

Five good communication standards

A guide for anyone who works with or supports people with communication difficulties



About this booklet

Lots of people with learning disabilities have difficulties with communication.

Good communication helps people to:

- understand
- express themselves
- make choices and decisions
- have greater control
- be included
- enjoy being with other people.

The standards tell people what things should be like and what they should expect.

The Five Good Communications Standards come from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to help people to:

- know what good communication looks like
- check whether good communication is happening.

You can use the checklists in this booklet to check the support a person is getting with their communication.

This booklet is adapted from:

www.rcslt.org/news/docs/good_comm_standards

Standard one: Each person will have a communication passport or plan that tells everyone the best ways to communicate with them

To communicate effectively everyone must understand and value a person's speech, language and communication needs. Individuals should be supported and involved, together with people who know them best, to develop a rich description of the best ways to interact.

This description needs to be agreed, active, regularly updated and readily available. This description is sometimes referred to as a communication passport, guideline or profile. It includes the best ways of supporting their understanding and expression, the best methods of promoting interaction and involvement and describes 'how to be' with someone.

How you will know if standard one is achieved:

- Communication passports, profiles, dictionaries or guidelines are readily available
- Individuals and their families and friends are involved
- People who know the individual well can recognise their family members or friend through the description
- Staff can provide a thoughtful description of how they adapt their communication in line with guidance
- Individual's communication is responded to positively in line with their passport description
- Descriptions are individual, current and up-to-date.

Standard two: Each person is supported to be involved in decisions about their life and their care

Individuals with speech, language and communication needs are often either excluded from patient experience feedback or included in a tokenistic way.

Their needs and opinions can often be assumed, misinterpreted or ignored. For professionals, this means recognising that people understand and express themselves in different ways.

For individuals, this means getting information and expressing themselves in ways that meet their needs (1).

Inclusive communication is an approach that seeks to create a supportive and effective communication environment, using every available means of communication to understand and be understood (2).

Innovative and creative solutions to understanding the views individuals are often required due to the nature of communications needs.

How you will know if standard two is achieved:

- ✔ Staff demonstrate they understand how individuals show they like or dislike something and these preferences are used to build up the individual's day
- ✔ Staff understand how visual approaches as part of Inclusive Communication (using signs, symbols or photos) support decision-making and involvement
- ✔ There is evidence of a culture of asking opinions, acting on the feedback and changing accordingly. Individuals report they feel involved
- ✔ Access to and use of PALS, complaints procedures and advocacy is clear and variety of support provided to ensure meaningful process, including accessible information and involvement of family and friends who know the person
- ✔ Accessible resources are available that provide information about a range of decisions for example from daily menu choices through to information about specific interventions. The use of the accessible resources will be evident
- ✔ Capacity assessments are completed for each significant decision. This includes documented evidence about whether the person understood information about the decision and the consequences, whether they were able to retain and weigh the information and how they communicated their decision
- ✔ Where individuals do not have capacity there is clear evidence that individuals are still encouraged to contribute to smaller aspects of the decision and every effort is made to ensure this is fed into the decision making.

Standard three: We will use the best ways to support each person with their communication

Colleagues working in specialist hospital and residential services must recognise communication difficulties.

They may need to change their communication style to support the service user and should have the knowledge and skills to adapt their communication levels, styles and methods.

Other factors can impact on communication, especially hearing, sight and sensory integration.

Health professionals should understand that what they say and how they say it matters and can impact positively or negatively on the individual.

It is important they understand how good communication underpins informed consent and capacity.

Professionals are able to promote the individual's understanding and expression and create opportunities for positive communication.

How you will know if standard three is achieved:

- ✔ There is a communication strategy for good communication and staff are aware of the main goals, there is evidence of visual communication strategies
- ✔ A learning and development framework focussing on communication exists and is evidenced through personal development plans / appraisals
- ✔ Easy access to a variety of communication learning and development opportunities from induction, to specialist training provided around individuals
- ✔ Supervision evidences psychologically minded practice, linking how people feel about the people they support and the impact on their communication
- ✔ Positive communication between staff and individuals is observed and a positive attitude to using augmentative communication strategies
- ✔ Staff have tools such as communication checklists and know when they need to refer to Speech and Language Therapy
- ✔ Staff use Inclusive Communication appropriate to the needs of the individual they are supporting and speak in a way they can understand
- ✔ Staff know how to maintain any specialist equipment needed to support/enhance communication.
- ✔ Staff use positive body language and facial expression, promoting dignity and respect
- ✔ Training and care plans include good individualised, clear proactive and reactive communication strategies around Positive Behaviour Strategies.

