4.5. Communicating with children/young people with cognitive and neurodevelopmental challenges

This section identifies communication issues that may occur in working with children/young people with neurodevelopmental presentations or conditions. Three example conditions are included, but it is important to hold in mind that:

- there are a range of these conditions
- children/young people can have more than one condition
- children/young people who do not meet formal diagnostic criteria may also have difficulties with communication.

- An ability to draw on knowledge that if verbal communication is challenging for the child/young person, other forms of communication (e.g. drawing, writing or play) are appropriate and may be the main way that they communicate, and:
  - an ability to make use of a range of communication strategies, as needed

Communicating with people with learning disabilities

- An ability to draw on knowledge that the linguistic and cognitive abilities of children/young people with learning disabilities will vary greatly, but they may have specific communication difficulties, e.g.:
  - difficulty understanding abstract concepts
  - unclear speech
  - needing more time to process and retrieve information
  - a limited vocabulary
  - being prone to suggestibility (they may change their answers in response to the feedback they get)
  - being more likely to agree and answer 'yes' to questions
  - struggle to express themselves, and become frustrated by it
- An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young people with learning disabilities may have learned social strategies to mask their difficulties understanding and following verbal communication

- An ability to address any difficulties the child/young person has communicating by making appropriate adjustments, e.g.:
  - listening carefully and asking them to clarify or repeat information if it has been hard to understand what they said
  - giving them time to respond
  - using simple, straightforward, everyday language
  - limiting the number of key ideas that are communicated in a sentence
  - using concrete examples (rather than abstract ideas)

	■ asking short, simple 'either/or' questions (but avoid asking leading questions)
	■ creating a context for comments (i.e. to orient the person to the reasons for comments or questions)
	■ regularly asking them to summarise or repeat what has been discussed (to check that it has been understood)

Communicating with people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

■	An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young people with ASD vary considerably in their capacity to communicate, but that they may:
	■ have difficulty articulating and communicating how they feel, both in their speech and non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expression, body language)
	■ have a very literal interpretation of language, and so find figurative language (metaphors, idioms, similes) difficult to understand
	■ have a higher level of expressive language (their ability to communicate with others) than receptive language (their ability to understand what has been aid)
	■ find long, complex communications hard to follow
	■ find it difficult to modulate the pitch, tone or speed of their voice (e.g. talking in a monotone or loudly)
	■ find it uncomfortable to maintain eye contact
	■ have difficulty interpreting facial expressions
	■ have difficulty interpreting body language

■	An ability to accommodate the communication difficulties of children/young people with ASD, e.g. by:
	■ keeping communications short and straightforward
	■ not using metaphors, idioms, similes or analogies
	■ using concrete examples/facts to explain things
	■ asking specific questions
	■ not overloading them with verbal information
	■ being patient and giving them extra time to respond
	■ regularly asking them to summarise or repeat what has been discussed (to check that it has been accurately understood)
	■ being aware of their difficulties and differences in non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expression, eye contact and personal distance)
	■ using alternative ways to communicate that they find easier or prefer (e.g. writing [including text and email] rather than speaking)

Communicating with children/young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young people with ADHD:
  - have difficulty directing and sustaining attention
  - can seem inattentive and forgetful
  - often have difficulty with impulse control
  - can experience social difficulties because of the combination of these factors

- An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young people with ADHD can find it difficult:
  - to follow the thread of a conversation
  - to concentrate on long conversations
  - to attend to conversations in a noisy environment
- An ability to draw on knowledge that children/young 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 children/young people with ADHD, e.g.:
  - minimising potential distractions (e.g. noisy or busy environments, or distractions e.g. mobile phones)
  - keeping communications short and focused
  - giving a 'big picture' summary before moving to a short summary of details (and so accommodate to difficulties holding attention)
  - avoiding long conversations