



Assisting Social Interaction

The following fact sheets are general resources to support people in their roles assisting people living with disabilities.

The information provided is not specific to any particular individual.

For behaviour and communication tools for a specific case, speak to the person first or contact the parents, carers or health care professionals to obtain further details.

Fact sheets:

- Communication difficulties
- Repetitive Speech
- Auditory Processing Disorder
- Difficulty with speech
- Individuals with little or no speech
- Social Media
- Person centered approach
- Challenging Behaviour
- Boundaries (relationships)
- Anxiety
- Sensory overload

Communication

Communication allows humans to socialise with one another. Through communication we develop and maintain relationships. It is impossible to not communicate. Communication involves our faces, bodies, and voices, therefore it is both verbal and non-verbal.

Verbal Communication

- Is when we use speech.
- We share speech in order to send and receive messages.
- Speech involves using tone of voice, volume and speed of speech. This helps to express emotions when delivering messages.

Non-verbal Communication

- Involves body language and movements (posture, facial expressions, space between people).
- Emphasises the meaning of messages.
- Non-verbal communication can help guide a conversation.

Communication Difficulties

Communication difficulties can include:

- Difficulties with form: where speech is hard to understand due to inability to correctly articulate.
- Difficulties with content: ranges from hardship of learning new words to inability to find the right words to express emotions.
- Difficulty with use: includes hardship with eye contact, staying on topic, or understanding the person talking to them.

Examples of communication difficulties

- Inability to partake in, or maintain eye contact.
- Difficulties taking turns with conversation.
- Hardship with social interaction and showing interest in others.
- Difficulties with beginning, maintaining, repairing and ending conversations.
- Issues using language in order to form discussions and negotiations.

Ways to assist communication

- Ensure that the individual with the communication difficulties is treated like anyone else.
- Ensure that you have the persons full attention before speaking, this will increase chances of mutual understanding.
- Speak with a natural tone; do not shout.
- Speak with a moderate speed, this will help the person to read your lips assisting with hearing and understanding your words.
- Use visual aids if required; this can include picture cards, writing, and key word signs (manual signs and natural gestures to support communication).

Repetitive Speech

Repetition can be described as an individual mirroring or copying something that was said by themselves or another individual.

This repetitious behaviour can sometimes be reinforcing for the individual; especially in terms of their stimulatory requirements. It may also be a way of communicating when an individual cannot retrieve the other words they need to say.

Ways to assist repetition

- Write answers to questions on paper so the person can see that it has already been answered; they can keep this with them and next to you so it is easily accessible.
- Reassure them that they have already asked or stated the sentence before, provide another conversation avenue.
- Provide visuals such as activity schedules and charts to reduce their anxiety and need to repeat questions throughout the activity.
- Restate the question towards the person with repetitive speech to see if they know the answer already.



Auditory Processing Disorder

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) can be defined as an individual having an insufficiency in being able to process sounds that is not caused by the use of complex language or speech.

Within APD, individuals tend to have issues with the following aspects of communication:

- Discriminating sounds from others in the environment
- Recognising patterns in sounds
- Locating sounds
- Difficulty following instructions (verbal)
- Remaining attentive
- Reading

Ways to assist individuals with APD

- Talk to the person in a quieter space to enhance their ability to understand what is being said.
- Use shorter sentences where possible.
- Speak with a clear voice and at a slower pace.
- Use visual aids if required; this can include picture cards, writing, and key word signs (manual signs and natural gestures to support communication).

Difficulty with Speech

Individuals that have difficulty with speech can experience hardship with understanding someone as well as being understood. Due to this, individuals may find it hard to express their ideas, feelings and emotions as well as any concerns they have within their environments.

Difficulties with speech can be caused by multiple aspects of an individual's life. Such aspects can include:

- Physical attributes such as muscle and structural issues in the face, mouth and throat.
- Slowed development of speech and vocabulary.
- Damage to the brain.
- Lack of experience in communicating verbally with another individual.
- Difficulties with hearing due to repetitive ear infections or other illnesses.

Ways to assist communication

The following guidelines can be used to increase the chances for positive communication to occur:

- Do not interrupt the person when they are talking; let them finish their own sentences.
- Use shorter sentences with simple words.
- Reduce distractions from other environmental aspects.
- Reinforce the important points of the conversation.
- Use open ended questions to encourage the person to explain their ideas and feelings.
- Slow down your speech.



