



10 tips for Health Professionals for communicating with people with a Learning Disability (LD)

1 Talk to the person first (not their family/support worker)

- Get their attention – and give them yours. Try not to look at notes or your computer screen while you are talking to them
- Be at the person's level, make sure they can see your hands and face clearly, as they will use gestures or facial expression to help them understand.

2 Speak clearly and use easy everyday words and sentences

- Don't make language complicated or use medical jargon or abbreviations.
- You may have to use the person's own vocabulary for body parts or procedures and go at the pace they set. Look in their **Purple Folder** for any communication tips

3 Take time

- Give the person time to listen to and process what you say, as people with LD need longer processing time.
- Many people with LD have other needs that may impact on their communication, for example physical disabilities, sensory impairments, epilepsy, pain, or side-effects of medications.

4 Use visual cues to support understanding

- Use all support available to you to back up what you are explaining. This could mean pointing to items, showing objects, photos, or pictures, or using internet videos as examples. www.easyhealth.org.uk also contains some useful easy read resources you can download or use.
- Seek advice from your Learning Disability Link nurse if communication is a barrier to their understanding and accepting treatment.

5 Give information a bit at a time

- Use short sentences – Give one or two pieces of information at a time.
- Break large pieces of information into smaller chunks and give time for people to listen and understand.

6 Get to know how the person chooses to communicate

- If you know a person has communication needs, try and find out **before** your appointment how to support them. Make sure this is flagged on your systems to help other health professionals who may see them. [requirement under the Accessible Information Standard]
- If they use an alternative method of communication, they will probably carry something that can help you (such as a My Purple Folder), or may be accompanied by a someone who can help.

7 Do not ask too many questions

- Questions are hard as they require listening, processing, planning and responses from the person. If you ask lots of yes/no questions, they may answer you but may not have understand what you said so give false information
- Try to ask open ended questions, or encourage the person to tell you what they need to in their own way.

8 Check the person has understood you

- Do not ask 'do you understand?' as people may respond 'yes' but this may not necessarily be accurate.
- Ask them to tell you what you have said so you can gauge their understanding and reiterate the parts they miss.
- Summaries the information and try to provide it to them in an accessible format.

9 Make sure the environment is communication friendly

- Ensure the room you are in is free from preventable distractions / anxiety provokers and adapt wherever possible e.g. noisy clock, noisy waiting room, flickering light or computer screen, medical equipment that isn't relevant to their appointment. Remember someone with an LD may not be able to use previous experiences to filter out what is not relevant, so may become unnecessarily panicked about things that don't relate to their health appointment.

10 Ask for help- there is no substitute for knowing a person well

- Check that **you** have understood fully and Don't pretend you can understand if you really don't!
- Make sure you know the persons baseline level of ability and communication to be able to understand how dramatic changes are and avoid delayed diagnoses
- Seek help from the people who know them well or your LD Link Nurse.