

Communication support principles

In order to engage effectively with people who have communication support needs, we have identified six Communication Support Principles to be followed.

The Principles have been developed in consultation with:

- individuals with a range of communication support needs
- the Inclusive Communication Network (a group of speech and language therapists in Scotland)
- other specialists in communication access.

Each Principle is accompanied by practical advice to help you put them into practice.

You don't have to be a communication expert.

Remember – small actions can make all the difference!

? Ask yourself

Every time you are planning an activity, simply ask yourself:

“If I had difficulty understanding, what would help? What would not help?”

“If I had difficulty expressing myself, what would help? What would not help?”

There are some specific examples of techniques you can use. These techniques may not be suitable for everyone. It will depend upon the type of communication support need an individual has.

First the six Principles are listed. Then each is listed with practical advice to help you put them into practise. Further details can be found in the Public engagement activities section of the toolkit.

Communication Support Principles



Principle 1:

Recognise that every community or group may include people with communication support needs.



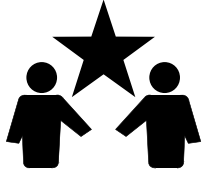
Principle 2:

Find out what support is required.



Principle 3:

Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand.



Principle 4:

Respond sensitively to all the ways an individual uses to express themselves.



Principle 5:

Give people the opportunity to communicate to the best of their abilities.



Principle 6:

Keep trying.



Principle 1:

Recognise that every community or group may include people with communication support needs

For example if you are targeting young people in a health promotion campaign; members of the LGBT community to respond to a consultation exercise; or the local community to encourage use of a new leisure centre:

- Adopt a policy of using clear, simple verbal and written language and design in all communications. This will make it easier for everyone to access information and engage in events.
- Save time and money by developing a set of templates for people in the organisation to use. For example for letters, meeting papers, presentations. (see Templates section of the toolkit for examples.)
- Make sure that everyone involved in the design and implementation of a public engagement activity understands the breadth and impact of communication support needs. For example include it in staff induction and offer training.
- Routinely ask people if they have communication support needs.



Principle 2:

Find out what support is required

Ask the individual (or their support worker, if they prefer):

- how they prefer to communicate. For example by the spoken word (face to face or telephone) or by the written word (letter or email)
- where and when they find communication easiest
- whether they like to be accompanied by someone
- whether they need specific support to:
 - understand what people say or write
 - express themselves verbally and/or in writing.



Principle 3:

Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand

To get your message across face to face:

- look at the person
- make sure your face can be seen and your mouth is not covered
- give people time to understand what you are saying
- use short simple, clear sentences
- avoid jargon (i.e. words that are not used every day) and explain abbreviations
- slow your speech down, speak clearly and regularly summarise what is said
- match the expression in your voice to what you are saying
- support what you are saying with gestures and facial expression
- use photographs, drawings and symbols to illustrate what you are saying
- offer to write down key words as you talk
- offer audio/video recordings for people to take away with them
- find out if people have understood.



Principle 3:

Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand

To get your message across in printed and online information:

- use short simple sentences
- avoid jargon (i.e. words not used every day) and explain abbreviations
- use a simple, uncluttered layout with plenty of space
- use a clear font e.g. arial or comic sans
- use a minimum font size of 12 point (some people will require a larger font)
- consider line spacing (a spacing of 1.5 lines is easier for many people)
- use clear visuals, such as symbols, photographs and drawings, to emphasise the message in the text
- use moving visuals like videos and DVDs, with simple, succinct sentences and story lines
- check people have understood
- consider the accessibility of online information as well as printed information.



Principle 4:

Respond sensitively to all the ways an individual uses to express themselves

Recognise and give people time to use:

- body language, facial expression and gestures
- signing
- speech
- 'talking machines', picture boards or other communication aids
- human sounds, such as laughing or groaning
- writing
- drawing
- pictures, photos, symbols, objects.

Check you have understood correctly.



Principle 5:

Give people the opportunity to communicate to the best of their abilities.

Adapt the environment

- identify where and how people like to meet
- choose a quiet venue with minimum distractions
- lay out the room so people can see you and each other
- have tables for people to put papers on
- have clear signage.

Adapt the timing

- send out information in advance
- consider a pre-meeting to help participants prepare
- schedule meeting times to suit participants
- ensure the meeting does not go on too long - some people can only concentrate and communicate for short periods at a time
- have regular rest breaks
- allow plenty of time for people to:
 - understand what is being said
 - read and understand any written information you circulate
 - get their message across.

Adapt the methods of communication

- different people prefer different methods of communication
- what form of communication are you are going to use?
 - face to face?
 - telephone?
 - letter?
 - email?

Ask yourself :

“If I had difficulty understanding or expressing myself, how would I respond?”

Encourage the use of support from a carer or support worker if this is required. Let the person choose who should provide this support. Budget for it.

Adopt a positive communication style

- use a positive and encouraging manner
- don't show impatience or put pressure on people
- avoid hogging the conversation - take no more turns at talking than the other person.

Adapt the budget



Principle 6:
Keep trying.

Communication is the foundation of human relationships.

None of us gets it right all the time.

Be creative.

Ask people what they think.

Be ready to change.

Seek to engage with people who have communication support needs, no matter how simple or complex.