

Communicating with people with learning disabilities

Please relax and look friendly - you are communicating with a fellow person!

1. Turn off your mobile phone, TV, and other distractions. Face the person and give them your full attention.
2. Speak at a moderate rate. People with learning disabilities take longer than others to process information.
3. Give the person time to say what they want to say. Resist the temptation to finish their sentences for them. Your guess may be wrong and will interrupt their line of thought.
4. Tone of voice is important. Don't shout. Speak in a normal voice and enunciate words clearly.
5. Use short, simple sentences. Keep your language literal and avoid abstract ideas, metaphors and the use of idioms eg. changing your mind.
6. Speak directly to the person with a learning disability wherever possible. Do not speak to carers expecting them to answer for the person with disability; it can undermine their self esteem and disable them further.
7. Unless you are using Makaton or some other form of sign language, keep hand gestures and general body movements to a minimum. They can distract from the verbal communication.
8. Speak with respect. Do not speak to them as if they are children. We all hate being patronised!
9. Be honest if you do not understand what someone is saying and ask them to try to say things in another way.
10. If someone with a learning disability is in a group and getting left out, turn to them and ask their opinion etc. Do your best to include them in the group.