

Barnet Learning Disabilities Service
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Best Practice Communication Guidelines for Interacting with Adults with Learning Disabilities

Up to 90% of people with a learning disability have a communication difficulty. There are some easy things you can do in your everyday communication to help someone with a learning disability. Following these guidelines can help someone with a learning disability to understand more of what you're saying and help them express themselves:

Environment:



- ✓ Make sure you're at the same physical level as the person.
- ✓ Reduce distractions in the environment as much as you can, especially for important conversations.

Support Understanding:



- ✓ Allow plenty of time for the person to understand and respond. It's important to be prepared to wait much longer than you do normally do in conversations.
- ✓ Take into account the knowledge, skills and experience of the person with learning disabilities.



- ✓ Ideas or information should be presented in the order in which they are going to happen or have happened.
- ✓ Use visual supports such as photographs, objects or symbols. Check which of these the person understands best. These are especially important when you talk about something abstract or out of context.



- ✓ Support what you say with keyword signing or gestures.
- ✓ Your facial expression and tone of voice should match the emotions you are discussing.



- ✓ Talk about one idea or key piece of information at a time.
- ✓ Use short sentences and stress the key words. Keep the number of information carrying words (key words) in your sentence to a minimum.



- ✓ Make it clear you have finished discussing a topic before introducing any new ideas.
- ✓ Talk about what is going to happen rather than what isn't going to happen.



- ✓ Talk about time by referring to regularly occurring activities such as swimming, college, church or mealtimes or major celebrations such as birthdays or Christmas. If you have to use time remember to use the numbers not words e.g. 10:00 am rather than ten o'clock.

Use Clear Language:



- ✓ Use easy to understand words e.g. use 'house' instead of accommodation.
- ✓ Be clear and avoid using figurative language, metaphors or idioms e.g. Say "stand on the scales" not "Hop on the scales". Say "That jacket is expensive" not "It'll cost an arm and a leg".
- ✓ Avoid using negatives e.g. can't, don't, won't. Say "The appointment is at 10.00 am" rather than "don't come before 10.00am."



- ✓ Use the actual names of objects or activities and talk about people using their names or their job; avoid using words like 'he', 'she' and 'it' (pronouns).
E.g. say, "The Nurse will do your blood test. The Nurse will take your blood at 10.00am" rather than "She will take your blood. She will do it at 10.00am".

Please contact Speech and Language Therapy on 020 8359 6161 if you:



- Have any questions about these guidelines or need help following the strategies.
- Would like to know more about how Speech and Language Therapy can help communication between you and the person you support.

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