Individuals with Little or No Speech

Individuals can encounter barriers to produce speech due to the acquisition of physical or neurological deficiencies. When these deficiencies occur, the individual's speech can become difficult to understand, or in some cases speech will not be understood at all.

Individuals who have little to no speech can experience the following impacts due to the inability to effectively express themselves:

- Emotional anxiety
- Decreased desire to participate in activities
- Low levels of self-esteem
- Self-isolation and lack of confidence

Ways to assist communication

- Ensure you provide the individual with your full attention.
- Stand closer to the individual if they are harder to understand; remain respectful of personal space.
- Inform the person if you have not understood.
- Use visual aids between you (signs or pictures) to ensure that you both understand what was said.
- Allow the person to take as much time as possible to communicate– be patient.
- Give the individual sufficient time to respond to you.
- If the individual uses a voice output device or other communication system, ensure you give enough time for them to formulate their message. DO not attempt to guess what the individual might be saying. Be patient.



Social Media

Social media is a digital form of communication which facilitates the sharing of ideas and interests and a platform to express oneself.

It is important to monitor what we do and post on social media in order to protect and maintain our reputations. It is important to remember that whatever we say and do on social media becomes part of our digital footprint; remember to be respectful of yourself and others.

Potential dangers:

- Cyberbullying
- Addiction
- Sexting
- Lack of sleep
- Harassment

What to think about before you post

Here are five questions to ask yourself before you post anything on any form of social media:

- Am I boasting?
- Am I unhappy?
- Am I seeking approval from others?
- Is what I am posting kind?
- Is this appropriate to share?

Social media etiquette

Social media etiquette is important, so here are five guidelines to assist you:

- Treat all social media platforms professionally.
- Avoid venting your frustrations where it could get out of hand.
- Ask for legal advice if required.
- Do not respond to or initiate inflammatory language.

Person Centered Approach

If you are being person centred you are recognising the person as an individual.

This approach must also be centered around the individual's families and communities with which they reside and participate in.

This approach also allows service providers to make sure they are meeting the individual's needs whilst also increasing the quality of experiences that the individual has within the services.

Guidelines to being person centered

The following points may be useful to increase your ability to ensure you are maintaining a person centered approach:

- Be aware of yourself – pay attention to the individual you are assisting and be in the moment.
- Ensure that when you listen to people, you are actively being non-judgmental to what the individual is telling you.
- Ask open ended questions to increase opportunities for the individual to explain and comment on their feelings, past experiences, ideas and values – make them feel respected.
- Share power status' within the relationship you have with the individual – do not try to always be in control of situations.

Challenging Behaviour

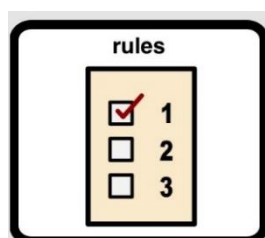
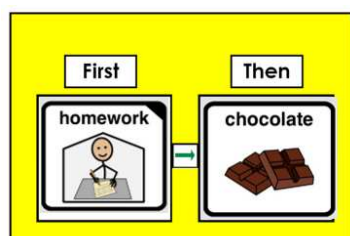
Challenging behaviour is behaviour that challenges the person and those around them. It may be aggressive behaviours, such as hitting, kicking or spitting, or passive behaviours such as refusing to do what is asked.

There is always a function or reason for these behaviours. Check what could be triggering the individual to act out – is it wanting attention, wanting to escape a situation or a person, or is it a sensory trigger (too much noise, too many people, an undesirable smell)?

How to reduce/control:

It is important to note that all of these points are only suggestions, and that strategies to reduce or control the occurrence of an outburst may vary between each individual.

