

Ability to communicate with people with neurodevelopmental conditions

This section identifies communication issues that may arise in people with neurodevelopmental conditions (conditions that are a result of brain development). Three examples of these conditions are included, but it is important to hold in mind:

- that there are a range of such conditions
- that some people will have more than one neurodevelopmental condition
- that challenges to communication may be present in people who have some but not all of the characteristics of these conditions.

An ability to draw on knowledge that where verbal communication is challenging for a person, other forms of communication (such as drawing, writing or play) are appropriate and may be the main way in which they communicate

an ability to make use of a range of communication strategies where this is indicated

Communicating with people with learning disabilities

An ability to draw on knowledge that the linguistic and cognitive abilities of people with learning disabilities will vary considerably from person to person, but that they may have specific communication difficulties, such as:

difficulty understanding abstract concepts

unclear speech

needing more time to process and retrieve information

limited vocabulary

prone to suggestibility (changing their answers in response to feedback)

they may be prone to acquiescence (they may tend to answer 'yes' to questions)

they may struggle to express themselves and become frustrated by this

An ability to draw on knowledge that people with learning disabilities may have acquired social strategies to help them 'mask' their difficulties understanding and following verbal communication

An ability to address any difficulties a person has communicating by making appropriate adjustments, such as:

listening carefully and asking the person to clarify or repeat information if it hard to understand what has been said

allowing time for them to respond

using simple, straightforward, everyday language

limiting the number of key concepts or ideas that are communicated in a sentence

using concrete examples (rather than abstract ideas)

asking short, simple either/or questions (but taking care to avoid leading questions)

creating a context for comments or questions (to help them understand the reasons for them)

regularly asking them to summarise or repeat what has been discussed (to check that they have understood accurately)

Communicating with people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

An ability to draw on knowledge that people with ASD vary considerably in their capacity to communicate, but that they may:

- have difficulty articulating and communicating how they are feeling, both via speech and via non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expression, body language)
- have a very literal interpretation of language and so find figurative language (metaphors, idioms, similes) challenging to understand
- have a higher level of expressive language (their ability to use language to communicate with others) than receptive language (how much they understand when people are talking to them)
- find lengthy and complex communications difficult to follow
- find it difficult to modulate the pitch, tone or speed of their voice (e.g. talking in a monotone or more loudly than is socially appropriate)
- find it uncomfortable to maintain continuous eye contact
- have difficulty interpreting facial expressions
- have difficulty interpreting body language

An ability to adjust communication with people with ASD to accommodate their communication difficulties, for example by:

- keeping communications short and straightforward
- taking care not to use metaphors, idioms, similes or analogies
- using concrete examples and facts to explain things
- asking specific questions
- taking care not to overload them with verbal information
- allowing time for them to respond
- regularly asking them to summarise or repeat what has been discussed (to check that they have understood accurately)

Communicating with people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

An ability to draw on knowledge that people with ADHD:

- have difficulty directing and sustaining attention
- can appear inattentive and forgetful
- often have difficulty with impulse control
- can experience social difficulties arising from the combination of inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity

An ability to draw on knowledge that people with ADHD can find it difficult to:

- attend to the thread of a conversation
- concentrate on long conversations
- attend to conversations in a noisy environment

An ability to draw on knowledge that people with ADHD may:

- 'blurt out' answers
- interrupt
- talk excessively
- struggle to organise their thoughts
- be easily distracted
- feel overwhelmed

An ability to adjust communication to take account of the difficulties experienced by people with ADHD, for example:

minimising potential distractions (e.g. noisy or busy environments, mobile phones)

keeping communications short and focused

giving a 'big picture' summary before moving to a succinct account of details (and thereby accommodate difficulties holding attention)

avoiding long conversations