



## Person-centred communications skills

### Tips for health professionals working with people with disabilities

#### 1. Be Respectful<sup>13</sup>

- Unless they indicate otherwise, **communicate directly with the person**, rather than through others.
- Do not assume how much someone understands, or how they communicate.

#### 2. Get to know the person<sup>13</sup>

- Remember that everyone is different.
- **Ask** the person (or their support network, if needed) **how they like to receive information**, or how they would like to communicate with you.
- Ask about the person's **culture** and appropriate ways to communicate.
- Find out if the person has a **communication plan** or profile.
- If the person uses behaviours to communicate, find out what they look like, and how to respond.

#### 3. Be Prepared<sup>13</sup>

- If someone has a communication plan, spend some time reading & understanding it.
- Be aware of the **different Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems** people may use.
- If you need to arrange an **interpreter** (e.g. Auslan or language), do so in advance.

#### 4. Make sure communication can happen<sup>13</sup>

- If the person uses a communication device or system, make sure they have *access* to it, that it is charged, and that it is **set up and positioned correctly**:
  - This may include access to their glasses or hearing aids.
- Be a receptive communication partner by having a friendly demeanour, showing interest in the person, and having open body language.

#### 5. Be an effective communicator<sup>13</sup>

- Ensure the person feels that you value & understand what they are saying.

- If you are short on time or can't give your full attention, communicate this.
- If you don't understand something they have said, let them know.
- Be patient – give people time to respond, get comfortable with silence while you wait.

## Communication Frameworks

Many communication frameworks are available to support health professionals to adopt a person-centred approach. Some examples of these include:<sup>14</sup>

- [Hello my name is...](#)
- [What Matters To You?](#)
- [Teach Back](#)
- [REACH](#) (Recognise, Engage, Act, Call, Help is on its way)
- [Reflect To Care](#)
- [Patient Delivered Handover](#)
- [Conversational Health Literacy Assessment Tool \(CHAT\)](#)

An implementation guide for the above strategies is available here: [Safety Fundamentals for Person Centred Communication - Clinical Excellence Commission](#)

## People living with disability – perspectives of the Ready to Go Home co-design group<sup>15</sup>

- “Listen to me, not to someone else talking about me.”
- “Listen with the intent to hear, rather than assuming you know what the problem is.”
- “Please be attentive; ensure I feel comfortable and supported.”
- “Staff need to bear in mind, some people (with disabilities) will often be very agreeable, say yes, they understand, but they don't actually understand what you have said.”
  - Use communication frameworks such as “Teach Back” to check understanding.
- “See me as a whole person – I am more than my disability.”
- “Try to avoid putting people on the spot – give me time to make an informed choice.”

*Fact sheet 2 of 3: This is part of a series of fact sheets on person-centred communication for hospital staff. Full reference list is available..*

*The Ready to Go Home project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Go to [dss.gov.au](https://dss.gov.au) for more information.*