

Chapter 1

Understanding why effective communication is important in the work setting



Lottie and her support worker. You should adjust the way you communicate so that people can take the lead and get their message across.

There was one nurse; one of the new nurses wasn't it Lottie? In the morning Lottie likes to sing along to songs and that but he thought she was upset. You have to get used to her sounds and if it means she is happy or sad or whatever. When she's eating – you pull a bit of a funny face, don't you Lottie? – and a lot of people get a bit frightened because it looks like she's struggling and doesn't like the food. But she is enjoying it and you just have to remind her to chew. Communicating whilst she's eating is important otherwise a lot of people kind of give up. Her yes and no is most important definitely – she should be able to choose what drink she wants, when she wants it. It annoys her when people don't ask. They shouldn't assume just because she likes coffee she wants that every time – they should be asking her.

Lottie's key worker



Introduction

Every day we interact with other people in a number of different situations for a whole variety of reasons.

Thinking point

Think about the time from getting up in the morning to arriving at work. How many times did you need to communicate with others? How many times did you need to speak or listen, read or write?

Most of the time, we express ourselves and listen to others with ease. We don't think twice about the complexity of day-to-day communication. We take it for granted. People with learning disabilities, however, often find it challenging to understand and express themselves using verbal (using words) and non-verbal (not using words) communication. It is often up to us to adjust the way we communicate, so that people can take the lead, get their own message across and understand what we say. To respect people, you must make the effort to understand them as people. You need to find out the ways in which they wish to communicate. This takes time and commitment.

People with learning disabilities have a right under the Disability Discrimination Act to be given communication support. If they do not get it, they are being discriminated against. It is not a case of being nice to people, there is an absolute right to this kind of support.

Report to the Scottish Government, 2009

Learning outcomes

This chapter will help you to:

- explain how communication affects all aspects of your work, including relationships;
- identify the different reasons people communicate.

This chapter covers:

- Common Induction Standards – Standard 3 – Communicate effectively: Learning Outcome 1 (not 1.3)
- Level 2 SHC 21 – Introduction to communication: Learning Outcome 1 (not 1.3)
- Level 3 SHC 31 – Promote communication: Learning Outcome 1

About communication

Communication is vital to us all as human beings. It enables us to socialise with others and make sense of what's going on around us. If we cannot speak, understand words, or read and write very well, we are often excluded, unless others around us are prepared to change. If we are unable to communicate for any reason, we can feel misunderstood, frustrated, isolated, and anxious.

Activity



If you were to pack an imaginary suitcase with everything you needed to communicate, what would you put in it? Remember to think about having something to say, a reason to say it, a way to say it, a person to say it to and a way to understand others' communication.

If you have done the activity, your 'suitcase' will be bulging with things we need in order to communicate – all things that those of us who find communication easy take for granted. You will also realise that many of the things you need are not things over which you have direct control. This is because communication is a shared activity and is about far more than the ability to speak.

When looking at how well communication is working for a person you support, you need to look not just at them, but at what has been called the 'Means, reasons and opportunities' model of communication.

Communication is both verbal and non-verbal. For many people with learning disabilities, verbal communication (using spoken or written words) can be difficult. Non-verbal ways of communicating (including gesture, body language, signing, symbols, objects of reference and other communication aids) are important ways in which many people communicate.

Communication is a two-way activity, involving understanding as well as expressing. How much somebody is able to understand is often misjudged by other people. It is important for you to establish as far as possible how much the people you support understand, so that they can be supported to take a full part in communication.

Communication is a shared activity – dependent on both ‘speaker’ and ‘listener’. It is not enough to focus just on the person with learning disabilities. You must also think about your own communication abilities and if necessary develop new styles, ways and skills of interaction.

Communication can be easily misunderstood. It is easy to misunderstand what somebody is telling us – particularly if they don’t use ways of communication with which we are familiar. You will need to be aware of this in your conversations and look for ways to understand better.

Means, reasons and opportunities

(adapted from the original model by Money and Thurman)

