairments around social communication, social interaction and social imagination
- As communication difficulties increase, behaviours that are considered challenging typically increase in frequency, intensity or duration
- Over two thirds of young offenders have speech, language and communication difficulties

We all need to make reasonable adjustments to our communication to maximise engagement, involvement and inclusion for people with learning disabilities – **Inclusive Communication** is the best way to achieve this.

Inclusive Communication means:

- Sharing information in a way that everybody can understand
- Being aware and valuing all the different ways a person may use to communicate, supporting them to make choices and express themselves
- Involving people in the world around them, from positive everyday relationships to wider opportunities for engagement

Without Inclusive Communication, people with speech, language and communication difficulties face several risks around being misunderstood, failing and being excluded from events, activities and relationships. This leaflet provides top tips and information about different resources and technologies that can be used to promote and support:

- Better understanding
- Different ways of communicating
- Being engaged and involved

There are many ways of getting a message across. It is important that you respect a person's way of communicating by using it with them e.g. if they sign make sure you can or that there is someone with them who can. If they have a communication book/aids make sure it is available and use it to give information. These are some commonly used resources to get you started ...

# Different ways of communicating

## Drawings, symbols, photos and pictures

Visual images add information. They are permanent and concrete in comparison with spoken language that is transient and over very quickly. However using the right image the right way is very important.

## Drawings

Drawings can be individualised, for familiar buildings or places. However they can be too general or too busy with too much detail. Some drawings still depend on written words included in the drawing to get their message across.

## Symbols

Symbols can be clear, simple and easily recognisable for concrete words. Some symbol sets use 'themes' to aid understanding. Some symbols are more pictorial, others too literal, or complex and dependent on the written word – these can only be used if the person is familiar with them. For consistency in Nottinghamshire we recommend the use of Somerset Total Communication symbols first.

## Photos

Photos can be best for helping a person understand and recognise people or places. But a photo can have too much information, and be distracting – especially if it is in colour when everything else is in black and white.

Images may be used on their own, grouped together in categories or to sequence events. They can support a person to understand what is about to happen or what is available to do. They can be used to request things, events or people. Images can be touched, taken, given, looked at or pointed to and used on individual cards, "All about me" or Chat books, photo albums, instructions or visual schedules.

Visual schedules are used to support verbal or written information about activities and routines. They support people with difficulties with reading, understanding language and/or memory understand what is happening "now" and "next".

All About Me books or DVDs provide personalised practical information about a person with communication difficulties who is unable to 'tell their own story'. They can help build relationships with peers and staff, and support conversations. Information is collated by the person and those who know them well.

## Narrative or story telling approaches

Social or sensitive stories describe social situations that are difficult and/or confusing for a person. They can help people identify relevant social cues, understand, and respond appropriately to specific social situations. Social Stories can be written to describe an upcoming event or situation.

Comic Strip Conversations provide visual representations of the different levels of communication that take place in a conversation, using symbols, stick figure drawings and colour. By seeing the different elements of a conversation visually presented, some of the abstract aspects of social communication (e.g. recognising the feelings and intentions of others) are made more concrete and are therefore easier to understand.

'Making Sense' stories or multi-sensory stories aim to combine the pleasure of engaging with a story and facilitating basic interaction skills without the need to understand spoken language. These are personalised around the individual's interests, activities and routines.

## Communication Passports or Dictionaries

Communication Passports are a practical and person-centred way of supporting people who cannot easily speak for themselves. Communication Passports gather, share and make explicit information about the person and their communication, gained from family and friends who know them best. They are rich and detailed; providing a view of the person in different settings. They aim to enable less familiar people to recognise and make sense of potentially communicative behaviour and facilitate others to understand the person and have successful interactions. A Communication Passport may be card, web based, paper or DVD.

## Objects of Reference

Objects of reference are objects used to communicate, often with people with additional visual or sensory difficulties. At the simplest level they may be usual everyday objects or objects with special meanings attached. The objects can be seen, held and felt, and used to represent activities, events, people and places. If consistently used, objects can progress through to less concrete and more abstract symbolic representation used to signal specific information, support understanding of what is about to happen or give someone a way of telling you something.

## Signing

Everyone uses natural gestures to support and complement our conversations. Signs are essentially hand gestures used in an agreed way to communicate words. Signs from British Sign Language (BSL) have been used in several vocabularies specifically developed for people with learning disabilities (e.g. Signalong or Makaton). Signs are used to support one or two key messages in a spoken sentence. A sign provides a visual cue alongside the spoken word which can support understanding of both basic concepts and abstract ideas, as well as supporting hearing, focusing attention and enabling memory for longer sequences. Signs also provide a way of communicating for some people with limited or no speech, or can be used to support people whose speech is largely unintelligible with unfamiliar people.

For signing to be successful everyone needs to use it! Organisations need to develop a signing culture, facilitating understanding and modelling use throughout the day.