- Identify environmental features and conditions that tend to cause outbursts – this may reduce some triggers for the aggressive behaviour.
- Get to know the individual's likes and dislikes, so you can build rapport with them and also have a 'toolbox' of ideas or items to distract them with if they start to escalate.
- Use visual supports, including first-then charts, choice boards and reward systems where possible.
- Reassure the individual that if something is making them upset or is not working for them that they can ask you for help instead of becoming acting out.
- Have objects that can help regulate the individual's stimulation requirements so that they can help calm themselves down.
- Attempt to direct any aggression into another activity – physical exercise is a good way to reduce negative energy and may be of something the individual enjoys.
- Plan ahead; aware of 'early warning signs' that the individual may be escalating (find these out from carers or others), and have ways or items to distract them at the early stages.



Boundaries (relationships)

Within every player/coach relationship there must be a variety of aspects present for it to be considered healthy and positive. These include the following:

- Trust
- Boundaries
- Perspective
- Respect
- Assertiveness
- Knowledge

For the purpose of this fact sheet, we will look at what are appropriate and inappropriate boundaries between a coach and a player.

What is appropriate?

- Ensuring that you knock on doors before you enter rooms (especially change rooms) to ensure the privacy of the player remains paramount.
- Try to not separate yourself from a group for one-on-one activities with players; try to remain in sight of other staff or coordinators.
- Behave within the guidelines of the company policies and procedures. For example, be respectful, treat everyone fairly and do not advocate or promote the use of illegal substances.
- Ensure that any physical contact with the players is appropriate for reasons such as skill development.
- Ensure that all activities within training sessions are age and ability appropriate.

What is not appropriate?

- Avoid becoming the players 'friend'. This could confuse the players about what the coach's role is, and could also lead to unintentional favouritism of individual players.
- Avoid playing the role of a counsellor for the players. This can lead to circumstances that should only be approached by someone who is trained in counselling. Being a counsellor to players can also distract the ability to coach at the highest standard within the individuals abilities.
- Never engage in a relationship that is intimate between a coach and player.



Anxiety

Anxiety can be generally described as a state of mind/mood that focuses on the future. This mood is causing the individual to prepare for upcoming events in a negative nature. Anxiety can effect anyone.

Anxiety can affect the following:

- Ability to concentrate
- Ability to be relaxed and calm
- Ability to sleep

Anxiety can have many side effects on a person. These include:

- Relationship issues
- Becoming self-isolated
- Reoccurring health issues (both emotional and physical)
- Compulsive behaviours
- Extreme fear of certain situations or objects
- Personality changes
- Abuse of alcohol or medical/illegal substances
- Depressive or suicidal thoughts

How to assist someone experiencing anxiety

The following points may help you assist someone who may be going through an episode of anxiety:

- Let the person know that you have seen a change in their behaviour or mood (help them recognise the anxiety in a sensitive way).
- Talk to the individual – actively listen to them and try to remain non-judgmental towards them.
- Encourage the individual to try and get enough sleep, eat healthy and keep exercising.
- Encourage them to not participate in consuming alcohol or other substances that may alter their moods and thoughts.
- Encourage them to go talk to someone about their anxiety (this could be family, friends, a counsellor or a psychologist).

Sensory Overload

Sensory overload occurs when a sensory experience is too much for the nervous system to handle. As an example, if the room is very loud an individual may become over stimulated. They may cover their ears and crouch over to try to smother the sounds in the room.

Sensory overload may lead to behaviours occurring that may not normally be present. These behaviours may include:

- Withdrawing
- Becoming unusually quiet or loud

What does it look like?

The trigger of sensory overload can cause the individual to feel confused, uncomfortable or even as if they are in agony. Some visible symptoms of sensory overload include the following:

- Covering eyes in brighter lights (both outside and inside)
- Sensitivity to sounds or touch
- Inability to begin or maintain eye contact
- Tantrums for no visible reason
- Heightened irritability to environments or clothing
- Withdrawal from socialising
- Looking for a way to escape from the area they are in
- Inability to focus on tasks at hand

How to assist someone with sensory overload

The following guidelines may help you manage or reduce sensory overload for an individual. It is important to remember that these will change case-by-case.

- Get the person to wear sunglasses to reduce light.
- Shut doors to reduce external noises.
- Avoid wearing fragrances if smell is too overpowering.
- Reduce amounts of lights used in a room.
- Provide the individual with ear plugs to reduce sound in noisy areas.
- Warn the person that you need to touch them gently in case they find touch uncomfortable.
- Allow them to wear clothes they are comfortable in (cut tags off if needs be).

