

Top tips for communication to support co-production

VoiceAbility Speak Out Cambridgeshire

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Why is it important to get communication right?



The Speak Out Leaders say:

People need to know you have understood them. You might think they've said something and then realise they've said something completely different.



You need to know what the person wants! Make sure you are speaking to the person and not their carer or parent. Or check to see who they want to speak to.



People need to be spoken and listened to without being too patronising. No one wants to feel like we are being talked to as if we're stupid.

Watch Anne, Bill and Sean talking about this and more here at 13 minutes 30s: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuEtw2rngBw>

Things you'll need to think about



The time.

The place.

How you're going to share information.

How you're going to gather information.

How well you know the person.

What works best for the person.

Creative ways to gather information.

Tools and resources that might help.

Time



What is the best time for your meeting? Check people's routines.

Some people will feel very anxious and distracted if your meeting is happening at a time that means their routine has changed. They might be so distracted by this that they can't get properly involved in the meeting.

Allow enough time for the meeting but make sure it isn't too long.

Make a plan or agenda for the meeting together, so everyone knows what to expect and when.

Put in breaks, and check how people are doing, spot if people seem tired or if they have switched off. Offer an extra break or fun activity if needed.

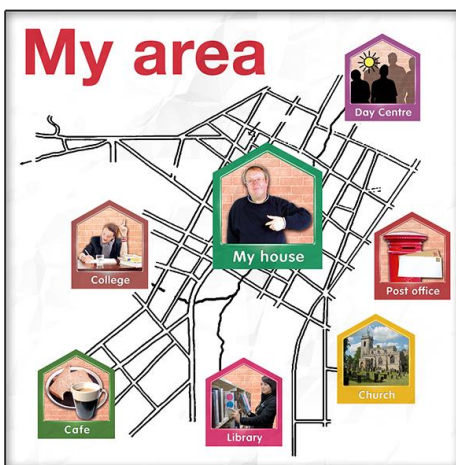
At break times recognise that some people might need to decompress, they may need time by themselves, on their phone or outside. Don't interrupt this time – they are recharging!

Place



How can you help people to feel comfortable in the room?
Ask them what works for them.

Think about lighting, and how the sound echoes in the room. Large halls with hard floors can be really difficult for some people. Flickering lights, very bright lights and white walls can be very draining for some people. They may find this so tiring that they cannot have good interactions with you. Background noise can be distracting, and people can find it hard to focus.



Think about the conversation you want to have. For example, if you want to hear about experiences of staff support at home, some people might not feel comfortable opening up and talking freely about this at home. Find another place.

Place



Make sure people can find the place easily, give them clear instructions.

A picture of the building can be helpful and a number to contact if they are running late or can't find the venue.



Think about how easy the location is to get to, wheelchair access – including toilets, public transport and parking.

How are you going to share information?



Make sure you have planned this before.

Sometimes a conversation is hard to follow for people.

Having some Easy Read words or pictures to follow makes it easier.
How can you break your information down?

Share a small amount of information and then check if people are following okay.

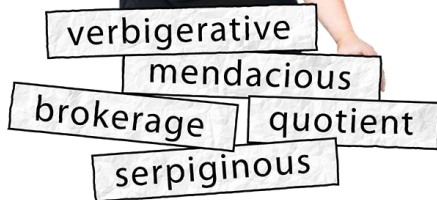


Avoid long periods of one person talking. Even 5 minutes can be too long for some people.

Avoid acronyms and jargon.

Let people know it's okay to leave the meeting if they find something difficult to hear.

It's okay to have a break any time.



How are you going to gather information?



Make sure you have planned this before.

Do you have questions to ask?

Can you share these (in Easy Read) before the meeting?



Some people like to have some time to think. You'll hear more from them if they have had time to process and think about your questions.

When you ask questions give people time to think. Don't be afraid of silence! People might like to come back to questions later.

If you're with a group, make some rules for how everyone is going to have a turn.

Passing an object (like a teddy/Disney character/sensory toy) round can help – people can talk when they are holding the object. Choose the object based on the group.

Traffic light cards can be good for this too.



What if the person doesn't use words to communicate or you find it difficult to understand them?



Find out how the person likes to communicate.

Some people point with their eyes, use communication books or cards, or an electronic device. Sometimes people like to pre-record their communication on a talking button or send text messages.

Allow plenty of time for the conversation.



Remember that for some people communication can be exhausting and they may need more breaks, or the conversation to happen over several meetings.

Never assume that because someone doesn't speak that they cannot understand you.



If you are finding it difficult to understand someone, let them know. Check you have understood what they are saying. Ask for support from someone who knows them well.

Sometimes it can take time to tune into the pattern of someone's speech.

Use games and fun activities to capture people's ideas

These are some we like:

- A Mexican Wave just for fun!
- Pictures of people's favourite things – Pokemon, dogs/cats/horses and Disney – this is a great way to get to know people before you talk about the more serious stuff.
- Asking people to give you a tour of their familiar environment. This can help you understand more about them and how they like to communicate.
- Bringing along something important to you and sharing why you've brought it, this helps them get to know you and it's great if they want to share something too.
- Voting tubes, label tubes with different topics and ask people to put tokens in the ones which are important to them.
- Flip chart paper and post its.
- People using a phone or tablet to take photos and capture their experiences.

- Playing Would You Rather?
- Creating different spaces in the room for different answers to questions – to get people moving.
- Going for a walk
- Playing bingo – use pictures of the topics you will be covering
- Quizzes
- Traffic light cards
- Talking Mats
- Creating All About Me pictures
- Picture Reveal