Standard four: We will create opportunities for people to communicate

An understanding, welcoming and socially rich environment is fundamental to relationships for all individuals and particularly people with communication needs.

Relationships are central to wellbeing. Getting the communication environment right will contribute to enabling people to live value and meaningful lives.

Individuals need to have the opportunity to communicate about all the things that all people talk about in everyday life such as dreams, hopes, fears, choices as well as everyday wants and needs.

Good communication needs to be considered broadly, not just about meeting needs and wants but about social interactions – greetings, sharing stories and fun.

It is the quality of interaction that contributes to overall emotional and mental wellbeing – providing a sense of belonging, involvement and inclusion.

Interaction may not necessarily involve speech. For someone without formal language interactive approaches are a way of ‘being’ with another person, making meaningful contact with those who are hard to reach. It may be about very basic early developmental interaction and communication and relationship building.

How you will know standard four is achieved:

- When you enter, you feel welcomed, understood and relaxed to be yourself
- There are visual communication supports tailor made to the people living there for example personalised visual timetables, mealtime mats. There is a range of media and purpose supporting individuals to engage in a meaningful way
- Staff are observed having a chat and fun with people who do not use formal language, using approaches such as intensive interaction.
- There is a place for carers and people with a learning disability to discuss how they feel and this is supported by a range of communication tools
- Staff can explain how they maximise every opportunity to enable individuals to express themselves and understand what is being said to them
- Staff are observed spending time with an individual for no purpose other than interaction and communication
- Opportunities for interaction and involvement created
- Staff are observed to use a social style of interaction which includes sharing, showing or commenting.

Standard five: Each person is supported to understand their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing

People with learning disabilities face avoidable health inequalities.

Limited communication and health literacy reduces capacity to convey health needs effectively to others (3). It is essential to consider communication needs in order to support individuals with their health.

Arriving at a diagnosis can prove difficult if a person cannot describe signs and symptoms easily, or their behaviour is misunderstood and misconstrued.

Staff need to be aware of how individuals communicate about their health and how they show that they are in pain. This includes considering ill health as a cause for changes in behaviour.

Knowing how much a person can understand is also essential in making a decision about their capacity to have a health treatment. It is also required to meet the principles of nursing practice that everyone can expect (4) including being treated compassion and dignity and providing person-centred care.

How you will know if standard five is achieved:

- ☑ Health passports or similar are in place and used by staff
- ☑ There is evidence of capacity assessments and consent or Best Interests Meetings regarding health assessment and treatment decisions are available
- ☑ Evidence of considering communication needs in all documents around an individual's health
- ☑ Staff know how individuals express pain and discomfort and act accordingly
- ☑ Primary and secondary healthcare are able to meet needs without referral to specialist services
- ☑ There is accessible information about food choices, including accessible menus reflecting individuals' preferences / needs with evidence of involvement
- ☑ Accessible information is specifically tailored to meet communication needs of individuals, explaining their health conditions and how to manage them
- ☑ If appropriate, good practice guidance on eating, drinking and/or swallowing (dysphagia) is readily available such as fluid consistencies and strategies required. Personal place mats make mealtimes safe and enjoyable
- ☑ Staff understand why individuals have special dietary requirements, medications and interventions and their associated risks for example food and drink.

References

1. Scottish Government (2011) Principles of Inclusive Communication: An information and self-assessment tool for public authorities www.scotland.gov.uk
2. RCSLT (2003) Communicating Quality 3
3. Emerson E and Baines S (2010) Health inequalities and people with learning disabilities in the UK: 2010. Improving Health and Lives: Learning Disabilities Observatory. Department of Health www.improvinghealthandlives.org.uk
4. RCN Principles of Nursing (2013) www.rcn.org.uk/development/practice/principles

Useful resources

- Find out more, including our training package for healthcare professionals, at www.kentcht.nhs.uk/giveme5
- Mencap. Resources/guides/Involve me www.mencap.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects/involve-me/resources-involve-me
- Makaton – language programme using signs and symbols to help people to communicate (<http://ace.psc.ac.uk/courses/category.php?c=24>)
- Talking Mats – Communication Tool (www.talkingmats.com/)
- Personal Place Mats and communication passports, www.communicationpassports.org.uk
- www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
- CHANGE (2010) How to make information accessible: a guide to producing easy read documents. Leeds, CHANGE.

