

Communication Tips

Hi, I am Alex



Hi, I am Ella



We both work at the Council for Intellectual Disability (CID).



Here are our **communication tips** for people spending time with people with intellectual disability.

These tips are meant as a guide, everyone is unique. We're the best person to tell you about how we need you to communicate with us. Just ask, we will appreciate it.

The term intellectual disability is used to describe a reduced ability to understand and process new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills.

Remember, the disability we have is only one part of us. Our life experience, emotional intelligence, education, family, support and personality all contribute to who we are and what is important to us.

Communication is key to not only attaining information but also important for us to feel involved, comfortable and heard.

Taking the time to ensure communication is accessible means we are included. It means we can understand what is happening.

We hope you find our tips helpful, and that you get the opportunity to use them to make your community more inclusive of people with intellectual disability.



Tips



1. Your body language is important

Why? How you hold yourself can affect how comfortable we feel.

Good example: Be open with how you sit and how you hold your body. Try not to cross your arms. Be professional, but personable.



2. Make an effort to understand us

Find common ground. Be friendly. Have good eye contact.

Why? Finding common ground is important to feeling comfortable, safe and an equal. Looking at us lets us know we are seen.

Good example: If you are asking us a question, look at us. Start the conversation with 'ice breaker' questions so we can get to know each other. Ask questions like "what are you interested in?" or "I like football, do you follow a sport?"



Tips



3. Give us time

It is important to be patient, to wait and listen. Speak calmly and clearly. Taking the time now saves time later.

Why? It can take time for us to process what is being said and then formulate our response.

Good example: After you ask a question, ask if we have understood it and if we need time to answer. Be happy to sit in silence for a while to give us time to process your question and come up with a response. You might have to wait for 5 minutes or more.



4. Explain things in everyday language

Why? Big words and complex terms are hard to understand.

Good example: Ask us if we know or understand the word or term you are using. If there is a different, easier word to use then use it. If there is no other word or term, then explain the meaning. Remind us of its meaning the next few times you use it.



5. Break down big ideas

Don't give us information overload.

Why? It can be hard to follow a conversation when a lot of information is given in a short period of time.

Good example: Regularly stop to ask if we understand or if we need a few minutes of quiet to process. Using pictures or illustrations can help us follow or better understand what is being said.



Tips



6. One topic at a time

Finish one topic of conversation before you start another. Make it clear you are moving on to another topic.

Why? It is very easy to lose track of what is being said. When this happens we can feel excluded, upset and overwhelmed.

Good example: After you finish a topic let us know and then check in with us. Offer to have a 5 to 10 minute break to allow us time to process what's been said.



7. Check in with us often

Make sure we understand what you are saying.

Why? It can be hard or embarrassing for us to stop you to say we don't understand.

Good example: During a conversation, regularly check to see if we are following. A good way to find out if we understand is to ask us to explain back to you what we think you said.



8. Repeat new information

Why? Remembering and processing new information takes time.

Repeating helps us remember.

Good example: If it is important information, repeat it a couple of times in different ways. Send us a follow up letter or email with a summary of the main points in Easy Read or plain English.



Tips



9. Ask open questions

Why? This will help you learn more about us. If you ask a yes/no question, we will most likely choose the answer we think you want to hear.

Good example: Questions like 'How can I help you?' or 'Tell me about...'
give us the chance to tell our story.



10. Always check if we want a supporter

A supporter might be a carer, family member, friend or other support person.

Why? We have the right to choose who comes into our appointments or meetings.

Good example: Welcome us then ask us who we want to join in our conversation.



11. Extra care and patience over the phone

Why? We can find it hard to talk over the phone unless we know the person on the other end well. Over the phone you can't read people's facial expressions or body language.

Good example: Make sure you give extra time for us to take in and understand what you are saying. Ask if the phone call is working for us. If it isn't then work out another method of contact.



Tips



12. Use pictures when you can

Why? Pictures can help explain hard words and reinforce what you are saying.

Good example: Use pictures to help explain a difficult concept such as 'social distancing'.



13. Give us as much information in Easy Read as you can

Why? Accessible information is our human right.

Good example: To put something into Easy Read:

- Use everyday language
- Only include what information is needed
- 14 size font and 1.5 line spacing
- Headings in bold to signpost
- New topic = new line or new page
- Use pictures to explain what you are saying



14. Ask us

And finally, remember, don't be scared to ask us questions about how we communicate. We really will appreciate it.

Contact CID on **1800 424 065** to ask about our Easy Read training and translation service

This information is funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency.