

## LPE Cognitive and neurological disabilities – Communication tips

### General communication

- Treat adults like adults
- Look at and talk directly to the person, not through a support worker or companion
- Don't make assumptions about the impact of a disability on a person, especially on the basis of appearance or behaviour
- Ask questions to check understanding if you are unsure, especially for important information
- Facial gestures and expressions may help people understand you
- If someone has speech problems, give them your whole attention. Be patient. Do not correct or speak for the person. Resist the temptation to finish their sentence
- If you have difficulty understanding, don't pretend. Repeat what you do understand and let the person's reaction guide you.

### General communication with people assessed with intellectual disability

- Use relaxed body language
- Consider what your body language is communicating. Body language can be quite informative to some people who may have difficulty understanding complicated concepts.
- Keep it simple. Use short sentences, simple language and no jargon
- One idea and question at a time
- Slow down - take more time, allow the information to soak in, repeat if helpful
- Expect an answer but be prepared to wait. With some people you may need to wait an uncomfortable length of time to make sure there has been time for the person to process the information and develop an answer
- Try not to interrupt. Don't finish the person's sentences
- Abstract concepts and thinking are difficult, so be as concrete as possible. For example, time may be a difficult concept so connect your question to something meaningful to the person – 'Was it before or after dinner/Christmas/your birthday?', 'What was on television at the time?'
- Clearly sign post changes in the topic to avoid confusion – 'OK, that's all I need to know about that. Now can we talk about...'
- Ask open questions and encourage free recall – let the person tell their story
- Reinforce the important messages.

### General communication with people with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Try to...	Avoid...
Use direct, simple, clear and precise language and less sophisticated vocabulary	Sophisticated vocabulary, sarcasm, idioms, metaphors and non-literal language
Present only one idea per sentence	Long sentences with multiple clauses, complex grammatical constructions and multiple ideas
Be specific about what you're referring to	Pronouns, which can be confusing – ie. I, me, mine, you, she, him, hers, etc

Provide clear, objective explanations of concepts	Deictic words, whose meaning changes depending on the context (such as waive/wave) or that point to the time, place or situation in which the speaker is speaking – ie. This, that, these, those, now, then, 'What we've got <i>here</i> ...'
Use full sentences that contain all the information the person needs in order to understand what is being spoken about	Talking around the topic or giving numerous examples
State the concept or bottom line clearly	Making predictions or promises you can't keep
Create only one stream of sensory information at a time.	Presenting verbal and visual information simultaneously.