



Module 2: Communicating with a person with intellectual disability

Understanding the complex nature of communication with people with intellectual disability

Many people with intellectual disability have difficulty understanding complex language and expressing all of their thoughts and feelings verbally.

They may also be more likely to agree, or say yes, to statements or questions if:

- they don't know the answer;
- the question is too long; or
- they think you want them to say yes. (Finlay & Lyons, 2002; Shaw & Budd, 1982).

People with intellectual disability experience difficulties with understanding complex grammatical structure or concepts, and the production of symbols and producing appropriate responses (Finlay & Lyons, 2001).

Many people with intellectual disability have difficulty remembering information; especially when they are away from the place where something happened, or where they are asked to remember several things at once.

They may also have difficulty organising their thoughts and ideas, and putting information together in a logical way.

Using images, pictures and objects can help people to remember important information, and to organise their thoughts and ideas (Wadsworth & Harper, 1991; Sigelman & Budd, 1986).

Every person with intellectual disability will have different language skills depending on their abilities, experiences and the communicative context. Therefore every person will have different communication support needs (Tuffrey-Wijne, 2012).

When communicating with a person with intellectual disability, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to make sure that you are understood and that you understand the person fully.

References

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